

**Thinking Together: A feminist
collaborative inquiry into pedagogical
approaches for domestic violence work
in Ireland**

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Dedication

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Abstract

This collaborative inquiry has produced a feminist pedagogical framework for an approach to learning and education that is congruent with the values and goals of anti-domestic violence work in Ireland. Findings were generated through a feminist study in which ten domestic violence workers (myself included) came together to generate solutions to the lack of such an organisational structure for their work. The knowledge that was generated addresses the distinctive and critical nature of domestic violence work and illustrates issues and dilemmas that present challenges to maintaining empowering feminist practice. Through a robust dialogic process, this group of co-inquirers were able to analyse and utilise their considerable skills and experience to identify the core components of an approach to learning and education. The research practice reflected those same values that participants identified as central to a future education and learning framework for domestic violence workers. These evidence based core principles centre around feminist praxis, in which all participants commit to relationships and processes that are democratic, collaborative and dialogic in nature and to use the knowledge generated to contribute to the continuing feminist struggle for an end to male violence and all forms of oppression.

Theoretically the study is informed by a feminist analysis in which domestic violence work is understood to be part of the wider feminist project that aims to end to all forms of gender oppression. Drawing from feminist and critical pedagogy, I add to the framework shaped by the collaborative inquiry group by forging a theoretical understanding of a pedagogy for domestic violence work. At the heart of this pedagogic proposal is a model of learning in which participation in feminist education, in a feminist community of practice and in a feminist social change movement are all processes in authentic, active and creative interplay with each other.

Prologue

7.00 pm - Sunday 14th September 1987.

It was time to go home. As I walked from the playroom towards the office to say goodbye to the worker who would be covering the overnight shift in the refuge, a loud banging was heard. The worker came out of the tiny office that served as the operations hub of the refuge and went to the front door to check out what the noise was about. Standing behind her, I saw her open a small cover over a peep hole and look outside. She backed away from the door, turned and said there were two men outside. The banging started again, along with shouting in which the name of a woman could be heard. The refuge worker ushered me out of the entrance hall, closed the inner doors and bolted them. She went to the phone in the office and called the Gardaí. She asked them to come to the refuge to remove two men who were making a disturbance and attempting to gain entrance. Throughout all of this, the banging continued.

I noticed women and children who had been in the kitchen preparing or cleaning up after the evening meal now standing around. Activity had come to a standstill. A couple of children were crying, their mothers holding them and soothing them. The banging stopped but after a few minutes a loud crash was heard from the kitchen. Something had been used to break one of the windows that was placed high up in the wall for security reasons. The refuge worker rushed to the kitchen to usher women and children out, but the women had already organised an exit and were leading the children away from the front of the refuge further back into the building.

I sat with the women and children in a corridor, observing how the women soothed the children and each other and particularly, how they assured the woman who was the target of this attack that she would be safe; that no one could get into this refuge; that the worker would make sure the Gardaí removed her husband and whoever had accompanied him.

The worker called the Gardaí again to tell them what had happened and to urge them to come immediately to the refuge. After numerous calls to the local station, the Gardaí eventually arrived at 11.30, four and a half hours after the first phone

call from the refuge worker to seek their intervention. Throughout this four and half hours, these two men continued to hold the refuge under siege. This happened during my first ever shift as a worker in a domestic violence service.

7.00 am – January 22nd, 2021

I browsed The Journal.ie app on my phone as I sipped my morning cup of tea. After a few Covid related items about transmission rates, hospitalisations and vaccinations, a headline stood out: ***10-year sentence following coercive control trial 'sends a strong message' to other women*** (The Journal.ie. 22nd January 2021)

This was the third conviction for coercive control since the legislation criminalising this course of conduct was enacted in January 2019. I was surprised to see the length of the sentence passed down - 10 years with 2 suspended. Surprised, but not because I thought the sentence was disproportionate to the crimes committed. The details in the news reports were horrifying and I could imagine that behind the brief summary of the evidence presented in court, there was a story of much greater brutality and terror. I was surprised because the length of the sentence was more than a *“slap on the wrist”*. It was a considerable and substantial response from the state to one man’s regime of terror and violence within the private sphere of intimate relationships and the family home. The impact of this sentence was potentially about more than holding to account the man responsible for these crimes. In the words of Mary Mc Dermott, CEO of Safe Ireland, this sentence communicates to men who abuse their partners that: *“they can no longer control, stalk, assault, isolate or degrade a woman with impunity. What was once secret and privatised, is now public”* (The Journal.ie. 2021). As I read the report I reflected on how far Irish society has come since 1987, when the primary state agency charged with public safety did not consider women and children entrapped within a women’s refuge to be *“the public”* whom they vowed to protect.

My witnessing of this incident on a September evening in 1987 was just the first of many, many occasions when the term *“it’s just a domestic”* seemed to underpin the response of An Garda Síochána to women at risk from violence and abuse from their male partners. Much much has changed since that time. As a manager of a domestic

violence service in the North West of Ireland from 2005 to 2016, a call to the Gardaí to seek their intervention was consistently responded to with urgency. Over the years, increasing numbers of women reported that the response they received from Gardaí was effective and that they felt safer and abler to move forward with pursuing their rights as a result. Despite this progress, inconsistency remains as a critical problem in relation to Garda responses. A recent internal investigation found that over 3,000 domestic violence calls to the Gardaí were cancelled in 2019 and 2020 (Lally, 2021). This meant that a significant number of women and children subjected to domestic abuse were ignored by the one agency charged with providing an immediate response to members of the public reporting a crime. Acknowledging that there are still serious failings and weaknesses to be addressed in the response of the Gardaí, my experience is that there has been an incremental improvement in Gardaí responses, aided by a suite of legislation and policies that unambiguously centre victim safety and designate clear responsibilities and duties to An Garda Síochána.

I begin this thesis with these reflections not to single out the Gardaí as any more culpable than other state institutions in failing to hold abusive men to account. I hope to illustrate how, in the space of 33 years, public and institutional perceptions of domestic abuse as a private matter have transformed. Domestic violence is now understood as a public matter, requiring the intervention of the state and its agents. There is still a long way to go before we can confidently get to place where *“it’s just a domestic”* as an attitude is relegated to the history books. However, if I were to seek the assistance of the Gardaí in responding to a woman at risk today, I could optimistically expect a response that took reports of violence and abuse seriously and that, in most cases, whatever powers the Gardaí have to enforce the law would be utilised.

The prevalence levels of violence against women have not decreased and there is some speculation that in reality the levels of violence against women have increased, particularly during the recent Covid pandemic (UN Women, 2022). It is difficult to say if the pandemic revealed the actual levels of violence against women or actually increased its prevalence. What is clear is that the longer change goals of

the women's anti-violence movement, to radically reduce the prevalence of men's violence against women have not been progressed. The benefits to women that have accrued from the work of anti-violence movements have largely been in changes in public disclosure about the issue and institutional reforms which can and do result in greater safety and wellbeing for some women and some children (Htun and Weldon, 2012; Stark, 2007). For over 30 years, I have been involved in the social change movement that has been instrumental in bringing about this change in Irish society and that continues to struggle for an end to violence against women. I have come to understand and appreciate the critical role that domestic violence workers and organisations play in our communities, both in offering interventions to individual women who are entrapped by violent and controlling partners, and as agents of social change. As a feminist practitioner and activist, I celebrate the many strengths and achievements of our movement whilst also recognising that our power and potential as a force for transformative change is undermined by the intersection of a myriad of factors. Our influence is weakened by our unequal relationships with the state on whom we depend for our very survival as organisations. At the same time, fractured narratives within the anti-domestic violence movement itself leads to different and uncoordinated approaches to tackling domestic abuse. These are just two dilemmas that continue to trouble our movement. The focus of this study is on another critical issue that I believe causes fragility in the anti-domestic movement in Ireland. I refer to the lack of an education and learning framework in Ireland that supports and sustains feminist anti-domestic violence work.

I have a long held an interest in the role of education and learning as a structuring support for effective and empowering feminist practice within women's domestic violence organisations in Ireland. I can testify to the centrality of experiential learning as the primary way in which I became educated as a domestic violence worker. However, the absence of an education and learning framework has been implicated in hindering the development of my efficacy as a practitioner and activist. Doing this PhD has provided me with an opportunity to work with my peers to identify solutions to the lack of this critical component of a supportive

architecture for domestic violence work. In this study, I chose to focus specifically on the frontline worker in women's services who respond to women's experience of intimate partner violence. I see this cohort of workers as holding a pivotal position in responding to the concrete needs of women and children and as contributing to the wider social change work for gender justice and an end of violence against women.

Thinking back to that first day of my over 30-year career within the anti-domestic violence movement, what stays with me as a memory and a feeling is not the fear or uncertainty that I am sure I experienced at the time. It is the awe I felt on witnessing the calmness and courage of the sole worker on duty, and the mutual care and support of the women for each other. The community and solidarity that I witnessed on that first night was reflected in the culture of the refuge which was imbued with these feminist values. I passionately believe that it is through maintaining this position of solidarity and in continuing to build a community of social change actors that the anti-domestic violence movement in Ireland will sustain and nurture emancipatory practice and contribute towards transformative social change.

Sustaining feminist practice while moving ever towards a transformative vision of change requires that the movement think about the solutions to the problems that threaten its existence, that devalues its knowledge, and that diverts its attention from its emancipatory goals. Following on from my good friend Maggie's maxim that, *"There's a pedagogic solution to every problem"*, this study contributes to knowledge about how the movement in Ireland could develop an approach to education and learning that supports workers and organisations to move ever closer to a shared vision of women's emancipation from violence and oppression, in Ireland and on a global level.

Chapter 1. Introducing the study

This study is an inquiry into how education and learning can empower and sustain the domestic violence worker in their dual and inextricably linked roles as a practitioner, responding to individual women's experience of intimate partner violence and abuse, and as a social change actor, working collectively with others for social justice. As a practitioner, activist and researcher in the anti-domestic violence movement, my perspective is shaped and informed by feminist theory and practice. I understand that the ultimate goal of the anti-domestic violence movement is to act to effect the necessary changes for an alternative future without violence against women (Dobash and Dobash, 1992).

Whether responding to an individual woman through a range of services and interventions or acting collectively with others to affect institutional and social change, I argue that the effective domestic violence worker is ideologically orientated towards a feminist perspective that understands domestic violence as a manifestation of unequal power relations between men and women (Dobash and Dobash, 1992; Hammonds, 2004; Lehrner and Allen; 2008, 2009; Schechter, 1988; Stark, 2007, 2009). The effective domestic violence worker understands that abusers exploit *"dramatic sex-based disadvantages"* in society and *"translate their relative privilege in the wider society into disproportionate levels of power and control in relationships"* (Stark, 2009, 1513). Domestic violence workers *as a group* therefore must *"constitute themselves as resistant and oppositional subjects"* (Sandoval 1991, 11 quoted in Hartsock, 1997, 372) to contribute towards the transformation of the oppressive social structures that underpin the prevalence of domestic violence. As individual practitioners domestic violence workers must manifest this oppositional consciousness in their work with women. This is essential if workers are to deconstruct and resist therapeutic and individualised concepts about domestic violence that ultimately lead to women-blaming narratives about and responses to women experiencing intimate partner violence (Dobash and Dobash, 1992; Lehrner and Allen, 2008; Stark 2007; Wilkin and Hillock, 2014).

A core concern that motivated my focus on learning supports for domestic violence work is that feminist practice and the transformative social change work have become increasingly undermined and marginal to our work in Ireland. Processes of professionalisation, the de-gendering of the issue of intimate partner violence and the co-option of movement goals by a neoliberal state, have eroded feminist practice and feminist activism within individual organisations and the wider women's anti-violence movement (Dewey and St Germain, 2014; Hammons, 2004; Ishkanian, 2014; Kendrick, 2002; Lehrner and Allen, 2008, 2009; Markowitz and Tice, 2002; Mehrotra et al, 2016; Murphy et al, 2020; Nicholls, 2013; Vachelli et al, 2015). While there is little research in Ireland on how these undermining processes have impacted on our work, my experience within the anti-domestic violence movement resonates with the findings of several studies in the US and UK that have inquired into these issues (Bruckner 2001; Hammons 2008; Hanman-James, 2018; Lehrner and Allen 2008, 2009; Markowitz and Tice, 2002). I argue that the lack of an education and learning framework for domestic violence work in Ireland increases our vulnerability to these encroachments. The aim of this study is to produce knowledge that will be useful in establishing an emancipatory education and learning framework that all domestic violence workers can benefit from. This in turn will accrue benefits to the women and children accessing domestic violence services and will strengthen the anti-domestic violence movement in Ireland. Ultimately such a structure would become a driving force for transformative change towards the achievement of gender justice.

Study aim and research question

The aim of this study is to generate useful knowledge that will address an identified lack of an education and learning framework specific to domestic violence work in Ireland. In so doing, the study will forge a theoretical understanding of how feminist and critical pedagogies provide an approach to education and learning that supports and sustains the domestic violence worker in their dual roles as practitioner and social change actor. To achieve this aim the central research question is:

What approach to education and learning is compatible with feminist anti-domestic violence work?

To address this central question three objectives were devised to identify critical pedagogical approaches to learning for the domestic violence movement.

- To illustrate the experience of this group of domestic violence workers and the factors that shape their work as practitioners and social change actors
- To collaboratively generate knowledge about the approach to education and learning that would meet the needs of domestic violence workers in Ireland
- To contribute to the domestic violence movement as a community of inquiry through initiating and facilitating a participatory action research project with domestic violence workers.

A contextual overview¹

Prevalence of violence against women

Violence against women and girls is one of the most systematic and widespread human rights violations on a global level. 30% of women and girls will experience some form of gender based violence in their lifetime (UN Women, 2022)². Domestic violence is reported as being one of the most common forms of gender based violence (EUFRA, 2014; UN Women, 2022). Such violence can be experienced by both women and men in both heterosexual and same sex relationships and both men and women can be perpetrators of violence and abuse. However, studies demonstrate that the vast majority of victims are women and perpetrators are men. Male domestic violence against women is widely understood to be a manifestation of unequal power relationships between men and women at all levels of society and to be a form of gender based violence (United Nations, 1993, 1995; Council of Europe 2021).

The most recent EU prevalence study found that one in five women in the EU have experienced some form of physical or sexual violence since the age of 15 (EU Fundamental Rights Agency, 2015). In Ireland, 15% of women experienced physical violence and 6% reported they experienced sexual violence within an intimate

¹ An overview of EU national and policy contexts is provided in appendix 1.

²² This figure does not include sexual harrassment

relationship. One in three Irish women reported that they experienced psychological abuse. Addressing the devastatingly pervasive nature of violence against women and the costs to women and children's health and well-being, that the World Health Organisation has identified tackling gender based violence as one of its top public health priorities (World Health Organisation, 2021). Gender based violence also results in significant economic costs to individual countries. In Ireland, it is estimated that the economy loses 2.2 billion per annum as a result of the cumulative effects of violence against women (Irish Observatory on Violence against Women, 2013).³

The international women's movement and more specifically the women's anti-violence movement, including domestic violence services and rape crisis centres, have been recognised as the primary motivators behind the growing global campaign against gender based violence. International human rights instruments, including the UN Declaration on Violence Against Women (United Nations, 1993), The UN Beijing Platform for Action (United Nations, 1995) and the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence (2011), all recognise the critical role played by the international anti-violence movement in revealing and responding to the pervasive and devastating effects of male violence against women and girls.

The demand for and use of domestic violence services in Ireland

Figures show the numbers of women and children who accessed women's domestic violence services in Ireland in 2018, the last year for which full figures are available. These figures also contain data on the numbers of women that refuges could not accommodate because of a lack of space (Safe Ireland, 2019a).

- 53,627 helpline calls were answered by domestic violence services across Ireland in 2018.
- 10,782 individual women received support from domestic violence support services in Ireland in 2018. This figure includes 9,971 individual women who received a wide range of face-to-face supports, including advocacy, emotional

³ This figure is based on a Council of Europe study that estimates that the cost of violence against women on an annual basis per each EU Citizen is €555

and practical support, information, counselling, court accompaniment and/or support groups.

- 1,138 women were accommodated and received a range of other supports in refuge.
- 861 individual women were accommodated and received supported in transitional/ supported housing.
- Services providing refuge were unable to provide accommodation for 3,256 requests because they were full.

In a report on demand for services during the first Covid lockdown, nearly 3,500 women contacted a domestic violence service for the first time (Safe Ireland, 2020). This report also showed that there was a 25% increase in calls to domestic violence helplines during the first six months of 2020 as compared to the same period in 2018. Women's Aid experienced a 42% increase in calls to the national helpline during 2020 (Women's Aid, 2021).

Overview of the domestic violence sector in Ireland

There are 40 organisations providing services to women who experience domestic abuse. Of these, 39 are affiliated to the Safe Ireland network.⁴ These organisations provide a range of services including refuge, transitional housing, one to one support, helpline support, advocacy, court accompaniment, group support and children's services (Safe Ireland, 2021a). Organisations are autonomously run and are managed and overseen in the most part by voluntary Boards of management. These Boards sign annual service level agreements with Tusla, the primary state funder for frontline domestic violence organisations. They commit to deliver a range and quantum of services in exchange for an allocation of funding. Tusla was allocated 25.3 million in 2020 to disburse to 60 organisations that provide services to victims of all forms of gender based violence. An additional allocation for 2021 of 4.7 million euro was announced by The Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, Roderic O'Gorman on November 20th, 2020, bringing the total allocation

⁴ Personal communication on 11th Feb 2021 with Lisa Marmion, Services Development Officer, Safe Ireland.

to the domestic violence, sexual violence and gender based violence sector to 30 million. There is no breakdown given on how much of the 30 million to be disbursed is specifically for domestic violence services (Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, 2021).

Safe Ireland is a second tier organisation acting as a network for women's domestic violence services and as a representative for the sector in negotiations with the state at national level. As well as research, policy and lobbying work, the organisation provides service development support to its 39 members. Two documents set out a framework and set of standards for service provision in Ireland. They are:

1. *Safe Ireland: A Framework for Service Provision to Women and Children Experiencing Domestic Violence in Ireland*

This framework document was produced by Safe Ireland in collaboration with its member organisations. The document draws on knowledge and evidence from international resources as well as the depth of experience of the Irish domestic violence sector. It sets out a theory of change that explains how specialist domestic violence services work to effect positive outcomes in the lives of women and children experiencing domestic violence. It identifies eight factors common to those domestic violence services that consistently support women to affect these positive outcomes for themselves and their children. The document provides a framework that enables a frontline women's domestic violence service to identify their current position and future direction in ensuring the delivery of a comprehensive and cohesive response to women and children experiencing domestic violence.

2. *Safe Ireland Principles and Standards for Specialist Domestic Violence Services in Ireland*

This document is grounded in the Safe Ireland Framework for domestic violence services for women and children. It further articulates evidence-based principles and standards across a range of service activity areas. Principles and standards are key components in maximising the safety of those using services and in ensuring that the organisation is optimising its potential to effect positive outcomes for the women

and children it serves. The standards can be used as a framework by domestic violence organisations in assessing the quality of their current service delivery and identifying areas for improvement.

Previous and current education and learning initiatives

Work to examine the feasibility of developing a qualifications framework for domestic violence work in Ireland has previously been carried out. A feasibility study on providing accredited education through the National Framework of Qualifications was carried out on behalf of Safe Ireland (Safe Ireland, 2008). The final report recommended that education for domestic violence workers be accredited at NFQ Levels 5 and 6. Safe Ireland concluded that qualifications at these levels were inappropriate, given that in a previous mapping exercise of workers profiles, Safe Ireland found that most workers employed in the domestic violence sector in Ireland had already attained qualifications at higher levels. They also assessed that the qualifications were not commensurate with the expertise of many workers in the sector. For these two reasons Safe Ireland concluded that there would be little incentive for current workers to pursue an accreditation route through the National Framework of Qualifications.⁵

The Women's Aid Domestic Violence accreditation project operated from December 2006 to December 2007. The aim of the project was to clearly identify the optimal accreditation route for domestic violence workers. A study of existing accreditation routes in Ireland was carried out as well as an exploration of a number of accredited training programmes in other countries (Women's Aid, 2007). As well as desk research, Women's Aid carried out research with domestic violence workers in Ireland to gather their views of accreditation for domestic violence workers. There was support from all workers consulted for accredited training and strong support for the inclusion of the recognition of prior learning and experience.

⁵ C. Gleeson, Safe Ireland, personal communication, 22nd March 2013.

Recommendations about a possible accreditation route were not included in the report.

The Women's Studies Programme in National University of Ireland, Galway, commissioned a feasibility study in 2005 on providing a certificate and a diploma programme on domestic violence intervention (Power and Glynn, 2005). A consultation was carried out with 10 frontline services. There was unanimous support for the development of a qualification's framework underpinned by feminist knowledge. Drawing from the consultation with these organisations, the report's authors produced an outline of a six module diploma course. The recommended establishment of a course was not pursued by NUIG.

Currently, there are two special purpose awards on domestic violence intervention being delivered in higher education institutes. The first of these is a NFQ level 8 Certificate in the *Fundamentals of Understanding and Responding to Domestic Abuse* in Dundalk IT. The aim of this course is to support learners in the development of an appropriate level of knowledge, skill and understanding to enable them to appropriately recognise and respond to domestic abuse (Dundalk IT, 2021). The second is delivered through a partnership of Limerick Institute of Technology and Haven Horizons, a second tier domestic violence organisation that delivers training and practice support. This course, a NFQ level 6 special purpose award, *Reflecting on and Responding to Domestic Abuse and Coercive Control*, is built around an understanding of coercive control and a feminist analysis of domestic abuse (Haven Horizons, 2021). Both courses are targeted at professionals and members of the public who wish to learn about the fundamentals of responding to domestic abuse.

Safe Ireland continues to seek resources to develop a qualifications framework. In their 2020 budget submission they state that:

While there is a very educated workforce employed in DV services there is no nationally agreed framework for qualifications or specialist feeder programmes to educate new recruits. In addition, there is no ongoing continued professional development standards established for domestic

violence specialists to complement the national standards for provision of domestic violence services (Safe Ireland, 2019b, 9).

Developing an infrastructure for the delivery of accredited training for professionals is identified as a priority action for Safe Ireland in its 2021 budget submission to government.

Methodological approach

Feminist Participatory Action Research

The aim of this study is to produce knowledge that can contribute to the long-term goal of providing education and learning that provides demonstrable benefits to the domestic violence worker and organisations, to women and children accessing domestic violence services, and to wider social change efforts. I believe that this vision can only be collectively realised and that collaborations are key in how this may be achieved. I determined from the beginning of this research project that it was essential to adopt a collaborative research approach that:

- centres domestic violence workers as knowledge producers,
- is imbued with democratic values and is mutually beneficial to all involved,
- supports a growing community of inquiry within the domestic violence sector in Ireland and
- integrates action for social change.

Feminist Participatory Action Research [FPAR] provided a methodological approach that supports these goals (Reid, 2004; Reid and Frisby, 2011). As I further developed my approach to this research, I drew a great deal from the literature on Collaborative Inquiry. Collaborative Inquiry is an approach to research within the wider family of participatory action research methodologies (Heron, 1996; Reason, 1998). Like FPAR, it is a collaborative method that brings together people who have shared concerns and interests and provides them with an opportunity to collectively generate new knowledge about how to act to change things they want to change (Heron and

Reason, 2008). As an “insider” researcher who shared the experience of my co-inquirers as a domestic violence worker, I found in collaborative inquiry a research approach that enabled me to act as co- subject as well as co-researcher. There was also much in the literature on collaborative inquiry that provided guidance and insight into how to structure and lead an inquiry, and that focused in detail on the role of the initiating researcher and facilitator (Bray et al, 2000; Heron, 1996; McArdle, 2008; Reason, 1998).

Nine colleagues from women’s domestic violence organisations in Ireland joined me as co-researchers in this inquiry. Through an iterative cycle of reflection, dialogue and agreement building, we worked collaboratively to generate knowledge about effective responses to women’s experience of domestic abuse and the approaches to education and learning that we assessed as compatible with the values, goals, and practices of our work. In this process we transformed much of our tacit, embodied knowing, gained through years of experience, into explicit knowledge. Thus, we were better positioned to share and critically examine our beliefs and assumptions with each other. Group members were committed to using the knowledge that we generated to support action for social change.

Overview of the thesis

This thesis presents the process and outcome of researching a feminist pedagogical framework for an approach to learning and education that is congruent with the values and goals of anti-domestic violence work in Ireland. Findings were generated through a feminist participatory action research project in which ten domestic violence workers collaborated to generate solutions to the lack of such a framework for their work. Theoretically, this study is informed by a feminist analysis on violence against women and feminist and critical pedagogies. My understanding of the purpose of women’s anti domestic violence organisations is that they exist to work towards the eradication of violence against women and for gender justice. As such, I align myself with feminist scholars and activists who call for the foregrounding of the political dimensions of domestic violence work and a strengthening of solidarity and

collectivism, core principles of feminism, in anti-domestic violence work (Elliot et al, 2005; Hanman-James, 2018; Kulkarni, 2019; Schechter, 1982, 1990; Stark, 2007; Wilson et al, 2015). Recognising the many internal and external challenges that women's anti-violence movements face, I argue that education and learning must be seen as important work, integrated into the life and activities of anti-violence movements. This is necessary to sustain the movement as self-critical, self-correcting, innovative, open and forever moving forward towards the achievement of transformative social change goals.

In this study I draw from three theories of learning. Firstly, I foreground feminist pedagogy as providing the most appropriate approach to education for domestic violence workers because as, articulated by Manicom, (1992) it is rooted in the feminist movement and continues to be part of and for the movement. Secondly, I draw from theories within the field of social movement learning that centre on learning in struggle and provide the possibility for movement participants to learn and think together in praxis against oppression (Harley, 2012; Zibechi, 2012). Thirdly, community of practice theory elucidates how we learn through participation in practice and how learning is inextricably enmeshed with identity formation, insights that are relevant for this study (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger 1998). I argue that shaping a pedagogical approach informed by these theories will open up trajectories of learning that are meaningful for domestic violence workers, that strengthen practice and that build collective movement towards social change. Furthermore, I propose that a future framework be constructed around the dynamic and coordinated interplay between learning at all these levels, ensuring that education is built around practice and that what is learnt through experience can be brought back into educational and movement learning spaces.

The thesis is organised into 12 chapters. The introductory chapter outlines the aims and research questions of the study. The context, rationale and methodology are introduced. This chapter contains a brief overview of the structure and composition of the domestic violence sector in Ireland. I finish this chapter with an overview of the thesis and an explanatory note about choices made in relation to language use.

Chapter 2 provides an overview of the context in which domestic violence workers practice. Locating the frontline worker as a social change actor within a wider movement for change, I elucidate a radical feminist analysis on violence against women and identify an agenda for change towards the eradication of gender oppression. This chapter provides a brief history of and critique of the women's anti-violence movement's progress in moving towards this emancipatory vision of change.

In chapter 3 I review literature on theories of learning that align ontologically and epistemologically with the logic of feminist anti-domestic violence work; feminist pedagogy, social movement learning and community of practice. While these three conceptual frameworks overlap in some ways, I argue that each contributes in different ways when considering how to provide for education and learning for anti-domestic violence workers in Ireland.

In Chapter 4 I describe the methodological approach chosen for this study. I focus on feminist research paradigms and feminist participatory action research as providing a methodology that enabled me and my co-researchers to achieve the research goals. The implementation of the research strategy is described with an overview of each stage of the inquiry and of how the group generated new knowledge. This chapter includes a section in which I reflexively consider some of the factors that impacted on the quality of our inquiry.

Chapters 5 to 10 present the findings. The focus of each of these chapters is briefly as follows:

- Chapter 5 provides a prologue to Chapters 6-10 by presenting data from the launching phase of the inquiry that illustrates how the group came to agree a focus for the research which was then distilled into an overarching research question.
- Chapter 6 illustrates how our collaborative inquiry facilitated this group of domestic violence workers to build agreement on foundational concepts underpinning effective responses to domestic abuse

- Chapter 7 illustrates how group members deepened their understanding of the importance of gender as a key concept for effective domestic violence work by examining the implications of not working from this perspective. The chapter illustrates how our inquiry brought into our consciousness the inadequacy of relying solely on gender as an explanatory concept for domestic abuse.
- Chapter 8 focuses on the group's generation of a description of the distinctive nature of domestic violence work.
- Findings in Chapter 9 focus on the approaches to learning and education that group members assessed would be compatible with the values and goals of our work as frontline anti-domestic violence workers.
- Chapter 10 shifts to focus on group members' experience of participation in this collaborative inquiry and reflections on both individual and group learning.

Chapter 11 discusses my interpretation of the findings with reference to feminist literature on the anti-domestic violence movement, feminist pedagogy, social movement learning and communities of practice. I draw out the implications of the findings in terms of examining what our experience elucidates about the current state of the movement in Ireland and the impact that the lack of an education and learning framework has on our work. I make a series of suggestions and proposals as to a pedagogic approach for domestic violence workers in Ireland.

The final chapter concludes the thesis. I revisit the aim and objectives of this thesis. I summarise the research and illustrate how these goals were met. The main arguments of the study are presented. I discuss the contribution that this study makes to the field of feminist domestic violence practice and its relevance for other disciplines and I identify further areas for inquiry.

A brief note on language use

This research project is focused on the experience and needs of workers in domestic violence services for women in Ireland. The question of what is meant by women

must be addressed. In a similar vein to Ahmed (2017), I recognise the complexities associated with essentialism and reductionist language. I use the term women to refer to all those who identify as women and seek the sources of domestic violence services. Domestic violence as a term can cover a number of different forms of interpersonal violence including violence and abuse against men in intimate relationships, within same sex relationships, and interfamilial violence. This group worked from the understanding that women's experience of intimate partner violence is on a continuum of gender-based violence, one of the most pervasive forms of violence and abuse globally (Kelly, 1987; United Nations, 1993, 1995, Council of Europe 2021). The women we have worked with have been subjected to coercive control, a profoundly gendered process (Stark, 2007). The organisations we work with respond exclusively to women and to their experience of coercive control and this is our area of expertise.

Domestic violence as a term conceals the gendered nature of abusive men's behaviour and intent. However, it is the term that is most commonly recognised in public discourse and I use it interchangeably with intimate partner violence and domestic abuse. I use the term coercive control when referring to the process employed by abusers and the entrapment experienced by women as a result of this course of conduct.

One of the tensions that surfaced in this research was whether I should refer to the network of domestic violence organisations in Ireland and elsewhere as constituting a sector or a movement. I use both terms in this thesis. When reviewing the literature and in discussing the findings I use the term movement. This reflects feminist understandings of domestic violence work as social change work and my position that our work will be strengthened by reclaiming a social movement identity. Social change movements that act to eradicate domestic violence are referred to in the literature variously as battered women's movements (USA), domestic violence movements and women's anti-violence movements. In this thesis, I refer to these movements as both domestic violence and anti-domestic violence movements. Similarly, I refer to organisations as domestic violence or anti-domestic violence

organisations and workers as domestic violence or anti-domestic violence workers or advocates. In the findings chapters the term sector is primarily used, as this is the term that was most often referred to by inquiry group members.

In this thesis I capitalise the words Black and White. The capitalised word Black is used by many people of colour to claim a political and cultural identity that is in opposition to White hegemony. I capitalise White to refer to how Whiteness functions in society at all levels as a system of racist domination that continues to oppress people of the African diaspora (Nguyen and Pendleton, 2020).

Chapter 2 The domestic violence movement and social change

Introduction

A core assumption underpinning this research is that the purpose of the anti-domestic violence movement is to act to effect the necessary changes for an alternative relational future without violence against women (Dobash and Dobash, 1992). This chapter provides a context in which to locate domestic violence work as contributing to the long term social change goals of women's anti-violence movements and by extension, the international feminist struggle for gender-justice.

I begin the chapter with my feminist analysis of the structural and cultural underpinnings of the prevalence of violence against women. A radical feminist analysis points to the need for dismantling these constructs as necessary to bring about an end to male violence. Recognising that frontline domestic violence work has become disconnected in many ways from the wider struggle for radical change, I continue the chapter with a focus on the re-integration of frontline practice and transformative social change work. Locating the domestic violence worker within a wider and diffuse social change movement, I draw on available literature to analyse the achievements, struggles and failures of women's anti-violence movements, both in Ireland and internationally. Following on this section I focus on how working from a transformative feminist perspective informs practice at the level of practical interventions with women who are subjected to domestic abuse. I provide an historical and critical perspective to bring the reader to the present day and to enable an identification of the strengths that must be protected and drawn upon in the continuing struggle against violence against women and the numerous dilemmas that continue to trouble women's anti-violence movements. Most of the literature reviewed is from the USA and the UK and I do not suggest that direct comparisons can be drawn with Ireland. I do, however, contend that useful insights pertinent to this study can be drawn when considering what pedagogic approach can strengthen both transformative feminist practice and social change work.

Understanding the roots of violence against women

This study is framed by a radical feminist analysis of violence against women that centres on patriarchy as a system of social arrangements that privileges men over women in both structural, ideological and cultural terms (DeKeresedy, 2021; Dobash and Dobash, 1980; Hearn, 1998, 2012; hooks, 2000; Hunnicut, 2009, 2021; Schechter, 1982). Patriarchy manifests in innumerable ways, at the macro level in terms of systems, structures and politics. At the micro level, patriarchal culture is evident in how people relate to each other, in families, communities, schools and other social spaces (Hunnicut, 2009). While a gender binary is being increasingly contested in modern discourse (Brubaker, 2021), feminists recognise that women are targets of male violence because of their gender and that they experience violence and abuse in contexts and ways that are distinct from the way men experience violence. Feminist anti-violence movements hold gender as a central organising theory while necessarily encompassing a critical analysis of white, class, heteronormative and Western hegemony (Bunch, 1992; Fraser, 2005, 2015; hooks, 2000; Hunnicut, 2009; 2021). The fluid, contextual and highly complex character of the inestimable “*varieties of patriarchy*” has been well researched (Hunnicut, 2009, 553). Consequently, if we are to understand violence against women and identify targets for change, we have to define the various structural and cultural underpinnings of men’s violence and abuse of women. Only then can we attempt to map a route to social change that will dismantle patriarchal constructs and bring into being the new world that we envision (Fraser, 2005, 2015; hooks, 2000; Schechter, 1982).

Feminist theories of violence against women centre on the social construction of masculinity as enmeshed with structures within a wider context that diversely accrues power, privilege and entitlement to men. Post structural feminism rejects a “top down” conception of power and it centres on understanding of terrains of power that operate differently across different times, locations and contexts (hooks, 2000; Hunnicut, 2009). Nevertheless, it is possible to map some of the social conditions that create the context in which such a sizable number of men employ oppressive patterns of gendered behaviour, including violence within

intimate relationships with women. I focus on two key dimensions of patriarchy as being centrally implicated in the prevalence of male violence against women: firstly, the inextricable entwinement of patriarchy and capitalism and secondly, the social construction of male hegemony.

Patriarchal capitalism

An analysis of capitalism as both deeply androcentric and as depending for its success on the subjugation of women amongst marginalised “others”, emphasises the “*exploitable dependency*” (Fraser, 2015, 116) of women. Patriarchy, while rooted historically in pre-industrial times, met the needs of late capitalist economies by providing a work force of unwaged labour that supported the male wage earner to work long hours outside the home, maximising the profits for the few at the expense of many (Dobash and Dobash, 1980; Bergeron, 2016; Schechter, 1982; Fraser, 2005, 2015). While women’s work in the home is socially necessary, under late capitalism it was rendered invisible and a clear separation between the private and public sphere was further demarcated (Dobash and Dobash, 1980; Schechter, 1982). For many women who did not participate in waged labour outside of the home, this resulted in almost complete isolation within the domestic realm. For other women, for whom working was an economic necessity, this resulted in women doing a “double shift”, working for low wages in the labour market and unpaid care labour within the family (Bergeron, 2016; Fraser, 2005, 2015). The result either way was a continuance of the exclusion of women from public spheres of power and influence, from other arenas of social interaction and the perpetuation of men’s power within the domestic realm. Thus the development of patriarchy and of capitalism are inextricably intertwined and centrally implicated in the prevalence of men’s violence against female intimate partners (Dobash and Dobash, 1980; Fraser, 2005, 2015).

While women have entered the paid labour market in ever greater numbers, and under neo-liberalism the maximisation of profit depends now on the two wage rather than the one wage family, this has not translated into greater power for many women within their intimate relationships with men. The decrease in real

terms of wages means that many women still do not have access to an income sufficient to provide for themselves and their children, continuing their dependence on male partners. In addition, the emergence of neo-liberalism as the primary economic social order has incrementally brought about the shrinking of the welfare state. This has resulted in the erosion of social supports for women and the failure of nation states to address those gaps in social service provision, such as child care, that have always contributed to women's entrapment by abusive partners (Bergeron, 2016; Fraser, 2005, 2015; Segal, 2013; Rowbotham, 2013; Wainwright, 2013).

The focus on equality with men in a class based, racist, and sexist capitalist system has resulted in gains primarily for white middle class women (Bergeron, 2016; Fraser, 2005, 2015; hooks, 2000). Seeking to overturn the male breadwinner model was only ever going to benefit class privileged women (Bergeron, 2016). A radical de-construction of capitalism is needed if sexist, racist and class based oppression is to be effectively tackled. However, a radical re-structuring of capitalism that benefits all, regardless of identity, status and location, will alone not bring an end to the prevalence of violence against women. Structural equality is only one feature of patriarchy.

Understanding male hegemony as the root of domestic abuse

Understanding how patterns of behaviour and thought typify men's use of violence within intimate relationships, it is possible to broaden one's lens to identify the social constructs that render intimate relationships between women and men as contexts for male violence and abuse. Studying men's use of violence and abuse within intimate relationships, both Dobash and Dobash, (1998) and Hearn (1998, 2012) concluded that abusive men were mostly animated by a sense of entitlement and that they employed specific justifications as to why they resorted to violent means to achieve specific ends. As such, men's violence within intimate relationships is intentional and goal orientated.

When men do violence to women, it is the outcome that is valued and at stake (getting what he wants, not letting a woman win an argument, ensuring that she is isolated from other men and from others who might

intervene on her behalf). ... Masculine identity, social ideals about husbands and wives, as well as personal privilege and material benefits are all at stake when men use violence against a woman partner. (Dobash and Dobash, 1998, 168)

In Hearn's interviews with men in perpetrator programmes, the most common justifications for the use of violence and abuse were because women were:

- not being sexually faithful, actual, assumed or expected;
- not doing housework;
- not doing childcare;
- not maintaining her appearance, ...
- not restricting herself in terms of movement, autonomy, use of the house, her access to her friends (1998, 126).

In these men's accounts, women were constructed as objects who were either to be possessed by men or to be corrected by them. A sexual subtext underpinned many accounts of abusive men in which the objectification of female partners as owned and subjugated objects meant that sex was never negotiated or even talked about but was assumed by men to be a "*background music to their particular business of violence*" (Hearn, 1998, 157). Kelly (1987) argues that we must understand domestic abuse as a form of sexual violence, rather than seeing sexual violence as one form of violence that abusers employ. This is endorsed by men's own accounts of employing a spectrum of sexually violating behaviours, from sexual coercion to violent rape, along with highly sexualised and gendered verbal abuse legitimated by the perceived or actual infidelity of women (Hearn, 1998).

Thus can be seen the terrains of power in which abusers assume dominance: the domestic realm, caring work, sexual relationships, and women's movements about and participation in the social world. Reflecting on the primary way men position themselves in relation to their use of violence Hearn states:

Men's accounts reflect and reproduce men's societal power, especially in relation to violence as one means of power for men, individually and collectively. The overarching societal context to men's talk about violence is heteropatriarchal relations, structures and cultures. (Hearn, 1998, 72).

When abusive men talked to researchers about their violence, they talked in terms of individual incidents that “triggered” their use of violence (Hearn, 1998). However, women’s accounts of their experience of domestic abuse illustrate that *“dramas of masculine control transcend specific incidents”* (Ptacek, 2021, 673). Violent acts occur within the ongoing context of coercive control and are part of a repertoire of behaviours and patterns of behaviours that abusive men use as a way of organising a relationship in such a way as to meet their “legitimate” expectations (Stark, 2007). Thus using violence and abuse is seen as justified to ensure that the woman is a “good” wife, “good” mother and “good” sexual partner as defined by her partner or husband. In Ptacek’s (2021) study of abusive male partners, he concluded that their patterns of behaviour were both about the men’s attempts to recognise and assert their power, control and autonomy and their misrecognition of their partners as “failed women” who did not live up to the idealised version of femininity.

Viewing these accounts of violence and abuse through a feminist lens, I agree with Hearn’s argument that violence against women within intimate relationships can be understood through an analysis of how *“the social category of ‘men’ is created and recreated in concrete everyday life and institutional practices, and in interplay with other social categories such as class, ethnicity, sexuality”* (Hearn, 2012, 596). It is necessary that in such an analysis we do not essentialise men as violent and oppressive and that we recognise their agency and the multiplicity of differences between men (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). However, accepting the contingent nature of the enactment of masculinity, empirical studies with abusive men illustrate that perpetrators of domestic abuse seek to institutionalise patriarchal ideology and structures within the private realm of family and relationships (Dobash and Dobash, 1998; Hearn, 1998; Ptacek, 2021). Hearn argues that the prevalence of men’s violence against women is related *“to the ideological and institutional strength of unequal structural intersectional gender arrangements”* (Hearn, 2012, 596). As such, it is possible that male hegemony, like White hegemony and other hegemonic forms of dominance, can be deconstructed and that emancipatory social orders can evolve to become the norm (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2004; Fraser, 2005, 2015; Hearn, 2012; hooks, 2000; Schechter, 1982). Such a transformative vision will require

radical change across every sphere of personal, cultural, economic and political realms, at local, national and global levels.

A feminist agenda for transformative change

Diagnosing the roots of male violence within the historical and deeply embedded culture and structures of patriarchal capitalism, feminist theorists have prescribed a radical social change agenda as necessary to bring an end to violence against women.

The radical feminist perspective advanced in this thesis is expressed by hooks:

It is essential for continued feminist struggle to end violence against women that this struggle be viewed as a component of an overall movement to end violence (hooks, 2000, 118).

One locus of change is about how people would have to unlearn deeply inscribed meaning frameworks and ways of being that normalise an ideology that coercive force is acceptable to maintain the dominance of privileged groups. This would result in changing oppressive relationships between dominant and subjugated groups within society, but also at an individual level within families. hooks argues that the goal is to create families that are based on a *“positive and affirming kinship structure with no oppressive dimension based on gender or sexuality”* (Ibid., 39).

The focus on the transformation of families has been reflected in the writings of feminist theorists who charted the early days of women’s anti-violence movements and offered a radical feminist analysis of violence against women (Dobash and Dobash, 1992; Schechter, 1982). For example, Schechter (1982) identified the patriarchal nature of heteronormative family structures as being inextricably intertwined with the interests of capitalism. She argued that the privacy of the nuclear family has to end and that how adults treat each other and children within families has to be open to public scrutiny and accountability. Within such families, gender equality would become the norm and state provided childcare, adequate incomes and shorter working hours would ensure that women and men could live healthy and sustainable lives.

Fraser (2005, 2015) also argues for a deconstruction of heteronormative family structures, describing a model of social arrangements that she terms as “The Universal Caregiver model”. The primary assumptions underpinning this model are that both men and women are equally responsible for and therefore must be equally available for caring within the extended family. It requires that the opposition between caring and paid work is dismantled and the re-valorisation of caring and other forms of social production as being as valuable, if not more so, than paid work. The realisation of such a vision requires not just transformative cultural change but an upending and dismantling of capitalism, which depends on the unpaid care labour of women and the availability of both women and men to labour long hours for the benefit of those few who profit (Fraser, 2015).

To progress towards this vision of a new social order, Fraser (Ibid.) argues that radical feminist struggle must embrace three interconnected strands of political action. Firstly, a politics of re-distribution underpinned by the principle of combatting poverty, in which resources are equally distributed to all. Secondly, the feminist struggle must include a politics of recognition, in which there is an equality of respect for all people and a dismantling of androcentric, racist and class based cultures and structures that keep people at the margins of society and deny their right to full participation in all aspects of economic, social, cultural and political life. Thirdly, Fraser argues that the feminist struggle must be transnational if we are to transform the conditions that lead to gender oppression and the intersecting oppressions of poverty and racism. In the current context of globalisation, we need to recognise that *“the interlinked injustices of misdistribution and misrecognition”* (Fraser, 2005, 305) are perpetuated by a misframing. Misframing happens when:

... the state-territorial frame is imposed on transnational sources of injustice. The effect is to gerrymander political space at the expense of the poor and despised, who are denied the chance to press transnational claims (Ibid.).

The feminist struggle must necessarily encompass work with other progressive forces and social change movements at transnational level if gender justice is to be secured for all women.

Such an expansive, transformative and transnational vision requires a broad based mass movement to radicalise consciousness and to build a counter force to the hegemonic status quo. hooks asserts that such a revolution requires mass education.

There never was a strategy on the part of feminist organisers or participants to build mass awareness of the need for feminist movement through political education. Such a strategy is needed if feminism is to be a political movement impacting on society as a whole in a revolutionary and transformative way (2000, 163).

How domestic violence workers can sustain a focus on a transformative vision of change and find ways of working with others towards the achievement of this vision is a core focus for this study. To address this question, it is necessary to look at how domestic violence workers are positioned in relation to feminist anti-violence movements and how locating frontline service provision to women within a wider movement for social change informs practice at this level.

Frontline domestic violence work: Social service or social change

The discovery of the prevalence and systemic nature of male violence against women within the public and private sphere began in the context of consciousness raising that was at the core of the women's liberation movement in the 1970s (Connolly, 2002, Connolly and O'Toole, 2005; Dobash and Dobash, 1992, Nash, 2002, Schechter, 1982, Stark, 2007). It was within the context of consciousness raising and 'speak outs' that women first started to talk about the reality of married life, intimacy and sexuality. The myth that the family home was the safest place for a woman to be was exploded. Repeated disclosures about the enforcement of male sexual privilege through violence and abuse, both within the public and private sphere, led to the issue of rape, sexual assault and domestic violence becoming one of the primary foci of the women's movement. This in turn led to the emergence of distinct sub movements that were dedicated to combatting gender-based violence (Connolly, 2002, Dobash and Dobash, 1992; Schechter, 1982; Stark, 2007). The purpose of the women's domestic violence movement was to:

... re-frame the cultural understanding of domestic violence from an apolitical, individual problem to be a profoundly social problem rooted

in structural systems of patriarchy and ideologies of gender inequality (Lehrner and Allen, 2008, pg.220).

Feminist domestic violence services offer a radically different alternative to women in providing counter cultural spaces in which women can experience solidarity, egalitarianism, affirmation and an experience of the power of collective action (Elliot et al, 2005; Kulkarni, 2019; Wilson et al, 2015). As such, these spaces can be engines that help drive a broad based social change movement towards the eradication of male violence against women. Domestic violence organisations that are embedded within a feminist social change movement can provide a liberating model of practice that facilitates the empowerment of women (Allen et al, 2013; Hughes, 2017; Kelly et al, 2014; Kulkarni et al, 2012; Nicholls, 2013; Zweig and Burt, 2007; Safe Ireland, 2015; Sullivan and Bybee 1999). These organisations offer a theoretical model that enables women to identify the social forces that have entrapped them within intimate relationships with abusive men and that continue to impede their journey to safety and autonomy. With this political insight, woman subjected to domestic abuse can resist women blaming narratives that predominate in our society and draw from the empowering potential of the collective in their struggles to secure the social and economic supports they need (Elliot et al, 2005; Kulkarni, 2019; Wilkin and Hillock, 2014; Wilson et al, 2015). This approach supports a form of empowerment that recognises that women cannot find the resources to live their lives well without community accountability for how those protections and resources are provided. Concerted political action is required when material necessities, such as housing, a sufficient income, protection from violence and connection to community are denied to women (Sullivan and Goodman, 2019).

The history of the anti-domestic violence movement is one of progress, achievements, weaknesses, failures and continuing struggle against the erosion of feminist practice and the resistance of the hegemonic social order to transformative change. In the following section I provide an overview of the anti-domestic violence movement in Ireland which shares this mixed history with movements in other countries. Because of a lack of critical scholarship about the movement in Ireland, I integrate literature from the US and UK to enable an analysis of critical issues that

contribute to the current context in which domestic violence workers in Ireland are situated.

Locating the anti-domestic violence movement in Ireland

How can the anti-domestic violence movement in Ireland be defined? Is it constituted by single issue groups who mobilise resources to position themselves as representatives of and advocates for a constituency of women who experience intimate partner violence? (Dobash and Dobash, 1992). Or does it correspond more closely with a new social movement, comprised of a loose constellation of groups and individuals who belong to the movement because they commit to shared goals targeted at institutional change and long haul cultural transformation (Dobash and Dobash, 1992, Nash, 2002). Arguably, both of these kinds of movement organising exist in Ireland. Safe Ireland and Women's Aid for example, both act as special interest groups at national level lobbying for social change (Connolly, 2002; Connolly and O'Toole, 2005; Galligan, 1998; Safe Ireland 2017, 2020; Women's Aid, 2019). They both see their constituency as being women who experience domestic abuse. While there are some survivors who participate in these organisations' activities, the vast majority of work is carried out by professional staff. There also exist a myriad of other groups, for example, Traveller rights group and migrant rights groups, who do not focus solely on gender based violence who are concerned to tackle the prevalence of domestic abuse in our society. Therefore, I argue that these groups are part of the anti-domestic violence movement in Ireland (Akidwa and Ncube, 2009; NWCI, 2002, 2019; Pavee Point and National Traveller Women's Forum, 2017). In addition, recent years have seen the emergence of autonomous survivor groups who are beginning to claim some of the political territory around anti-domestic violence social change work (Immigrant Council of Ireland, 2021; Stop Domestic Violence, 2021). What about individuals within state agencies, academia, business, the arts, and media, some of whom are survivors of domestic abuse and some who act as allies to survivors and try to bring about change from within these structures? Are they too members of a social change movement against domestic abuse?

Following Wainwright, I argue that the anti-domestic violence movement can be understood as a constellation of networks, organisations and people who share common values and goals but who are “*each autonomous and interrelated in different ways*” (2013, 56). The network of women’s organisations dedicated to tackling domestic abuse in Ireland therefore, could be understood as a movement within a movement. These groups sometimes act alone to seek specific institutional reforms and sometimes as part of wider networks of organisations and movements acting for transformative cultural and structural change. This research focuses on the social change efforts of domestic violence organisations and workers who occupy a central position in this constellation of networks, organisations and people who constitute the anti-domestic violence movement in Ireland.

A brief history of the anti-domestic violence movement in Ireland

As in the UK and the USA, the first activists to respond to intimate partner violence in Ireland were women who had been involved in the second wave of the women’s movement (Connolly, 2002). In the mid-1970s, reform orientated activists and women involved in the more radical actions of the Irish Women’s Liberation Movement converged to respond to single issue gender justice issues including rape and domestic violence. They set up new organisations that provided support and services directly to women (Connolly and O’Toole 2005, Smyth, 1988). Two organisations, AIM (Action, Information, Motivation) in Dublin and ADAPT (Association for Deserted and Alone Parents) in Limerick, focused on the injustices experienced by women who were separated or “deserted” by husbands, and it was these two organisations that set up the first refuges for women fleeing domestic violence (Connolly, 2002). In an Irish Times article in May 2000, AIM founder member Nuala Fennell describes the institutional injustices and failures affecting women who were separated and/or experiencing domestic violence in Ireland in the 1970s:

At that time, women faced insoluble problems when a marriage broke down. A deserted wife had to wait six months before qualifying for an allowance and had to prove that she had tried to trace her husband. The family home was often sold over her head without her knowledge, and she had no statutory entitlement to maintenance from her husband. Even the children's allowance was vested in him. In incidences

of family violence, there were no barring or protection orders, assault cases were heard in open court, with the alleged injuries exhibited to the court; the husband, not the wife, may have had a solicitor, and all details were duly published in the next day's newspapers. The result was usually a fine or a suspended sentence, which left the family intact, and so often led to further brutality for a wife who no longer had confidence in the courts (Fennell, 2000).

Fennell (2000) recounts that she felt “crushed” by the hundreds of women experiencing violence and abuse from husbands who contacted AIM for support and protection. The demand for help led to public meetings and Women’s Aid was formed as an organisation in 1974. They opened the doors of the first refuge in Ireland later that year followed shortly by ADAPT in Limerick who also opened a refuge in 1974 (Connolly and O’Toole, 2005).

Galligan (1998) notes that unlike in the UK where the Women’s Aid federations supported local groups to establish refuges, the growth of refuge provision in Ireland was not coordinated and refuges were set up by groups who held diverse ideological perspectives. Despite this lack of coherence, those working and volunteering in refuges for women experiencing domestic abuse began to gather and to collaborate through their affiliation to the National Network of Women’s Refuges and Support Services⁶ in the late 1970s.

A focus on institutional change

When women in liberal democracies began to gather and to organise around the priorities that affected their lives in the early 1970s, the landscape today would be unrecognisable as compared to the status quo that pertained in relation to this critical social issue at that time (Htun and Weldon, 2012, Stark, 2007). Significant reforms of legislation, civil and criminal legal responses, housing and other social services have been progressed in many countries. In Ireland, Women’s Aid, held a predominant position throughout the 1980s and 1990s, being key actors in lobbying for institutional change whilst also offering a radical feminist analyses on violence against women (Galligan, 1998). A number of Women’s Aid’s social change goals were

⁶ Formerly the National Network of Women’s Refuges and Support Services. The Network change its name to Safe Ireland in 2008.

realised during the 1990s. The Domestic Violence Act 1996 saw the introduction of progressive legislation that extended the period for protection and barring orders and extended the access to such orders to cohabitants (Connolly and O'Toole, 2005, NWCI, 2000). The Act also gave the Gardaí new powers of arrest and entry into private homes when they had reasonable cause to believe that a crime had taken place. However, Women's Aid was a single non-membership organisation and while there is some evidence of smaller organisations' alignment with a feminist perspective (Meade, 1997; NWCI, 2000), it is hard to assess the degree to which the network of domestic violence organisations in Ireland acted as a social change movement.

The emergence of Safe Ireland in the mid 2000's as a leading feminist organisation was significant because as a membership organisation to which almost all of women's domestic violence organisations are affiliated, they began to articulate a collective feminist vision for change in Ireland (Safe Ireland, 2017a, 2017b, 2019c). Safe Ireland have emerged as a leading social change agent, sharing the national lobbying space with Women's Aid. Similarly to Women's Aid, Safe Ireland have focused on institutional change whilst also holding and articulating a vision for transformative cultural change. Both agencies have carried out research on women's experiences of accessing state support and protections and they have used this information to successfully lobby for a series of legislative reforms. Most recently, their efforts and that of other organisations resulted in the enactment of the Domestic Violence Act 2018 which for the first time criminalises coercive control, thus placing domestic violence as a distinctive form of criminal behaviour into the statute books (Safe Ireland, 2021b, Women's Aid, 2017).

Despite these achievements, inconsistent enforcement of the law and the failure of institutions to reform in ways that are responsive to the lived experience of women and children who experience domestic abuse remains as an ongoing concern for anti-domestic violence movements in Ireland and elsewhere (Hanman-James, 2018; Safe Ireland, 2017; Stark, 2007; Women's Aid, 2019). The intransigence of key state agencies when it came to implementing changes in practice led activists to seek new

ways of engaging with the state. One of these was in lobbying for and being involved in creating multi-agency coordinated efforts at community level.

The success of some of these initiatives has seen an increase in conviction rates for abusive men, an increase in police, social service and court interventions and increased safety for women and children (Hague and Malos, 1998, Shepard and Pence, 1999; Stanley, 2015). This has led to the proliferation of coordinated community responses and multi-agency forums in several countries including Austria, the US, the UK, Australia and New Zealand. Many such initiatives, however, fail to improve institutional responses or bring benefits to women and children. Furthermore, there is evidence that some multi-agency initiatives and other kinds of institutional reform can result in practices that mirror the power and control tactics of the abuser and result in unintended outcomes that further harm women, children and their communities (Hague and Malos, 1998, Hague 2001; Hanman-James, 2018; Patel, 1999, Wilson, 2013). Women's organisations, who advocate for feminist responses that ensure that choice and agency remain with women, are often marginalised on these multi-agency bodies by more powerful state actors and this diminishes or negates their capacity to prevent "*a new layer of surveillance and 'monitoring' into women's lives*" (Stanley and Humphreys, 2014, 380).

The existence of such forums can give the impression that the state is doing something about domestic violence when in reality little is being done to tackle the prevalence of male violence against women (Patel, 1999).

Inter-agency work on domestic violence can sometimes act rather like a smoke-screen to disguise the fact that little is really happening, while 'looking good' from the outside and feeling good from the inside (Stanley and Humphreys, 2014, 385).

This "*smokescreen*" effect can be seen at national level in Ireland where successive commitments from the Irish state to coordinate a whole of government response have never been fully realised. Beginning in the 1990s, the government responded to consistent lobbying by Women's Aid and established the Taskforce on Violence Against Women in 1996 (Galligan, 1996; NWCI, 2000). This was followed by the

establishment of a coordinating body in the Department of Justice and Equality and the publishing of the first and second National Strategies on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based violence in 2008 and 2016 respectively (Cosc, 2021). Despite isolated pockets of good practice and the small number of cases in which concerted efforts were made to coordinate responses at community level, the overall prognosis is that the promise of the Taskforce strategy was never realised (Kearns and Coen, 2014) and that much of the reform agenda included in the two national strategies have not been progressed (NWCI, 2019). The promised establishment of coordinated community responses or any kind of multi-agency forum that was given the remit, power and resources to coordinate and hold to account relevant institutions for their reform efforts never happened in Ireland (Safe Ireland, 2017, Women’s Aid 2019). The one such initiative that did emerge, the NDVIA⁷, eventually had to close because of a lack of state support and funding (NWCI, 2002).

Promises made, promises broken⁸

The phrase ‘*promises made, promises broken*’ characterises the failure of the Irish state to make real most of the commitments it has made to tackle domestic violence, particularly since 1997 and the publication of the Taskforce Report on Violence Against Women in 1997 (Kearns and Coen, 2014; NWCI, 2017; Ryan, 2006, 2007; Safe Ireland, 2017, 2017a; Women’s Aid, 2017, 2017a). Many of the problems identified in submissions to the CEDAW⁹ body in 2005 remained unaddressed in 2017 when Safe Ireland, Women’s Aid and the National Women Council of Ireland again made submissions to this treaty body (NWCI, 2017; Safe Ireland, 2017, 2017a; Women’s Aid, 2017a). In its submission Safe Ireland stated:

The legal system - at every level – is failing women and children who are living with violence and abuse in their homes. There is complete inconsistency in the responses domestic violence victims receive from the legal system. While there are pockets of good practice, where legislation and policy are being implemented, this has been the exception rather than the norm. The pillars

⁷ National Domestic Violence Intervention Agency

⁸ This heading is borrowed from the Amnesty International 2005 campaign on the failure to deliver on the promises made by the Irish Government at the 1995 UN Conference on Women in Beijing. A review of the government’s implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action in 2005 revealed that most of the commitments signed up to by the Irish government had not been progressed.

⁹ UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.

of best practice in protection of victims from domestic violence emerged as entirely absent from the Irish context (Safe Ireland, 2017, 7).

As recently as 2019, Women's Aid carried out a consultation with service users about their experience of seeking protection and redress through legal system. The conclusions of this study indicate that the issues Women's Aid raised in the 1990s, about the fragmentation of responses and particularly, the disconnect between the civil and criminal justice systems that enabled abusers to evade accountability, have not been tackled and the legal system continues to fail women experiencing domestic abuse (Women's Aid, 2019b). The prevalence levels of male violence and abuse against women in intimate relationships have not abated. The most recent statistics from the EU Fundamental Rights Agency indicate that 1 in 3 women in Ireland experience psychological abuse and almost 1 in 6 experience physical violence in relationships with men (Fundamental Rights Agency, 2015).

While much responsibility for a failure to make good the promises of legislative, institutional and cultural change lies with the state, the strategies of women's anti-violence movements are themselves implicated in the lack of progress towards the achievement of movement goals.

Movement strategies critiqued

Alongside recognition of the many achievements of women's anti-violence movements there have been critiques of movement goals, strategies and some of the outcomes of movement gains. These critiques emanate primarily from the USA and from the UK and there is no similar body of work relating to movement strategies and gains in Ireland. Given that the Irish anti-domestic violence movement is connected to and influenced by developments in and scholarship on domestic violence work in these two countries, these analyses are relevant to this current study (Connolly, 2002; Smyth, 1988). I address these critiques in more detail at a later stage in this chapter. The focus of this section is to position myself in relation to debates about whether women's anti-violence movements should focus on long term change, targeted at upending the structural and cultural constructs that

underpin men's violence against women, or on institutional reform, or if these two goals are incompatible or part of the one struggle.

Much critique focuses on the unintended consequences that came about as a result of the movements' preoccupation with institutional reform at the expense of more transformative social change work. The preoccupation of the women's domestic violence movement with institutional reform has not only absorbed much of the movement's resources and energies but has also shifted the attention away from dismantling the structures and norms that provided the context in which men gained their power, privilege and sense of entitlement to be dominant within relationships and family (Stark, 2007; Schechter, 1988, 1990). Shepard and Pence argue that the movements' focus on criminal and civil justice system has meant that:

The battered women's movement did not develop a radical critique of the family or of the capitalist state, or of heterosexism. Rather, safety became to the battered women's movement what liberation is for radical feminism. (Shepard and Pence, 1999, 6).

Critiques of women's anti-violence movements have identified that social change approaches focused on deep rooted structural and cultural change have been marginalised in favour of a focus on liberal institutional reform efforts. I agree with Mc Kinnon who contends that approaches from a liberal feminist perspective do not stop male violence against women because criminal enforcement while suggesting that rape and battering are deviant:

... punishes men for expressing images of masculinity ... for which they are otherwise trained, elevated, venerated and paid (McKinnon, 1993, 206).

In contrast radical feminists work for a reality beyond legislative and institutional change and towards a deconstruction and transformation of those social and cultural constructs that underpin the prevalence of violence against women (Barry 1995, Fraser, 2005, 2015; hooks, 2000; Schechter, 1982). Acknowledging the inadequacy of a singular focus on institutional reform, it is essential to recognise the reality for those activists and practitioners who bear witness to the failure of the state to provide protection, redress and support to women subjected domestic abuse. Many

movement activists took the position that it was necessary to engage in systems advocacy because the “*sheer numbers of women coming into shelters necessitated a pragmatic approach*” and that domestic violence advocates felt compelled to advocate for legal reform as women were “*already inextricably hooked into the legal system*” (Shepard and Pence, 1999, 10.). Regardless of their ideological orientation, movement activists found themselves increasingly caught up in the “*daily grind*” (Schechter, 1990, 308) of providing refuge and other supports to women as they also fought for resources and to retain control of how services would be run. In this struggle, they spent what little time and resources they had left to focus on those actions that were most likely to bring immediate benefits to women and their children (Dobash and Dobash, 1992; Schechter, 1988, 1990; Shepard and Pence, 1999; Stark, 2007).

I align my views with Shepard and Pence (1990, 1999), who assert that institutional reform has an important place in women’s domestic violence movements, whilst they also recognise that it does not address the culture of domination in which violence against women is rooted. They contend that it is possible to maintain a radical vision of a transformative change at the same time as advocating for effective and coordinated institutional responses, which they argue:

Can and does make individual women safer. It can and does save women’s lives. It can make it easier for women to be about their real business, the work of transforming the culture that violated every part of their being and spirit. Projects like these are not about changing men, but about creating safe space for women to live in and to participate in their communities in order to create a more sane society (1990, 296).

From this perspective, creating safety for women is a prerequisite to creating the conditions in which women can act collectively for women’s emancipation. While the achievements of anti-domestic violence movements in this regard are significant, at the macro level of countrywide crime surveys, homicide reviews and pan European prevalence studies of violence against women, there is no indication that men’s control and abuse of women within relationships is decreasing (Fundamental Rights Agency, 2015; Hanman-James, 2018, Stark, 2007). Valid questions have been asked of the movement about how it has come so far and yet

there has been no notable decrease in the prevalence of violence against women within intimate relationships (Hanman-James, 2018, Stark, 2007).

Stark (2007) argues that the strategies that have been employed by women's anti-violence movements have brought them as far as they can go and he argues that it is now time to reorient focus and actions.

The abuse of women in personal life is inextricably bound up with their standing in larger society and therefore women's entrapment in their personal lives can be significantly reduced only if sexual discrimination is addressed simultaneously. In the early shelters, the interrelatedness of these tenets was grounded in the practice of empowerment, whereby the suffering of individual victims was mollified by mobilising their collective power to help one another and change the institutional structures that caused and perpetuated women's second class status, an example of women doing for themselves. Our challenge is to resurrect this collective practice and broaden its political focus to the sources of coercive control (Ibid., 2007, 14).

Thus, a renewal and strengthening of the transformative potential of women's anti-violence movements requires an inward looking focus on the purpose of our movements and organisations, the values that underpin all aspects of organising and on the practices that individual workers employ on a day-to-day basis. If anti-domestic violence movements are to progress towards a vision of a radically altered world, then it follows that practice must be transformational in intent and nature. In the following section I provide an overview of the constituent elements of transformative feminist practice within frontline domestic violence organisations.

Transformative feminist practice in frontline domestic violence work

Transformative feminist practice in domestic violence work seeks to facilitate women's journeys to safety and autonomy whilst simultaneously providing spaces in which women can experience an alternative to the oppressive conditions they experience within intimate relationships and within a patriarchal capitalist society (Schechter, 1982). Practitioners seek not only to create space for action for women in the short term, but seek to provide a "*basket of resources*" (Kelly et al, 2014, 127) that women can pick and choose from for as long as they need these supports.

Advocates working according to transformative feminist principles are aware of the need to engage in social change work and to centre an intersectional analysis as part of their practice (Nicholls, 2013; Mc Phail et al, 2007). By bringing a political dimension to the centre of their work, they make available for survivors an analysis of domestic abuse within which women can place their experience (Schechter, 1982, Wilkin and Hillock, 2014). Thus:

Caring combined with political insight, helps women understand their feelings and gives them tools to understand their experiences. Battered women are entitled to an explanation for why they were beaten and why they were denied institutional help. This does not mean giving political lectures to residents but rather suggests the need for consciousness raising and group sharing formats (Schechter, 1982, 252)

A commitment to relationships built on care, respect and equality enables women to connect into an empowering and sustaining community in which they can experience the healing power of the group and realise their potential to act with others for social change (Elliot et al, 2005; Herman, 1992; Schechter, 1982; Wilson et al, 2015). The following section focuses on three aspects of transformative feminist practice: the knowledge about the causes and nature of male violence against women within intimate relationships, a commitment to imbue all interactions and actions with feminist values, and an ability to utilise this knowledge and understanding in practice.

Knowledge

The necessity to “*interrogate our core paradigm*” (Stark, 2009, 1510) and to be knowledgeable about the implications for women of applying different meaning frameworks to our work, is, I contend, one of the most pressing arguments for providing for education and learning opportunities for workers. If domestic violence workers are to respond effectively to domestic abuse, it is essential that they understand the lived reality for women who are subjugated by intimate partners and most importantly, that they understand what the intent of abusers is and what strategies and tactics they will use to achieve their goals (Stark, 2007). Feminist practitioners have long understood that individual men’s use of violence and abuse is underpinned by the perpetuation of male privilege at all levels of society. Working from this perspective, those involved in domestic violence work focus on how abusers

entrap women within intimate relationships through employing a process of coercive control (Kelly et al, 2014; Sharp-Jeffs et al, 2018; Stark, 2007, 2009).

Understanding coercive control: A form of subordination rather than a typology of violence

From the beginning of the women's anti-violence movement, advocates and activists understood that abusers in intimate relationships sought to gain and maintain power and control through using multiple and overlapping forms of violence and abuse (Dobash and Dobash, 1992; Edwards, 1987; Schechter, 1982). Evan Stark through a forensic examination of abusive men's patterns of behaviour provided a deeper understanding of the dynamics and processes that characterise their intent, strategies and tactics as a process of coercive control. Coercive control is defined by Stark (2007) as a "course of conduct" employed by abusive men as a means to subvert and deny women's autonomy and freedom and to maintain the dominance of the abuser within intimate relationships (Stark, 2006, 2007, 2009). Stark (2007) emphasises that the most important thing that needs to be understood about coercive control is not what abusive men do, but what they stop women from doing and how they prevent women's self-determination. His analysis of controlling men's violence and abuse within intimate relationships with women is consistent with a radical feminist analyses that understands that:

... dramatic sex-based disadvantages remain that allow men to translate their relative privilege in the wider society into disproportionate levels of power and control in relationships ... but the key inequality that men exploit in coercive control involves women default consignment to domestic service (Stark, 2009, 1513).

Stark (2006, 2007) contends that coercive control is underpinned by heteronormative stereotypes of men and women in society and particularly within intimate relationships. Reflecting the arguments of Kelly (1987), he argues that this makes it hard for women who are subjected to coercive control and others to identify where sexist constraints normalised in a patriarchal society end and imposition and enforcement of regulation begins. He argues that in societies where male privilege is more explicitly and forcefully sustained by the state, men do not have to resort to

coercive control in the way they do in states where women have been afforded a relative level of autonomy and liberty because of liberal and progressive social change. Thus, when women have an alternative to their consignment and containment within the domestic sphere, abusive men resort to a process of coercive control to secure their male privilege at the level of their intimate relationship.

Coercive control has been compared to other “capture” and course of conduct crimes such as hostage taking and prisoner of war camps (Herman, 1992; Stark, 2007). What is particular to coercive control is that the abuser’s presumption of intimacy and privileged access to his partner affords him a level of knowledge about the woman that he uses to target her personhood. This level of knowledge enables the abuser to tailor their tactics specifically to the woman he is in a relationship with, undermining and destroying what is valuable to her, and exposing to others, and exploiting those aspects of her life, about which she may feel vulnerable (Hennessy, 2012; Stark, 2007, 2009). The abuser targets all aspects of the woman’s life, exploiting and controlling her time, her resources, her relationships, her skills, and her energies (Stark, 2006, 2007, 2009). One of the ways that coercive controllers do this is in the extension of the regulation and micromanagement of minute facets of everyday life. Thus,

... such regulation crushes the spirit even more fundamentally than the deprivation of necessities because it leaves little space for personhood to breathe. The irony, to reiterate, is that the liberties denied by this process are so much a part of the everyday taken-for-granted affairs that their violation usually passes without notice (Stark, 2007, 274).

The impossibility of imagining how these “taken-for-granted” liberties could be denied to one adult by another outside of the context of state or criminal violence is one of the reasons, Stark argues, that domestic violence against women is “*hidden in plain sight*” (Ibid., 2007, pg. 15).

While coercive control is primarily a crime against women’s liberties and rights rather than a solely a crime against women’s bodies, the threat of physical violence is ever present in the majority of cases where women are coercively controlled. Most women are subjected to numerous minor assaults over time and this experience along with repeated acts of intimidation result in women feeling terrorised by their

partners (Stark, 2007; Johnson, 2006). While recognising the devastating impact of physical violence Stark calls for a new model of harm to be applied to coercive control. Women repeatedly tell advocates that the range of harms they experience and that they themselves assess as most injurious are not physical but are the cumulative effects of increasing levels of entrapment (Stark, 2007). Intimate partner violence is the leading cause of depression, suicidality, substance misuse and homelessness amongst women (Women's Health Council, 2007). These harms in themselves severely restrict women's freedoms and affect their welfare and well-being in a myriad of ways. However, Stark argues we must go beyond even this model of harm to understand that the primary harm inflicted upon women is the loss of freedom.

A feminist intersectional analysis

A core concept in the knowledge framework of feminist practitioners is intersectionality. Crenshaw (1991) coined the phrase intersectionality to draw out the implications for women of colour and poor women in relation to both their experiences of male violence, racism and poverty. The intersectional nature of race, class and gender creates a higher level of risk for women of colour, poor women, and other marginalised women than that faced by women who are White and middle class (Ritchie, 2006). Domestic violence service managers and advocates need to have an awareness of and knowledge about white class and other forms of privilege, where and how they are located within this complex matrix of power at a societal level and how these different locations can influence orientations and choices when it comes to responding to women experiencing domestic violence (Donnelly et al, 2005; Nicholls, 2013). As Bograd (2006) attests:

We exist in social contexts created by the intersections of systems of power (for example, race, class, gender and sexual orientation) and oppression (prejudice, class stratification, and gender inequality and heterosexist bias). In practice social dimensions are not merely abstract descriptions as they are suffused with evaluations that have social consequences. ... These systems are not mutually exclusive, static, or abstract. They operate independently or simultaneously, and the dynamics of each may exacerbate and compound the consequences of another (Bograd, 2006, 26).

A feminist intersectional approach requires advocates to understand the intersection of state violence and personal violence in the lives of marginalised women. In practice, this requires the domestic violence worker to understand that a woman's presentation to a domestic violence service is often "*merely the most immediate manifestation of the subordination they experience*" (Crenshaw, 1991 pg. 1245). The advocate must therefore be able to acknowledge and consider the very many different factors that further limit marginalised women's space for action (Kelly et al, 2014; Thiara, 2015).

While acknowledging the role that culture and structural constructs play in the lives of women experiencing domestic violence, domestic violence workers need to be wary of explanations for violence against women that rely solely on cultural factors (Donnelly et al, 2005; Sokoloff and Dupont, 2005, 2006; Sokoloff and Pratt, 2006; Thiara, 2015). Rather than making cultural assumptions based on ideas about the homogeneity of certain groups of women, advocates would therefore need to commit to "*a practice of cultural humility*" which entails:

(a) a continuous process of questioning one's own beliefs, biases, and assumptions as they have been shaped by specific social locations; (b) ongoing curiosity and openness to others' cultural backgrounds and identities; and (c) a commitment to challenging institutions and systems that negatively affect marginalized communities (Sullivan and Goodman 2019, 2011).

An example of a prevailing practice paradigm within mainstream services that needs to be interrogated is that individualised responses fail to honour a woman's desire to receive support from within informal networks within her own community (Ashbourne et al, 2019, Kim, 2020). At agency level, this means holding an awareness that marginalised women may be underrepresented in our services. This is not because of barriers that the advocate may perceive as being inherent to minority cultures, but because of assumptions that a 'one size fits all' approach results in equal outcomes for all women. Such a view ignores the many factors that impact on socially marginalised women's experience of intimate partner violence (Donnelly et al, 2005).

Purpose

The unique and critical nature of feminist anti-domestic violence work arises from the specificity of practice which is designed to respond to the ways in which men entrap women within intimate relationships and to the context in which women seek supports and protections. Effective responses to women are those in which practitioners seek to provide “*space for action*” (Kelly et al, 2014) to directly counter the systematic and pervasive pattern of coercive control exerted by the abuser. Because of the unrelenting nature of coercive control, women have:

... little volitional space between abusive incidents to exercise autonomy. Many have a sense that the abuser is omnipresent and come to believe the perpetrator’s negative evaluation of them and their capacities. It is in this narrowing of life and options that women’s ‘space for action’ is diminished (Ibid., 7).

The efficacy of responses from women’s domestic violence organisations is underpinned by their specific role in responding to the multiplicity of ways in which women’s lives that have been made smaller by the actions of coercive controllers. Evaluations and research with survivors illustrate that it is as a result of engaging with frontline workers within an empowering environment, where they were “*supported by committed individuals who understood domestic violence*” (Ibid., 127), that women found space for action. They came to identify and access the resources and supports that enabled them to maximize the safety of themselves and of their children (Allen et al 2004, Fitzpatrick et al 2003; Kelly et al, 2014; Kulkarni et al, 2012). The distinctive components of a practice that has evolved to respond to women’s experience of coercive control are briefly described in the following subsection.

Practice

The centrality of empowerment practice

‘Empowering practice’ (Safe Ireland, 2015) or an ‘empowerment approach’ (Wood, 2015) is perhaps the defining characteristic of feminist run domestic violence services. Empowerment as defined by survivors of domestic violence means that the worker supports and affirms survivors’ abilities to make choices for themselves (Allen et al, 2013; Fitzpatrick et al 2003). Rather than working to a deficit model, feminist

practitioners employ a strengths' based approach and recognise that women are active help seekers, going to great lengths to protect themselves, and their children if they are mothers (Allen et al, 2013; Sullivan and Goodman, 2019). By affirming women's position as the best assessors of what would work for them, workers contribute to women regaining power and control, rather than mirroring the control of the abuser by acting as if they know more about the woman's situation and what is best for her (Allen et al, 2013; Dobash and Dobash, 1992; Haaken and Yragui, 2003; Schechter, 1982, 1990; Stark, 2007; Sullivan and Bybee, 1999; Wood, 2015; Zweig et al, 2007). At all times, the feminist practitioner is aware that it is the power of the abuser and the impact of their coercive control, intersected with a myriad of cultural and structural barriers, that entraps women within intimate relationships with abusive partners (Bograd, 2006; Crenshaw, 1991; Donnelly et al, 2005; Hennessey, 2012; Kelly et al 2014; Sullivan and Goodman, 2019; Thiara, 2015).

Focusing on women and children's safety.

Safety planning is an ongoing process in which the domestic violence worker works collaboratively with a woman to explore in detail the risks that she and her child(ren) face and to identify safety strategies that the woman assesses are likely to work in maximising safety (Cattaneo and Chapman, 2011, 2015; Goodkind et al, 2004; Kelly and Humphreys, 2001; Logan and Walker, 2018, 2018b; Macy et al, 2010; Murray et al, 2015). Useful safety planning from the perspective of women who have experienced domestic violence is where the worker provides the women with space and time to tell the story of her abuse rather than compartmentalise the high risk incidents from the wholeness of the woman's experience of intimate partner violence. Effective safety planning addresses risks beyond the risk of physical violence in the short term and takes into account both perpetrator and life generated risks in the longer term (Cattaneo and Chapman, 2011, Kelly and Humphreys, 2001; Logan and Walker, 2018; Murray et al 2015).

Survivor-centred advocacy broadens the definition of survivor safety stating survivors are "safe when there is no violence, their basic human needs are met, and they experience social and emotional well-being (Davies and Lyon, 2013, pg.6, quoted in Kulkarni, 2019).

Thus, safety planning is effective when the range of supports available to women and children includes a variety of responses focused on recovery from trauma, economic empowerment and the restoring and strengthening of women and children's social connectedness (Hanman-James, 2018; Kelly et al, 2014; Safe Ireland, 2015b). Again, the importance of viewing women's safety through an intersectional lens is emphasised as necessary if practitioners are to recognise and remain responsive to what safety means for women who experience the intersection of gender, race and class injustices (Kulkarni, 2019).

Rights based advocacy

Advocacy interventions underpinned by feminist principles, focus primarily on community responsiveness and accountability (Allen, et al, 2004; Shepard and Pence, 1999; Schow, 2006; Sullivan and Bybee, 1999). Working from the understanding that violence against women is a social problem requiring social solutions, interventions seek to shift responsibility to the community and those agencies and institutions that are responsible for stopping violent men re-victimising women and children and affording access to basic rights such as housing, income, education, and health care (Allen et al, 2004; 2013; Kelly and Humphreys, 2001; Shepard and Pence, 1999; Sullivan and Bybee, 1999; Sullivan and Goodman, 2019). Allen et al provide the following definition for domestic abuse advocacy.

To help survivors of domestic violence navigate the systems involved in the community response as they attempt to acquire needed resources. There is evidence that survivors of domestic violence are likely to have a constellation of needs such as housing, employment, education and child care ... Thus advocacy may involve a wide variety of social institutions that affect survivors lives including for example the criminal justice system, health care and social services, and/or religious institutions (Allen et al, 2004, 1017).

Advocates have to balance the tensions between maintaining positive relationships with a range of practitioners and asserting themselves with uncooperative professionals who often hold more power and status in the community (Dobash and Dobash, 1992; Kelly and Humphreys, 2001). At times, the advocate or organisation has to take a clear oppositional stance to the attitude and response of a state agency.

The ability of advocates to be effective in relation to individual cases, and system change, often turns on their ability and willingness, at all times and in whatever ways are necessary, to represent the interests of those they are advocating for. This may mean using strategies such as threats of adverse publicity or litigation. ... Advocacy in its purest forms can, therefore, constitute a serious test of many of the comfortable representations and relationships that are accepted as necessary aspects of interagency working. (Kelly and Humphreys, 2001, 246).

This oppositional stance requires the domestic violence worker to confront discriminatory attitudes and demand equal treatment for women of colour, minority indigenous women and other marginalised women (Nicholls, 2013). For example, racist assumptions about Black, Traveller and other minority ethnic minority women being deployed to position violence and abuse as a “*way of life*” results in women from these communities being seen as underserving by those agencies and institutions that have a duty to protect and afford women access to their rights (Bassett, 2006; Donnelly et al, 2005; Pavee Point and National Traveller Women’s Forum, 2017; Thiara, 2015, Women’s health Council, 2009). Working from an intersectional approach requires domestic violence advocates and organisations to be responsive to these inequalities and to integrate practices that challenge such responses and demand equal and effective interventions for all women experiencing domestic abuse. It also requires that all involved in anti-violence work reflect on the extent to which internalised oppressive meaning frameworks have been internalised at both individual, organisational and collective levels and to consider how they are positioned in relation to structural inequalities that result in the intersection of violence and oppression in women’s lives (Imkaan, 2017; Connolly, 2018).

Arguably, one of the most challenging aspects of domestic violence advocacy is in advocating for women who are mothers. The state has a clear responsibility to intervene in families when there is information that children are at risk of ongoing harm. However, assumptions underpinning social work, justice, health and education responses to children who are exposed to domestic abuse often fail to take into account the specific context of coercive control that both the woman and child have been subjected to and that continues to create risk for them post separation (Hester, 2011; Holt 2011, 2015). Working from de-gendered

assumptions, many practitioners in these agencies see women as primarily accountable for protecting their children. The domestic violence advocate in this scenario is focused on empowering women to advocate for their children and their own safety or to step into that advocacy role when women and children are not being heard or the woman feels unable to do this herself (Kelly and Humphreys, 2001).

Systems advocacy

Some women who depend on the state for basic needs such as housing or an income find that with or without advocacy support, they are unable to negotiate access to the resources they needed to escape violence and abuse (Allen et al, 2004, 2013). The level and quality of basic social provisions such as housing is a significant factor in affording women access to their rights than the level of self or third party advocacy. This points to the need for domestic violence organisations to engage in systems advocacy so that provision of essential social supports are available at an adequate level (Allen, et al, 2004; Kelly and Humphreys, 2001; Sullivan and Bybee, 1999). Workers need to understand individual women's experiences within a wider analysis of structural constructs, to develop a critical stance in relation to the state's failure to afford women access to their full rights and to generate collective strategies towards effecting institutional and wider social change (Lehrner and Allen, 2008, 2009; Nicholls, 2013).

Aiding recovery through the maintenance of RICH relationships

Domestic violence workers are, by and large, not therapists and yet the quality of the relationship between a worker and a woman can contribute to healing and recovery from trauma.

... a therapeutic relationship is one that offers respect, information, connection, and hope - a RICH relationship!. This type of relationship helps develop safety and trust, the essential building blocks of healing human connections. Safe relationships are consistent, predictable, nonviolent, non-shaming, and non-blaming (Elliot et al, 2005, 466).

These elements were found to be common across domestic violence services that worked from within a trauma informed framework. Transformative trauma informed practice goes beyond the creation of RICH relationships at the individual level (Elliot et al,2005; Kulkarni, 2019; Wilson et al, 2015). It requires organisations and practitioners to embrace the principles of power sharing and collaboration and to provide opportunities for women to influence the work and in some cases, to become involved in the work as peer educators and activists (Wilson et al, 2015). Committing to this kind of power sharing and inclusion are important elements of healing from trauma as in transforming a woman's perception of herself "*from powerless to powerful, she gains self-respect*" (Elliot et al, 2005, 470). Enabling women's voices to be heard "*increases their self-esteem, and transforms their feelings of isolation and shame*" into feelings of connection with others who have shared experiences of injustice and oppression (Ibid., 2005, 470).

Working from within this orientation, domestic violence organisations and workers need to embrace an intersectional trauma informed approach. This requires that organisations and workers shift from being merely survivor-centred to being survivor-informed, replacing some long held assumptions about what constitutes safety and healing from trauma, particularly for women from marginalised communities. Kulkarni argues that for women living in poverty or from minority ethnic and or immigrant communities, that closed, confidential, individualised approaches do not serve them well because they:

... may experience increased well-being in the domain of physical safety while simultaneously experiencing significant decreases in their social connectedness and meaningful access to resources because they have been uprooted from important social networks (Kulkarni, 2019, 57).

Remaining connected to and integrated within the community is particularly important for marginalised women if they are to increase and sustain their economic, social, physical and emotional well-being. An intersectional trauma informed practitioner will work alongside a woman to support her to increase her choices and negotiate access to protection and supports that are for her culturally appropriate (Ibid., 2019).

Intersectional practice

Intersectional feminist practice requires that organisations and workers respond not only to women's experience of domestic abuse but to "*other multi-layered and routinized forms of domination that often converge in these women's lives, hindering their ability to create alternatives to the abusive relationships that brought them to shelters in the first place*" (Crenshaw, 1991, 1245). Providing holistic responses to Black and minority ethnic [BME] women therefore requires that a range of services; refuge, advocacy, counselling, court accompaniment, and group support, are provided both throughout the crisis and recovery period for women (Women and Girls Initiative (WGI) BME Action Learning Set ,2020). Specialist BME domestic abuse organisations have taken the lead on developing specialism in providing such holistic services that respond to the complexity and specificity of BME women's experiences and needs (Imkaan, 2016).

BME women rarely come with a single issue: holistic working means taking into account the whole person, whose experiences of violence and abuse may span childhood and adulthood and include experiences of racism, insecurity and poverty. They may face the threat of violence from multiple perpetrators and have profound concerns about confidentiality as a result. BME women's organisations recognise and respond to these needs and concerns. Some of this is enabling women to challenge traditional ideas within communities about what they should do, strengthening their resolve not to return to abusive relationships within families or intimate relationships, and generating belief in sustainable futures. Specialist BME VAWG organisations have also developed specific expertise in relation to immigration issues, which are increasingly complex to negotiate: getting it wrong can leave women and children facing destitution and/or deportation. (Women and Girls Initiative (WGI) BME Action Learning Set ,2020, 6)

Intersectional practice also requires of the worker that they practice "*intersectional reflexivity*" (Imkaan, 2017, 9). This means that workers need to engage in a first person inquiry about how they are positioned along an axis of power with women who seek their support. This interrogation goes beyond just examining power dynamics inherent to the professional/survivor relationship but address how practitioners are situated with reference to wider power differentials in society. Four questions that should be at the fore for an intersectional reflexive practitioner are:

- What 'truths' are held in this organisation about some groups of women and girls (and some men)?
- How does that influence what is asked / delivered / assumed?
- What 'truths' do I hold about X group?
- How does this influence my practice? (Imkaan, 2017, 9)

Having brought to awareness how the power and privilege of the practitioner shapes how they respond to a woman who experiences the intersection of male violence and other forms of discrimination and oppression, practitioners need to act to ensure that their response disrupts that unequal power dynamic (Ibid). Part of intersectional reflexivity may at times be to recognise the limits of their own knowledge and capacities and to realise that it is in the best interests of a woman to refer to or collaborate with a specialist BME domestic abuse service.

Survivors repeatedly tell us that they need, and value, specialist BME led organisations. Many survivors are more likely to access BME specialist services and they are often a woman's first point of contact with any formal support provider, particularly for women who encounter multiple barriers to mainstream services. Accessing a stable and trusted point of contact and a BME women only space can be invaluable to women who may be feeling isolated, persecuted, misunderstood, powerless and/or vulnerable (Imkaan, 2016, 10).

Intersectional reflexivity therefore must extend beyond individual practice to an organisational level where questions must be asked about how the organisation will act to ensure such specialist services are available to women in their community. In the context of the growth of neo-liberal funding models that commission large mainstream organisations to provide services to all women in a given geographic location or community, this requires that domestic violence organisations commit to power sharing, resource sharing and solidarity with BME specialist organisations (Larasi, 2016; Imkaan, 2016, 2017).

Values

Following on Evan Stark's (2007) advice that women's anti-violence movements need to resurrect collective practice, it is useful to train our vision on the early days of the feminist anti-violence movement and the ways in which refuges and other support

services were organised. Egalitarian relationships underpinned by a position of solidarity were deemed essential in how the individual worker related to a woman seeking their support. In addition, it was important to organise in ways that provided an alternative to the oppressive ideology and practices of patriarchy. One element of this counter cultural project was to organise in ways that consciously underpinned collective and non-hierarchical organisational processes and egalitarian relationships. In the early refuges, there were no managers or Directors and women were involved in decision making along with workers and volunteers about how the refuge was run. Jobs such as cooking, shopping, cleaning and childcare were shared (Dobash and Dobash, 1992; Kelly and Humphreys, 2001; Schechter 1982, 1990; Stark, 2007).

Solidarity was expressed as a core value in how these organisations worked. Schechter (1988: page number) describes how *“inch by inch”*, workers and volunteers in the early refuges and other services worked with women to uncover the sexist ideology that underpinned men’s use of violence and society’s active collusion with the abuser. In those shelters and refuges seeking to enact feminist principles on a daily basis, both survivors, workers and volunteers were viewed as being in a process of liberation and discovery together. One shelter activist interviewed by Schechter explained:

We are all part of a liberating process of women helping each other. We are all sharing pain and through that similarity we grow. Often, we forget to share our lives and we become objects of services. When we share, there is a continual transformation of our own lives (Schechter, 1982, 66).

These statements exemplify a primary philosophical position of solidarity in feminist refuges. Rather than pathologise women who experienced domestic violence, those who worked from this perspective understood that any woman could be abused by a male partner and they did not see the woman as a client but as a participant in a joint struggle (Dobash and Dobash, 1992, Schechter 1982, Schechter 1990). The following statement from a group of feminist activists in Australia defending their right to resist the professionalisation of the refuge they established reflects this position.

Our intent is not to solely provide refuge to battered women, but more importantly, to create a space where each woman who comes through here will discover that the violence she is experiencing is not her fault, that she is not crazy and not alone. We believe domestic violence is a political issue, one that is rooted in patriarchy, and we (staff and residents) are sisters in this struggle. It is imperative that our hiring practices reflect this feminist vision (Marcus and Otto, 2001, 25).

Workers in feminist services believe that women were further empowered by being able to help other women rather than just being the recipients of support and a self-help, mutual aid ethos emerged as a core to feminist refuges and support services (Dobash and Dobash, 1992; Kelly and Humphreys, 2001; Schechter, 1982). Thus, holding a position of solidarity with women is inextricably linked with empowerment practice and with building a collective movement for social change.

Pence and Shepard (1990) argue that rather than professionals within anti-violence movements negotiating for change, that they should focus on organising women to affect change on their own behalf. This is particularly important for those women from marginalized communities, who see law enforcement agencies and other agencies of the state not necessarily as there to protect them, but as entities from which women need to protect themselves (McMahon and Pence, 2003; Mc Phial et al, 2007; Ritchie, 2006; Sokoloff and Dupont, 2006, Sudbury, 2006). Maintaining this position of solidarity with women who experience male domestic abuse and facilitating their empowerment as central to movement social change efforts is a critical role for those workers who encounter these women on a daily basis and who are positioned to offer spaces for just such work. Such a position expresses the grassroots values and reflects the “*political energy and turbulence*” (McMahon and Pence, 2003, 63) that first ignited the feminist anti-violence movement. A grassroots movement that is not restrained by dependent relationships with the state is far more likely to result in change that upends the status quo than the kind of institutional reform that is negotiated with the state. This is likely to be reform that is agreed *because* it does not radically alter the social order nor threaten the power of already privileged groups. As Ellen Pence stated when reflecting on her work as an anti-domestic violence scholar and activist, “*We risk losing our most powerful tool—*

our position of solidarity with women who are beaten" (Pence, 2001, 330, quoted in McMahon and Pence 2003).

It is difficult to find literature that describes current organisations operating as they did in the early days of the anti-domestic violence movement. Processes of professionalisation have profoundly changed the nature of refuges and other forms of services provided by women's domestic violence organisations (Bruckner, 2001; Hanman-James, 2018; Kendrick, 2002; Markowitz and Tice, 2002; Mehroratra et al, 2016). Most of these services are now provided by professional staff, working within a hierarchical management structure where women are seen as recipients of services rather than as companions in a joint struggle (Bruckner, 2001; Hanman-James, 2018; Markowitz and Tice, 2002; Wilson et al, 2015).

There were good reasons for bringing a greater level of structure, accountability, and transparency into domestic violence work. Studies that highlighted failures within feminist run services to live up to the ideals of feminism identified how structurelessness and a lack of transparency allowed inequality between workers and women availing of these services to persist (Bergstrom-Lynch, 2017; Dobash and Dobash, 1992, Pahl, 1985; Schechter, 1982). The manifestation of unequal power relations within domestic violence organisations was particularly harmful to Black and minority ethnic women, poor, disabled, lesbian and other marginalised women who sought support or who felt excluded from them (Donnelley et al, 2005; Thiara, 2015). Professionalisation was perceived as an antidote to the covert forms of power that operated within unstructured women's organisations. However, it is scholars and activist practitioners from within marginalized communities who have issued a challenge to the mainstream movement to return to the grassroots principles and practices of solidarity, collectivism and power sharing. Evidence of resistance to the worst impacts of processes of co-option and a re-commitment to feminist ways of organising within domestic violence organisations indicates that several organisations are responding to this challenge (Arnold and Ake, 2013; Ashbourne et al, 2019; Costello and Mason 2005; Kim, 2020, Marcus and Otto, 2001; Mc Phial et al, 2007). Nevertheless, there continue to be numerous challenges to be met both internally

within anti-violence movements and organisations, and the external environment in which they work. The final section of this chapter provides a brief overview of some of the most critical issues that continue to trouble women's anti-violence movements.

Critical issues troubling feminist anti-violence movements

Movement identity and leadership

The failure of the mainstream anti domestic violence movement to adopt an intersectional approach has in part been attributed to movement membership which has been characterised as a 'White woman's movement', and with increasing professionalisation, as a middle class women's movement (Crenshaw, 1991; Donnelly et al 2005; Markowitz and Tice, 2002; Richie 2000). One of the impacts of some processes of professionalisation is that as domestic violence organisations have become increasingly professionalised, they have also become increasingly middle class (Bruckner, 2001; Hanman-James, 2018; Markowitz and Tice, 2002). The positioning of professional domestic violence workers as specialists or as experts in multi-agency forums has resulted in the exclusion of women survivors from such forums and silenced their voices in debates about what kind of interventions are needed (Hanman James, 2018). This loss of grassroots activism is implicated in what Evan Stark (2007) describes as the stalling of the revolution that mobilised early movement activists.

Black activists and theorists have integrated a vigorous critique of the failure of anti-domestic violence movements to address class and race privilege as embodied in the mostly White, middle class status of its workers and Boards of Management (Richie 2000). The need for movement leaders to examine their own White and class privilege and how this impacts on how they understand the multiplicity of women's experience is highlighted as a priority issue (Donnelly et al 2005, Sokoloff and Dupont 2005, Richie 2000). Ritchie (2000, 2006) calls for anti-domestic violence movements to recognise the contradiction between rhetoric and reality and to honestly deal with what she characterises as its hypocrisy.

In the end, the assumed race and class neutrality of gender violence led to the erasure of low-income women and women of color from the dominant view. I contend that this erasure, in turn, seriously compromised the transgressive and transformative potential of the anti-violence movement's potentially radical critique of various forms of social domination (Ritchie, , 2006, 53).

The challenge from women of colour to the primarily white leadership of mainstream anti-domestic violence movements requires that white women must step aside so that Black women, other minority ethnic women and poor women can step up to take leadership. To address these challenges effectively, acknowledgement and honesty from movement leaders about internal divisions and inequalities is necessary. Solutions lie in collaboration, innovation and a greater openness from within the movement to integrate multiple perspectives (Donnelly et al 2005, Sokoloff and Dupont 2005, Richie 2000, 2006; Siddiqui 2000).

The de-politicization of domestic violence work

Concerns about the increasing de-politicization and erosion of the social change role of domestic violence organisations have been articulated since the earliest days of the movement (Dobash and Dobash, 1992, Schechter, 1982). While the movement itself was implicated in some of the losses and erosions of feminist principles, the co-optation of the domestic violence movement was reinforced by a prevailing cultural paradigm that individualises socially created problems, particularly so in the US (Dobash and Dobash, 1992, Schechter, 1982, 1990). Hanman-James (2018), reflecting on the current state of the movement in the UK, argues that the replacement of the movement's agenda of securing both safety and emancipation for women with the state's agenda of focusing primarily on managing high risk cases has resulted in a similar co-optation of movement goals. This co-optation, she argues, has been further advanced by the increasing professionalisation of the movement, which from the perspective of domestic violence organisations has meant "*depoliticizing the women's anti-male violence movement and burying them in paperwork*" (ibid., pg. 331).

The encroachment of neo-liberal priorities, that seek to marketize all aspects of human endeavour, roll back the role of the state in providing essential human services and foreground value for money, whatever the human cost, is implicated in the de-politicisation of the domestic violence movement (Hanman-James, 2018; Ishkanian, 2014; Mehrotra et al, 2016; Murphy et al, 2000; Vachelli et al, 2015). Hanman-James (2018) identified the increase in neo-liberal approaches to social service provision as being implicated in the replacement of feminist-led organisations by generic service providers who *“eagerly stepped in”* when some women’s services refused to compete for *“poorly drawn up contracts that favoured costs over quality of service”* (Ibid., 331). The emergence of non-feminist and de-politicised approaches to domestic abuse matches the priority of funders who are not interested and, in some cases, are actively opposed to action for social change being a role for domestic violence organisations (Murphy et al, 2020; Stark, 2007).

The perceived co-optation of the anti-domestic violence movement has impacted on workers’ identification with the movement as a force for social change. Studies on advocates’ awareness of the structural and cultural underpinnings of domestic violence have found younger advocates were unable to engage with or even critique this analysis (Hammonds, 2004, Lehrner and Allen, 2008, 2009, Nicholls, 2013). Many of these advocates de-gendered the issue of domestic violence despite being aware of the very high prevalence rates of violence against women and the comparatively low rates of intimate partner violence against men. They insisted that applying the principle of equality to their work meant that *“anyone can do it, anyone can get it, and everyone in the family’s affected”* (Hammons, 2004, 280). Thus, a shift to a de-gendered language has happened in the context of a “backlash” against feminism and the anti-violence movement where a:

...de-gendered analysis of domestic violence diverts attention away from men’s responsibility and the cultural and structural factors that oppress women and foster violence (Lehrner and Allen, 2008, pg. 230).

Lehrner and Allen conclude:

If the movement is in fact floundering, one likely outcome is a reduction in social change efforts targeting the theorized social and cultural foundations of domestic violence (2009, 657).

Processes of professionalisation have been implicated in the reduction in social change work and other troubling aspects of the development of women's anti-violence movements. It is important to further examine this issue before concluding that professionalisation is something that necessarily and always should be resisted by feminist domestic violence organisations.

Is professionalisation always problematic?

This study proposes that the field of domestic violence work needs to transition from a situation in which there exist differing ideologies and practices to being a clearly defined practice. This requires that there is an accepted delineation of *"the content of the work carried out ..., as reflected in accepted roles and responsibilities, key functions and remits, range of requisite skills and knowledge, and the general nature of work-related tasks"* (Evans, 2008, 25). Evans states that this endeavor is *"... generally to be seen as the identification and expression of what is required and expected of members of a profession"* (Ibid.). To ensure that workers are competent to practice within this profession *"each occupation must agree prerequisite attributes, determine certain standards of practice and approve particular education and training programmes, including Continuous Professional Development"* (Fitzsimons, 2017, 198). What is essentially at stake in making such a proposal is a process through which domestic violence work is professionalised. However, professionalisation within women's anti violence movements has been critiqued, the implication being that processes of professionalisation are inherently anti-feminist and antithetical to organisations that wish to work to feminist principles (Bruckner, 2001; Hanman-James, 2018; Kendrick, 2002; Markowitz and Tice, 2002; Mehrortra et al, 2016).

Scholars who have studied the issue of professionalisation concur with many of the critiques in domestic violence movement literature. For example, the credentialising of worker education and locating such education in universities has in some cases

excluded grassroots, working class members of community development organisations from securing paid positions when qualifications became a prerequisite to employment (Fitzsimons, 2017). This unintended consequence reflects similar exclusions within women's anti violence movements and clearly needs to be avoided (Markevitz and Tice, 2002). Alongside these concerns, positive stories of participation in higher education have also been shared, with community development practitioners from diverse backgrounds reporting that:

Being accredited, especially on a subject relevant to personal life struggle, can lay a great foundation in personal confidence. Secondly, accreditation enhances the rigor of learning. Through writing analysis and reflections and submitting them for scrutiny, we test our assumptions and sharpen thinking. Thirdly, accreditation provides a guide to standards of competency. Given the demanding nature of the work, we cannot rely on voluntary effort, and must pay people to work in the field. Accreditation can assist in choosing who to employ (Fitzsimons and Dorman, 2013, 55).

Issues in relation to power are central to any professionalisation process (Fitzsimons, 2017). Who decides what the attributes of a profession are, what standards should apply and what kind of education and qualifications are needed? Are such stipulations imposed from above or are they constructed by those with a real stake in the work, those who benefit from the work being done and those that are employed to deliver the response or service (Evans, 2008). In the context of neo-liberalism, professionalisation seems to be equated by the state with compliance with funder demands, in contrast with professionalism constructed by workers with an *"altruistic concern to constantly improve practice in the interests of clients"* (Helsby, 1995, 318). This is a significant issue in the UK where the Home Office focus on managing high risk cases has resulted in shaping how domestic violence organisations respond and the subsequent reduction of services to women who experience non-physical forms of abuse (Coy and Kelly, 2019; Hanman-James, 2018). A further critique of professionalisation is that it is primarily about providing prestige to the professional, giving them greater power than the person who seeks their response or service (Fitzsimons, 2017). Recognising the dilemmas and risks that come with professionalisation processes, I agree with Fitzsimons who sees professionalism as a paradoxical challenge for those involved in social change work.

I see the risks to grass-roots political activism but also see the benefits of creating university spaces to problematize practice and nurture practitioner's critical capacities. The tension is between maintaining spaces such as these, and the pressures from regulatory bodies to centralize technical skills at the expense of radicalism (2017, 223).

One of the dilemmas facing the domestic violence movement in Ireland is that without education and learning spaces in which workers can reflect on their work, stake a claim for feminist practice, and assert the value of domestic violence work as a profession through gaining qualifications, the movement will continue to experience the encroachment of feminist practice by problematic professionalisation processes. This dilemma was reflected in a statement by O'Neill (2014), quoted in Fitzsimons, who said:

As educators we sometimes miss the irony that what we advocate for the good of our students' development as learners, we rarely call for in our own development as educators. Most of us would, in some way or another, believe in and practice a form of pedagogy that has a social and dialogic element. In trying to achieve this, we work hard to create appropriate and safe spaces for such learning to occur. But do we fight as hard to create similarly appropriate spaces, temporal and physical, for our own development as educators? (O'Neill, 2014, 153. Quoted in Fitzsimons, 2017, 223)

Given the critical nature of frontline domestic violence work, professionalism would seem to be a crucial component in sustaining effective responses to women. I agree with Fitzsimons and Dorman who critically analyse the risks of professionalisation but who argue that *"the challenge is to push from below"* (2013, 56), to build professionalisation from the ground up, ensuring that emancipatory, participative and collective practices are kept at the centre of all such processes.

A unitary focus on physical violence and managing risk

Much criticism of the anti-domestic violence movement's involvement and cooperation with the state has focused on reform efforts being preoccupied with criminalising physical abuse of women by intimate partners (Hanman-James, 2018; Mehroratra et al, 2016; Stark, 2007). To gain the attention of the state and provide a rationale for increased resources, interventions and legislative reform, many

movement activists focused on those acts, primarily acts of physical violence, which were already recognised under the law as criminal (Mc Mahon and Pence, 2003; Shepard and Pence, 1999,) The problem with this almost unitary focus on physical violence and managing risk is that this has eclipsed the process of coercive control which defines women's experience of their partner's abuse and violence (Hanman-James, 2018; Stark, 2007). The emphasis on physical violence has not benefitted many women, who report that the worst harms that they suffer are not physical, but the denial of their basic rights and freedoms (Ibid.).

Some of the strongest criticism of the movement's preoccupation with criminalising violent and abusive men comes from Black and minority ethnic [BME] women. By failing to centralise an intersectional approach, these critics argue that the movement has been blind to the further harms inflicted on women of colour by the increased presence of un-reformed legal and social services institutions in the lives of marginalised women and their communities (Crenshaw, 1991; Mc Phial et al, 2007; Ritchie, 2000, 2006; Sokoloff and Dupont, 2006, Sudbury, 2006). Recognising that in many communities, collusion with abusers and silence about the prevalence of male violence prevail, some BME activists and scholars call on anti-male violence movements to collaborate with others to find alternatives to incarceration and intrusion by the state into women's lives by developing ways of holding men to account within their own communities (Ashbourne et al, 2019; Incite! Critical resistance, 2006; Kim, 2020). For this to happen, they argue, the anti-domestic violence movement needs to break free from the constraints of professionalisation that have alienated them from their *"community organising, social justice roots"* (Incite! Critical resistance, 2006, 109). This perspective of community accountability *"elevates the community as the primary site of prevention and intervention and community members as the central actors"* (Kim, 2020, pg. 6) and consigns domestic violence and law enforcement agencies to secondary roles in securing safety for women and accountability of violent and abusive men.

This is not a unitary position amongst Black and minority ethnic activists however, with some arguing for reform within the criminal justice system. Recognising the

institutionalised racism and sexism that permeates criminal and civil law responses, they continue to argue that those institutions who are responsible for providing protection and recourse to justice must be reformed to ensure that Black and minority ethnic women [BME] receive equal treatment under the law (Siddiqi, 2006, 2016; Smee, 2016). In the UK, specialist BME women's anti-violence organisations not only seek to transform institutional responses but to be agents of change in minority ethnic communities, where they encounter support but also resistance to their change agenda and activism (Siddiqi, 2000, 2016). Given the levels of silence, collusion and resistance that women's anti-violence organisations experience within their communities, and this is not exclusive to Black and minority ethnic communities, calls for the movement to turn away from a focus on the justice system to build community accountability mechanisms would thus seem to be a longer term strategy. Organisations such as Southall Black Sisters [SBS] maintain a radical critique of the state and the justice system, whilst also campaigning for legal and policy measures that will bring more immediate benefits to women at risk of all forms of gender based violence (Ibid.). An example of this is in the campaign for a package of measures to address forced marriage. Recognising that criminalisation of forced marriage would deter many women from seeking help or reporting to the police, SBS focused on getting legislation that would provide women with access to protective orders through the civil courts (Siddiqi, 2016). By applying an intersectional lens to their work and ensuring that the voices and experiences of BME women are central to their campaigning, Southall Black Sisters and other specialist BME women's organisations bring a nuance to campaigning that responds to the complexities of BME women's situations. These specialist domestic violence organisations are critical actors in community efforts to address violence against women, holding a pivotal position between BME survivors of violence and abuse, the community, the state and its institutions (Imkaan, 2016; 2017; Larasi, 2016). The challenge of mainstream anti-violence movements, in Ireland and elsewhere, is to recognise that the future potential of the movement to effect radical change relies on an internal transformation where power sharing and collaborations between BME women and the predominantly White movement becomes the norm (Ritchie, 2006). Like Ritchie, Siddiqi sees that the future lies in:

The strength of black feminism [which] lies in political activism and alliance building between black women, and with white feminists, anti-racists, secularists and those on the left who support their position. Mainstreaming our concerns is crucial if we are to have our voices heard, as difficult as that task is. Our common agenda has to be that of empowering black women and ensuring that women truly have the freedom to define their own identities and choose their own destinies (2006, 95).

Neo liberal incursions into domestic violence organisations

Mehrotra et al (2016) argue that neoliberalism, a focus on criminalisation and professionalisation are braided together in ways that shape and constrain practices in domestic violence organisations. The logic of neoliberalism, which foregrounds value for money and thus assumes that business models apply to the provision of social services, has disrupted and in some cases, decimated, women's domestic violence organisations. (Mc Donald, 2005, Ishkanian, 2014; Markowitz and Tice, 2002; Mehrotra et al, 2016; Murphy et al, 2000; Vachelli et al, 2015). Attempts to sustain women led and holistic practices that are flexible and responsive to the needs of individual women and that centre an intersectional approach to domestic violence work are coming under increasing pressure. These pressures include an historic under-investment in domestic violence services, the impacts of austerity policies, and the replacement of feminist practice goals with state led, short term, outcomes focused priorities that are framed as value for money.

This results in the range of responses developed by women's organisations, that provide an holistic response from the crisis stage through to the recovery period, being replaced by responses that are time limited and limited in scope. For example, in the UK government policy is dominated by a focus on those women who face a high risk of physical violence, thus leading to short-term incident based strategies centred on managing risk within the criminal justice and child protection systems (Hanman-James, 2018; Wilson, 2015). As a consequence, women who do not report experiences of serious acts or threats of violence are being under-served by both the state and by domestic violence services in the UK, who are being increasingly pressured to cooperate with state led initiatives (Hanman-James, 2018; Kelly et al, 2014). In addition, Coy and Kelly (2019) identify how the risk discourse that

predominates in state led, multi-agency responses to domestic abuse in the UK has resulted in the responsabilisation of survivors for stopping the violence and abuse they are being subjected to by male partners. In focus groups exploring professional responses to domestic abuse, participants saw their role as to draw women's attention to the risk they were experiencing and to provide information to them about their options. Once these risks were known and women had information, survivors were then seen as responsible for averting risk by taking certain actions that professionals deemed as the "right" choices. This approach resulted in *"the position of victim-survivors as knowers"* being *"occluded"* (Ibid., 156).

Incremental funding cuts and pressures to "fall in" with state led agendas rather than respond to women led priorities have resulted in services that provided refuge, support, advocacy and recovery programmes in a flexible way in which *"each woman could dip in and out of support as required, creating their own 'basket of resources' fitted to their particular needs and circumstances"* (Kelly et al, 2014, 127), being either closed or struggling to respond (Hanman-James, 2018; Mehrorta et al, 2015; Vachelli et al, 2015). The manager of a local domestic violence service in Ireland spoke of the impact of austerity on her organisations' practice.

Pre-austerity, the service had more freedom to operate as a "rock for women and children", however, the ability to offer refuge to all who need it has been seriously eroded by reduced funding across a number of fronts. Now, the language we use with clients is increasingly less about options and more about restrictions. It is increasingly demoralising as a manager to have to constantly say "no" to workers who are asking for resources for women and children, which we can't provide any more or to ask them to "make do" with an option which we know is inferior to what is really needed (Safe Ireland, 2014, 18).

The failure of the state to restore, in real terms, pre 2008 funding levels to domestic violence organisations and to continue to under-invest in essential frontline services, combined with the roll back of the state from providing adequate levels of social housing and other social supports, means that *"an already fragile and fragmented system of support for women and children"* has been pared *"right down to the bone"* (Ibid., 2).

A focus on evidencing that funders money is well spent has resulted in a shift from survivor led advocacy in favour of agency defined outcomes that removes choice and agency from women and that, in effect, mirrors women blaming narratives when women “fail” to meet agency expectations (Dewey and St. Germain, 2014; McDonald, 2005; Markowitz and Tice, 2002; Murphy et al, 2020). Thus, women survivors, rather than violent and abusive men and the state, are thus being held to account for stopping domestic abuse. Such an approach is complementary to neo liberal ideology that individualises social problems as justification for eroding the state’s function in the provision of social services (Finnegan, 2008).

A self-correcting and ever evolving movement

There remain significant challenges for the feminist anti-domestic violence movement in realising its transformative potential and yet there are many committed feminist practitioners, activists and organisations who are proactively and successfully working to embed these transformative feminist values and practices into their work (Ashbourne et al, 2016; Elliot et al, 2005; Kim, 2020; Kulkarni et al, 2019; Mc Phail, et al, 2017; Wilkin and Hillock, 2014; Wilson et al, 2015). As a movement that is always learning from the interaction of theory and practice and is constantly “*dynamic, growing, changing*” (Shepard and Pence, 1990, 297), a number of authors have argued that anti-domestic violence movements are forever evolving and developing new and inspiring models in response to increasing knowledge about the complex and intersectional nature of domestic violence (Arnold and Ake, 2013; Mc Phial et al, 2007).

Arnold and Ake (2013) argue that women who were traditionally marginalised from the mainstream movement have changed the movement by shifting prevailing paradigms and have developed innovative and culturally specific responses that have enriched and strengthened its transformative potential. They characterise the battered women’s movement as one that is a “*self-correcting movement that continues to learn from its mistakes*” (559). Within the literature describing and critiquing the anti-domestic violence movement in the UK and the USA, there is

evidence of an active engagement with and response to the challenge from Black and minority ethnic women in particular to re-think movement strategies and to embrace and embed grassroots and intersectional feminist analyses and practices (Ashbourne, 2019; Arnold and Ake, 2013; Elliot et al 2005; Kim, 2020; Kulkarni, 2019; Mc Phail et al 2007; Sullivan and Goodman 2019; Wilson, et al 2015). These accounts illustrate the importance of continual learning in supporting women's anti-violence movements to remain self-critical and *"fluid, open and responsive to new information"* (hooks, 2000, xiii).

Conclusion

The literature reviewed in this chapter illustrates the many aspects of the complex and often contested nature of domestic violence work. The dual focus of domestic violence workers on wider social change and transformative feminist practice in frontline services is emphasised. The historical perspective taken illustrates how anti-domestic violence movements have been continuously engaged in agitating and advocating for social change from the 1970s to the present day. As evidenced from the writings of activists and scholars, a feminist analysis of domestic violence and a vision for transformative change has been central to movements' social change agenda. However, as movements that are personified by the provision of practical supports and interventions for women subjected to intimate partner violence, they have been primarily focused on the pragmatic gains that can be achieved through engagement with the state and institutional reform. Feminist scholars and activists call for the movement to re-focus on their radical social change goals and to innovate and collaborate to build a mass movement that can progress such a transformative vision for change.

This chapter foregrounds the interconnected nature of dimensions of transformational feminist practice. The creation of counter cultural spaces and egalitarian relationships cannot be fully realised unless domestic violence organisations and practitioners truly centre and embed an intersectional approach to their work. Actions at all levels, whether within an interaction between a worker and an individual woman, or in work that seeks to build a collective voice towards

affecting social change, must be trauma-informed. In turn, trauma informed work will be transformational, both for individual women, for workers and in collective action to change the world, when it is underpinned by grassroots, intersectional feminist knowledge and ways of working.

The challenges inherent in embodying these ways of thinking and practicing for workers, organisations and anti-violence movements is evident in the critiques provided by a number of feminist scholars and activists, most particularly those who come from Black and other minority ethnic and marginalised communities. Some of these challenges arise because of failures within domestic violence organisations and movements to be honest about, face up to and transform the unequal power relationships and lack of power sharing within them. Alongside a recognition of the failures of anti-domestic violence movements to live up to their transformative potential, there is also a recognition of the many external forces and pressures that drive a wedge between the emancipatory goals of feminist anti-domestic violence organisations and the realisation of these goals in practice. While these factors continue to threaten feminist domestic violence work, this chapter illustrates that a vigorous defence of and commitment to strengthening feminist responses continues to be generated from within anti-domestic violence movements. Providing opportunities for worker education and learning will be key to sustaining this effort. The following chapter addresses pedagogic approaches that are compatible with the values, goals and purposes of feminist anti-domestic violence work.

Chapter 3: Compatible theories of learning

Introduction

Chapter 2 emphasises the importance of elevating feminist knowledge and feminist practice. The factors in the external environment that disrupt and, in some cases, displace feminist social change work have been identified in numerous studies of women's anti-violence movements (Dewey and St. Germain, 2014; Hammonds, 2004; Kendrick, 2002; Lehrner and Allen, 2008, 2009; Nicholls, 2013). Solutions that address these challenges are discussed in the literature, but within these sources, there is little attention paid to how learning and education supports and sustains feminist domestic violence workers in frontline organisations. It is precisely this gap in knowledge that I address in this study. In this chapter, I review literature on theory and knowledge about learning and pedagogical approaches that are compatible with the values, goals, and practices of feminist anti-domestic violence work.

I begin with a short section that reviews the few sources addressing education about gender based violence. While all of this literature is about education in 3rd level settings, the knowledge of these educators provides useful examples of ways in which education delivered from within a feminist perspective provides learning opportunities that respond to the many learning and educational needs that are identified within the literature on anti-domestic violence organisations. I consider that feminist pedagogy provides the most appropriate approach to education for domestic violence workers because as, articulated by Manicom, (1992) it is rooted in the feminist movement and continues to be part of and for the movement. I continue the chapter with a review of literature that describes the core assumptions and principles that underpin feminist pedagogy, the processes that characterise feminist learning environments and some of the challenges inherent in providing education as an experience of praxis for participants (Freire, 1972).

Understanding how people learn is essential when considering how to provide for the learning and education needs of anti-domestic violence workers. In the third section of this chapter I focus on social movements as places in which knowledge is generated and in which participants learn through an ongoing cycle of engagement

with others in social change struggle. In the final section, I review the field of communities of practice that provides insight into structures and processes for meaningful learning trajectories for workers within practice settings.

Domestic violence pedagogies

Few sources are available that explicate or critique approaches to teaching about gender based violence. In those that are available, feminist pedagogy is foregrounded as providing a learning and teaching framework for students to engage with experiential, critical and reflexive learning. These sources illuminate the ways in which feminist pedagogic practice is suited to the learning needs of the domestic violence worker (Adelman and Coker, 2016; Adelman et al, 2016; Amy, 2006; Coker 2016; Fuller and Russo, 2016; Hollander, 2005; Lee, 2008; Mc Queeney, 2016; Meier, 2016; Nash, 2007; Wilkin and Hillock, 2014). In the main, feminist educators teaching about gender-based violence are concerned to facilitate the learners' capacity in responding to individual women's experience of violence and abuse and as social change actors. Students who had participated in such courses spoke of how locating individual experiences of gender based violence within a socio political analysis helped them to realise the extent of the problem and this lead simultaneously to a realisation that solutions lay in collective action for social change (Lee, 2008). In one study, learners spoke of feeling personally empowered to respond differently to experiences of gender based violence as these statements illustrate.

After taking this class I am more aware of the way men, especially, treat women, and I realize that I am not the only one who has experienced these things, unfortunately. I want to become a feminist activist and change what is happening. (Lee, 2008, 1458)

This class has helped me feel unified, not isolated, in my struggles – empowered to help others who are going through similar circumstances right now. (Ibid)

Linking an ethic of care to an ethic of justice

A significant contribution to those considering the educational and learning needs of domestic violence workers is in how these educators pay specific attention to

the emotional, psychological and spiritual needs of students. This focus arises from a commitment to an ethic of care and a recognition that for many students, discussions about violence and abuse are not abstract, but are realities that impact on their lives, sometimes in deeply harmful ways. For others, learning about and bearing witness to the reality of gender-based violence can be distressing and disruptive to a persons' sense of self and of the world (Amy, 2006; Hollander, 2005; Lee, 2008; Newman, 1999).

....the classroom is a physical and rhetorical space charged with fallout from these disturbing narratives (Lee, 2008, 1451).

To counteract the despair that participants can experience on learning about the prevalence and nature of gender-based violence, feminist educators provide access to information about the strength and resilience of women and the many achievements and successes of women's grassroots' organising (Hollander, 2005). As well as providing an historical perspective on the achievements of the women's anti-violence movements, providing an opportunity for students to develop a socio-cultural analysis of the factors underpinning such violence enables students to reframe gender-based violence from being an individual personal problem to one that was socially created (Lee, 2008). For those students who had experienced violence and abuse, this helped shift feelings of shame and self-blame. To again draw from Lee's work, the following statements by two learners illustrate this impact.

After worrying about this for the longest time I was able to realise that it was not my fault – I was just a child, and now I can let it go .

The class showed me why it (experiences of violence) were not my fault (Lee, 2008, 1458)

Learning through experience about the positive effects of a socio cultural analysis on feelings and perspectives about gender-based violence is explicitly connected to the development of skills needed for anti-violence work. Wilkin and Hillock argue for integrating this skill to:

... help service users to see how structures in society create and perpetuate inequality, oppression, and personal problems and encourages them to act

on this knowledge and awareness by resisting the now visible oppressive structures (Wilkin and Hillock, 2014, 200).

Practicing how one would facilitate this change in perspective provides an opportunity for workers to develop skills in this respect. Such an approach responds to a need within the field of anti-domestic violence practice to counter the prevailing individualised and pathologising narratives which:

... uphold the status quo by blaming marginalised people for the violence committed against them and ignores, power, location, and culture (Ibid. 261).

Feminist educators write about how the negative emotional impacts of learning about violence can also be countered by participation in social change work in the community and within the educational institutions they study in (Meier, 2016, Coker, 2016; Hollander, 2005). Students own accounts of their experiences in these interventions and placements illustrate the importance for them of realising their own agency and the hope that was engendered when they worked with activists in the community who were making a difference (Coker, 2016, Meier, 2016).

Feminist trauma informed practitioners in the field of domestic violence emphasise that women survivors are also best served when they are facilitated to connect to community and to collective action for social change (Elliot et al, 2005; Kulkarni, 2019; Wilson et al, 2015). Coming to know, through practice, the healing outcomes of participation in collective action for social change is useful knowledge for the domestic violence worker. It bolsters not only their efficacy as trauma informed practitioners, but also frames their relationship to women survivors of intimate partner violence as one of solidarity in a joint struggle against gender oppression (Haken and Yragui, 2003; Schechter, 1982). Thus, is the ethic of care linked to the ethic of justice, a core value underpinning feminist practice and feminist pedagogy (Iverson and James, 2017).

Creative approaches to learning

The many creative ways in which feminist teachers have enabled their students to learn through simulations and role plays are intended to prepare students to enter into social change work in the future (Adelman et al, 2016; Coker, 2016, Fuller and Russo, 2016; Mc Queeney, 2016). For example, Laurie Fuller and Ann Russo use simulations and role play with 3rd level students that are designed to empower these students to intervene when they witness sexual harassment, intimate partner abuse or racist behaviour on campus or in their community (Fuller and Russo, 2016). Fuller and Russo (2016) emphasise the need to intentionally build community in the classroom by supporting skills development in collaborative learning, mutual care and solidarity building, all of which are core to building the capacity to act in response to oppressive behaviours. They explain,

Often when we talk about intervening in violence, we imagine ourselves acting alone, which often precludes us from responding. In order to shift from individual to collective responses – from what can I do to what can we do – we encourage students to recognise that often there are more people present in any given situation who could become potential collaborators in an intervention. When we realize that we are not alone, and that we can engage with others in a response, the possibilities grow. Often just using the word *we* when addressing behaviour can spark our energies and imagination for responding (Ibid., 189).

Thus, solutions to some of the seemingly intractable problems that trouble anti-domestic violence organisations could be found in pedagogical responses that centre and employ intersectional feminist analyses and processes.

Feminist educators concerned to strengthen intersectional practice foreground texts on gender, power, and violence from women of colour and other marginalised women (Coker, 2016; Mc Queeney, 2016; Nash, 2007). One learning tool utilised is journal writing accompanied by an active engagement between teacher and student in using journal entries for further learning to help nurture the skill of. Reflexivity is a critical skill in domestic violence work, enable workers to develop an awareness of how their positionality impacts on their practice. Reflexivity is also essential supporting workers to notice when and how they are

being affected by the daily witnessing of the harms done to women and children and to develop self-care strategies that help mitigate against the impacts of vicarious trauma (Meier, 2016).

The literature reviewed in this section focuses on the practical application of feminist pedagogies in teaching about gender-based violence in 3rd level settings. The descriptions of how learning about violence against women is approached and facilitated illustrate the efficacy of feminist pedagogy as an approach to an education and learning framework for domestic violence workers in Ireland. In the following section, I review literature that focuses on the epistemological underpinnings that shape emancipatory, collaborative, and critical feminist learning environments.

Feminist pedagogy: An educational home for domestic violence work

I argue that feminist pedagogy provides the most compatible approach to learning and education for domestic violence workers because as, articulated by Manicom (1992), it is rooted in the feminist movement and continues to be part of and for the movement. Feminist pedagogy is a standpoint, rather than being about teaching techniques.

The standpoint of a feminist teacher is political: to develop feminist analyses that inform/reform teachers' and students' ways of acting in and on the world. Central here is feminist movement towards social justice, and pedagogy that fosters this movement (Manicom, 1992, 365).

It is a pedagogic approach that has its origins in the consciousness raising and social action roots of the early women's liberation movement that developed in parallel to Freirean and critical pedagogy and stands alongside other emancipatory learning models. While feminist and critical pedagogies share much in terms of values, goals and processes, feminist pedagogy is specifically focused on how emancipatory education can contribute to the empowerment of women as knowledge producers, learners and as social change actors (Connolly, 1997; English and Irving, 2015; hooks, 2010; Weiler, 1991). As a "*crucial component of the feminist revolution*" (Shrewsbury,

1993, 15) feminist pedagogy ultimately seeks to empower learners to go beyond the classroom and to act with others towards affecting change that benefits their own and other communities of oppressed peoples (Connolly, 1997; Maher, 1987; Manicom, 1992; Mc Cusker, 2017 Shrewsbury, 1993; Weiler, 2010). In the context of feminist education, fostering leadership is not understood as empowering just some women to come to the fore as leaders but as nurturing women's shared leadership through "*the embodiment of our ability and our willingness to act on our beliefs*" (Shrewsbury, 1993, 13). Women's leadership is seen as:

... the active mechanism for achieving the empowered community and for that community to continue to be effective within the broader world (Ibid. 14).

In the same way as there are multiple feminist perspectives, there are also multiple approaches to feminist pedagogy. For example, Connolly (1997) and Tisdell (1998) highlight the limitation of reformist approaches to feminist pedagogy that fail to disrupt dominant discourse or empower action towards transformative change. As the literature on domestic violence work suggests that many domestic violence workers are likely to work from such a liberal reform oriented perspective, I align myself with post-structural feminist pedagogies that foreground the connection between the individual and the social context. This enables the learner to "*examine the impact of social systems of privilege and oppression on their own identity, including their beliefs and values*" (Tisdell, 1998, 146) thus disrupting a discourse that prescribes certain roles and positions to themselves and to others. Connolly (1997) argues that for emancipatory education to contribute to transformative social change, it is essential to move beyond providing good learning experiences and opportunities for personal development, and to ensure that learning processes are underpinned by a theoretical framework that provides the learner with the knowledge and tools to make connections between their personal experiences and the social construction of identity and experience. Intentionally foregrounding this political dimension in feminist education provides the possibility for the individual and the collective to develop an analysis of the structures and discourses that underpin privilege and oppression (Connolly, 1997; Tisdell, 1998; Weiler, 1991).

Approaching adult education from this perspective, learners can experience a shift in their identity, transforming a sense of themselves as “*conforming citizens*” who “*act successfully within the existing system and the structures of power*” (Jonsson, 2010, 397, quoted in Murray, 2013) to identifying as “*a critical and creative citizen*”, one who will “*ask awkward questions and, crucially, imagine and explore alternative futures*” (Murray, 2013, 25). Creating the potential for such shifts in identity to happen in the learning environment is essential if domestic violence workers are to consider the implications of working within the constraints imposed by a neo-liberal state and other factors that impede progress towards emancipatory social change goals.

Post-structural feminist pedagogies foreground reflexivity as a practice and are therefore essential in enabling domestic violence workers within a learning environment to consider how their positionality and the positionality of others affects the politics of knowledge production (Connolly, 2018; Tisdell, 1998). As Tisdell puts it:

Post structural feminist pedagogies help learners to examine the connection between a) how knowledge is constructed by individuals and the politics of “official” knowledge construction and dissemination at sociocultural level; b) how sociocultural systems of privilege and oppression such as race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and religion have affected the development of their “constantly shifting identities”; and c) who in reality speaks and who tends to remain silent in “coming to voice” in the learning environment, and who consciously or unconsciously is recognized as “smart” or “leaders” in light of these same systems of privilege and oppression (Tisdell, 1998, 150.)

Tisdell’s explication of the application of feminist post structural perspectives in feminist education emphasises the necessity to apply this analysis not only to knowledge construction and power relations outside of the learning environment, but to examine how privilege and oppression can manifest within a learning group. This collaborative conscientisation process is integral to transformative feminist learning environments, however, without a commitment to praxis, conscientisation

alone cannot affect the kind of changes that are needed both within and without the learning environment (Freire, 1972; hooks, 2010).

Feminist education as praxis

The creation of counter-cultural spaces was core to early feminist practice within refuges and other movement spaces (Dobash and Dobash, 1992; Haaken, and Yragui, 2003; Pahl, 1985; Schechter, 1998). Similarly, one of the most important purposes of much feminist education is to provide for all participants an experience of praxis in which the vision of an alternative way of relating, organising, and sharing of resources are lived in the education and learning environment. The ethical imperative to live the vision of change that we seek means that anti-domestic violence practitioners and activists have to enact feminist principles of equality, justice, reciprocity and care in the present and not just see these as ways of acting that will typify relationships in the future (Pence, 1999). Transformative feminist practice, regardless of the focus or setting of the feminist project, seeks to provide opportunities for women and men to experience what it is like to learn and to act in counter-cultural spaces that reject the competitiveness and individualism of patriarchy and capitalism (hooks, 1994).

Feminist pedagogy centres an ethic of collaboration, mutual reciprocity, and a shared responsibility for group learning (hooks, 1994; Shrewsbury, 1993; Schniedewind, 1985; Manicom, 1992).

To experience an alternative mode of learning, working, and relating is significantly different from thinking about it. By participating in a feminist process, students can examine and learn from their feelings and experiences. Furthermore, they know, precisely because they have experienced it, that normative values, policies and patterns of relationships can be different. As they gain validation from speaking “in a different voice”, their experience confirms an alternative to dominant codes of social analysis and interaction (Schniedewind, 1985, 7).

Regardless of experience as activists and practitioners within the community, the kind of solidarity building that has to be consistently attended to in the community, must also be experienced in praxis in the learning space.

Core to the feminist learning environment is a commitment to collaborative learning. As a mode of learning that enhances the quality of learning for participants, collaboration is recognised as a useful approach in various educational settings, not all of which have emancipatory goals (Connolly, 1997, English and Irving, 2015). What is important about collaborative learning within the context of models of emancipatory education is not only that it supports a better quality of learning, but that the knowledge and skills required for collaborative learning and group work are the same as those needed for collective action for social change (Connolly, 1997; Schniedewind, 1985).

Shrewsbury (1993) describes feminist learning environments as those in which participatory democracy operates as the norm in goal setting and decision making in which *“at least some power is shared”* (Ibid., 9). The feminist vision of human flourishing for all means that the empowerment of all, not just some participants, is the goal of feminist pedagogy. Shrewsbury defines the ideal operation of power within the feminist learning environment as:

... a concept of power as energy, capacity, and potential rather than as domination. This is an image of power as the glue holding a community together, giving the people the opportunity to act, to move, to change conditions, for the benefit of the whole population (Ibid., 10).

Aspiration to build community towards social change that benefits everyone implies solidarity building and identifying shared goals, however, the reality in many feminist learning environments is that these goals have not always been attainable. Concepts of feminist learning environments as intrinsically nurturing, just, collaborative and empowering have been challenged, particularly by women of colour, working class women and in some cases, women who do not subscribe to a feminist analysis, as places in which they felt silenced and marginalised (Briskin and Priegert Coulter, 1992; Gardner et al 1989; Manicom, 1992). The tensions that arise between creating warm and reciprocal relationships in a group so that all can feel valued for their participation and the imperative to acknowledge the discomforts that expression of difference will engender is a focus for learning within feminist learning spaces.

English and Irving describe this as walking “*the fine line between safety and edginess*” as they “*find a way to be creative and fruitful in our pedagogy*” (2015, 112).

Utilising discomfort and conflict in the development of critical consciousness

Whilst acknowledging the importance of creating environments in which people feel able to speak without fear, some useful critiques of an overemphasis on creating safety to the detriment of enabling difference to be expressed and recognised as useful points for learning has been provided by feminist educators (English and Irving, 2015; Kishimoto and Mwangi, 2009). As well as recognising the need to explicitly build an ethic of care into all learning programmes, English and Irving highlight the limitations to learning that occurs when educators “*err on the side of having all people comfortable and engaged*” (2015, 112).

At issue is the point at which the decision to be safe and nurturing is a limiting one, causing participants to seek harmony at all costs, to avoid contentious subjects. The teacher or facilitators may privilege peace above all and may avoid getting to the heart of the matter and of naming and probing problematic issues (Ibid).

A rhetoric of safety conceals the divides that can exist in learner groups and the ways in which power and oppression can manifest in relationships between participants. Participation in feminist learning environments, needs to be recognised as opportunities in which:

... contradictions, ambiguities, anger, pain, and struggles can be sources of energy to facilitate critical consciousness necessary for individual and social change (Kishimoto and Mwangi, 2009, 98).

Amy (2006) writes of how she facilitates students in her class to confront conflict caused by different perspectives and positionalities of participants. By supporting students to critically reflect on their experiences of speaking, being heard, and not being heard, Amy establishes what she termed as a culture of “*ethical witnessing*” (Ibid., 65). By nurturing ethical witnessing in the classroom, Amy seeks to enable students to move beyond polarised positions and to develop their capacity to dialogue across difference without hostility or blaming responses. She does not claim

to have created a climate of safety for all group members and acknowledges that safety in a learning environment may not be attainable, especially for those participants who experience the intersection of gender, race, class, and other forms of oppression. This concept of ethical witnessing is useful to consider when reflecting on how feminist anti-violence workers can be supportively challenged to go beyond a desire to feel comfortable and to deepen their understanding of the ways in which the violence of various forms of oppression impact on the lives of people who are situated differently in society. A commitment to *“bear witness to the truth of the effects of violence on us, in our daily lives, and in our concrete and lived experiences”* (Amy, 2006, 58) is, I would suggest, of equal significance to creating a climate of safety in providing transformative learning for activist practitioners within anti-domestic violence movements.

The intersection of experience, critical thinking and theory

Experience as knowledge

In feminist education spaces as in all other feminist projects, acknowledging and valuing women’s experience and feeling as the basis from which to generate knowledge towards action for change continues to be fundamental to feminist practice, including feminist education (English and Peters, 2012; hooks, 1994; Manicom, 1992, Weiler, 1991) and feminist domestic violence practice (Allen et al, 2013; Dobash and Dobash, 1992; Haaken and Yragui, 2003; Schechter, 1982, 1990; Stark, 2007; Sullivan and Bybee, 1999; Wood, 2015). The need to interrogate and upend androcentric notions of what constitutes valid knowledge and who are valid knowledge producers is integral to feminist projects.

In many disciplines, feminist critiques have shown that what is taken to be official and sanctioned knowledge about women and their relations to the world is in fact riddled with distortions and omissions. One reason, therefore, for beginning in women's experience is to transform knowledge production to produce knowledge from the point of view of women themselves (Manicom, 1992, 370)

Feminist epistemology is concerned not just with elevating women’s experiences as valid ways of knowing, but in revealing how the sublimation of women’s knowledge is an essential component in maintaining hierarchical relationships based on gender.

In order to perpetuate itself, every oppression must corrupt or distort those various sources of power within the cultures of the oppressed that can provide energy for change (Lorde, 1984, 53).

One source of women's power is when women recognise and value experience and feelings as knowledge. This power is defined by Audre Lorde (1984) as an erotic power, which she defines as:

... an assertion of the lifeforce of women: of that creative energy empowered, the knowledge and use of which we are now reclaiming in our language, our history, our dancing, our loving, our work, our lives (Ibid., 55).

Reconnecting to experience and feeling therefore is not just to provide a counter narrative to oppressive meaning frameworks that have shaped women's experiences, but to reconnect to an energy that can be used in acting with others for transformative social change (Lorde, 1984; Shrewsbury, 1993). In this endeavour, transforming "*the personal, the "I", to the political, the "we", is fundamental*" (Connolly, 2018, 30). In feminist education spaces, this form of consciousness raising continues to be core to processes of learning and knowledge production and provides possible solutions towards the restoration of those principles and practices that underpin transformative feminist practice in anti-domestic violence work (Hanman-James, 2018, Kendrick, 2002).

Personal experience and feeling are both a starting point for and continue to be a rich source of knowledge in feminist learning environments. But feminist consciousness raising is not only about providing women with an opportunity to reflect on their experience, but also to develop critical thinking about the connection between the personal and the socially constructed nature of experience (Connolly, 1997; Tisdell, 1998). De-constructing the dominant discourses that are used to justify abusive men's behaviours is essential if anti-domestic violence workers are to maintain an oppositional stance to that which underpins male privilege and entitlement. In addition, critical thinking is key to the practice of reflexivity for:

...without the capacity to think critically about ourselves and our lives, none of us would be able to move forward, to change, to grow (hooks, 1994, 202).

Critical thinking

Feminist educators elevate women's knowledge, nevertheless, they do not take an essentialist nor simplistic view of women's ways of knowing as the only or best way in which to generate useful knowledge (Manicom, 1992). Their stances reflect that of standpoint epistemologists who centre women's experience as core to knowledge production but who identify that each women's "truth" is subjective, partial, and temporal (Harstock, 1997, Harding, 2011). Accounts of experience and feeling can change in the telling, in response to the listener, the place and other contextual factors (Manicom, 1992). In addition, it is essential to balance the tension between validating women's experiences and feelings as knowledge whilst also ensuring that our interpretations of experiences are *"critiqued, interrogated, and deconstructed, since the sense-making of our lives will be inscribed with dominant ideologies"* (Manicom, 1992, 374) .

We cannot develop a feminist critique of how official forms of knowledge are produced without looking at the production of our own personal knowledge. We cannot claim the importance of beginning in personal knowledge and experience, without attending to the character of this knowledge (Ibid.).

While resisting androcentric approaches to knowledge making that sublimate and negate the value of experience and feeling, in feminist learning spaces, interrogation of perspectives through dialogue and critical thinking is essential in enabling participants to become self-aware of how their experiences and feelings are shaped by public discourse and social location (Manicom, 1992). Dialogue in feminist, critical education learning spaces is not about *"disproving another person's perspective, not destroying the validity of another's perspective, but at a mutual exploration of explications of diverse experiences"* (Shrewsbury, 1993, 9). The aim of dialogue in this context is not to come to a shared standpoint about any given issue, although this may be an outcome, but to increase understanding of the many complexities, contradictions and paradoxes that are inherent to human experience. This in turn enables people to approach problem solving with as much information as possible, whilst also centring and honouring women's experience and feeling as important sources of information in this endeavour (English and Irving, 2015).

Feminist educators have a specific responsibility to utilise their authority when a participant expresses discriminatory and oppressive viewpoints as 'their experience'. The validity of such 'knowledge' needs to be interrogated within the classroom and the teacher or tutor needs to intervene to bring a feminist consciousness into the discussion, to empower students who may have been silenced by such oppressive experiences to find their voice, and ultimately, to articulate their own anti-oppressive stance (Manicom, 1992, Tisdell, 1998).

Clearly, feminism must be anti-racist and anti-classist in its pedagogy, in its analysis, in its political project. Doing anti-racist, anti-classist feminist oppositional work means developing and critiquing our knowledge; analysing more thoroughly the concepts of experience, sharing, and power; and thinking more carefully about the implications of the first two for the processes we claim as feminist pedagogy (Manicom, 1992, 382)

Accounts from women of colour and other marginalised women who are active in anti-domestic violence work illustrate how an assumed commonality of experience privileges the voices and perspectives of those women who occupy privileged positions in terms of race and class. The necessity to complicate an approach to domestic abuse that is based on a unitary analysis of gender by centring an intersectional analysis has been identified as one of the most critical development issues for anti-domestic violence movements (Crenshaw, 1991; Mc Phial et al, 2007; Ritchie, 2006; Sokoloff and Dupont, 2006, Sudbury, 2006). hooks while arguing for dialogue as *"one of the simplest ways in which we can begin ... as critical thinkers to cross boundaries, the barriers that may or may not be erected by race, gender, class, professional standing, and a host of other differences"* (1994, 130) also argues that critical thinking is developed and nurtured in practice through an engagement with feminist theory.

Engaging with theory

As illustrated in the section on domestic violence pedagogies, examining experience with reference to feminist theory can enable women to make sense from their experience and provide healing for women. This occurs when it aids perspective shifts from individualised women-blaming meaning frameworks to understanding

how their experiences have been shaped by circumstances which have not *“been of their own choosing”* (O’Grady, 2018, 33). However, theorising as integral to feminist struggle for transformative change must encompass processes that aid not only *“self-recovery”* but also *“collective liberation”* (hooks, 1994, 61).

Reflecting on my own work in feminist theory, I find writing -theoretical talk- to be most meaningful when it invites readers to engage in critical reflection and to engage in the practice of feminism. To me, this theory emerges from the concrete, from efforts to make sense of everyday life experiences, from my efforts to intervene critically in my life and the lives of others. This to me is what makes feminist transformation possible (Ibid., 70).

Education for transformative feminist practice requires that theorising be focused on aiding the learner to develop an acute awareness of how we internalise *“old structures of oppression”* (Lorde, 1984, 123). Theory produced by some Black feminist thinkers and other women of colour, women who experience class oppression, LGBTQI+ women, disabled women, all those who speak from the margins of the mainstream women’s movement, is key in challenging essentialist notions of a unitary experience of womanhood that have dominated both *“mainstream”* feminist pedagogy (hooks, 1994, Lorde, 1984; Nash, 2007) and mainstream feminist anti-domestic violence work. A specific task of the feminist educator, therefore, is to make available and foreground:

... the works and voices of those who have been historically marginalized in adult education curricula and to disrupt the dominant discourse in adult learning environments and turn it on its head (Tisdell, 1998, 154).

hooks (1994) critiques the *“false dichotomy of theory and practice”* that has been created by the claiming of theorising as a practice that is confined to the academy. She argues that it is necessary in all liberatory struggles to *“claim theory as a necessary practice”* (Ibid., 69). Her arguments call for a re-claiming of theory from the kind of primarily white dominated academic feminist theorising that is inaccessible and has no meaning for women outside of these privileged and exclusive educational settings. If theory is to make feminist anti-violence practice possible, it must be useful and to be useful, it must be written in a manner that is accessible to all those invested in the success of the movement. This is particularly the case for

those who experience the harms of oppression and injustice and who have most to gain from transformative feminist action (Thompson, 1983). The interplay of experience and feeling as knowledge and the practices of critical thinking and theorising are thus core to transformative feminist education for domestic violence workers.

The literature of domestic violence and feminist pedagogies provide a pedagogical framework from which education and learning can be provided for the domestic violence worker. Much of this literature refers to the practice of feminist education within formal settings, mostly within 3rd level institutions. My interest, however, is in how the domestic violence worker learns through their participation in a feminist community of practice, which is also a social change movement, and I provide a review of literature on situated learning within related fields of practice in the following section.

Situated learning: Learning through participation in the social world

To address the question at the heart of this study I needed to learn more about and critically reflect on how individuals and organisations come to know what it is they know and how they utilise this knowledge to become effective as valuable contributors towards change that benefits both the individual and the wider community. Theories of situated learning have been generated by those studying social change movements and those who enquire into learning within a community of practice. Whilst overlapping in some respects, they have different emphases when considering learning as an integral part of human experience.

Knowledge production in social movements

The documented histories of anti-domestic violence movements in the UK and the USA illustrate that knowledge production was not a by-product of movement activism but is and remains as a deliberate and primary strategy aimed at shaping social perceptions of a previously invisible and latterly misunderstood social problem. Further, knowledge generation has been core in the communication of an alternative vision and the articulation of a plan of action that provides a pathway to

the attainment of that vision (Dobash and Dobash, 1992, English and Irving, 2015; Schechter, 1988, Stark, 2007). As such, anti-domestic violence movements produce knowledge not just for the sake of the movement but facilitate learning that “*is central to the production of human knowledge itself*” (Harley, 2012, 4).

While there exist eclectic approaches to domestic violence, the majority of knowledge that has been articulated and formalised has been produced by feminist practitioners, activists, and scholars. Feminist practice characterises the response of many anti-domestic violence organisations and while there is little in the literature that describes how this knowledge is shared or interrogated within organisations and movements, it is clear that this knowledge is communicated and engaged with by workers. Alongside this recognition however, feminist knowledge has always been contested by more conservative forces and is increasingly under attack from gender-neutral, individualised and pathologised perspectives on violence against women. What then, can be learnt from those who have studied how movement knowledge is created, communicated, interrogated, and applied in the work of those who struggle for social justice?

Learning and education in social change movements

Actors in any struggle for social change must have a distinct sense of identity, that is, have an understanding of what they are opposed to, a clear sense of the alternative vision they are trying to create, and some knowledge about how they are going to go about progressing their work towards the attainment of this vision (Welton, 1993). The formation of an individual identity, in which the participant develops a sense of agency and begins to experience a sense of connectedness to others, is a precursor to the development of a collective identity, formed as people make connections with each other, identify common goals and commit to act together for social change (Connolly, 1997, Kilgore, 1999). In this process of identity formation at both individual and collective levels, people critique the discourse and structures that protect privilege and underpin oppression and come to articulate an oppositional ideology and discourse that expresses their emancipatory vision (Foley, 1999). All of these transitions and formations do not happen as a separate process to action but are

processes of learning that occur as people participate in a social change movement. (English and Irving, 2015; Foley, 1999, Steinklammer, 2012). Learning and education within emancipatory social change movements is therefore understood primarily as a process of informal learning through struggle and in movement with others.

Learning through practice

Women's organisations and movements have always been important sites for informal learning through practice (English and Irving, 2015, Foley, 1999). English and Irving detail the multi-faceted aspects of learning experienced by women as they engage in social action with others to overcome gender oppression.

... the central forum for learning for feminists in community based organizations has been through active hands-on engagement in organizing and activism. This informal learning can happen in the everyday and can be influenced in a variety of ways for women, including in an embodied way - learning through the body and actions on and through the body ... It can also happen through emotions and relationships which are very important for women and learning (2015, 18).

While recognising the importance of emotions and relationships in women's learning, English and Irving do not essentialise women's learning as being inherently and always supported by caring relationships and reciprocity, although, these factors are important when considering women and learning. English (2005, 2006) in her studies of feminist organisations found that women also learnt through conflict and resistances to power that played out within organisations. Learning to resist through resistance is a theme that is repeated in studies of women's social change groups reviewed by Foley (1999). In these studies, women learnt as they struggled to have their voices heard and their demands met. Much of their learning happened when they experienced the resistance of those in power to their demands. In particular, women learnt to analyse the discourse utilised by the state, corporations, the church and other oppressive institutions as they sought to de-value women's knowledge and dismiss women's claims. For example, for a grassroots women's group in Brazil who were campaigning for the provision of childcare in a working class community, the seeming receptiveness of state agencies to research carried out by the group led the

women to believe that the state would respond to their reasonable demands. Having waited a number of years for a childcare facility to be funded, this group realised that exercising patience was never going to result in the changes they wanted. This experience resulted in women learning how to deal with state agencies. In the words of one activist:

If we're there pressurising them, things will happen. If we leave it up to them, we'll never get anything we need in the neighbourhood (Foley, 1999, 95).

Learning that the state was not going to respond to the demands of people who were perceived as lacking in power helped these women to shift their perception of themselves as people who waited patiently for the state to do what it should, into claiming an identity as women who would agitate for social change by directly confronting the state about its inaction. Critical adult educators emphasise that for this kind of learning to happen time is needed for people to unlearn the adaptive preferences shaped by the social world in which they act (Steinklammer, 2012). The domesticating force of the hegemonic social order, which expects that people will accept the status quo and will not resist the power of privileged groups, is secured not merely through discourse, in which the "common sense" of privileged groups is articulated, but through practical learning, which inscribes the logic of oppressive social orders in peoples' ways of thinking and acting (Foley, 1999; Mayo, 1999; Steinklammer, 2012). This results in:

... a type of domination ... that people adopt and reproduce ... even if they occupy a subaltern position within it and even if this order is opposed to their own interest (Steinklammer, 2012, 26).

Practice is essential for the internalisation of power relations and is equally important if people are to be empowered to truly resist domination and act in alternative ways. Learning through participation in a social movement provides the opportunity for people to unlearn hegemonic ideology (Foley, 1999), to learn how to fight the influence of the dominator culture within us (Steinklammer, 2012) and to act with others to create the world that we work to bring into being through praxis (Zibechi, 2012). Zibechi calls this "*education in movement*" (2012, 24), which he defines as:

... movement- in -motion (while the movement lasts) is a permanent process of self-education. It tries to do so consciously, so as to enhance and strengthen itself. We can also understand the movement as “transforming itself by transforming” (Ibid., 25).

This approach to social movement learning means that the movement itself becomes a pedagogical subject, which implies that “*each space, each instance, every action*” can be converted into “*spaces for collective growth and learning*” (Ibid., 27). Zibechi’s description of learning in movement reflects Connolly’s (2018) concept of feminism as “*living, breathing, questioning, transforming*” (Ibid., 27). As a way of thinking about education in movement, this concept provides a useful way of thinking about an approach to education that counteracts the compromises that feminist anti-domestic violence organisations have made in order to secure their survival. These compromises have resulted in the significant reduction and in some cases erasure of the kind of spaces and time required for ongoing reflexivity and critical thinking that women involved in the feminist struggle need (English and Irving, 2015).

English and Irving (2015) reflect Zibechi’s argument that social movements themselves need to become pedagogical subjects when they write about the importance of an educational and learning focus on the internal life of feminist organisations. The unique nature of feminist organisations, and particularly anti-violence agencies, as a hybrid of social change and social service presents specific challenges for these organisations in nurturing critical and creative learning within them because, as articulated by English and Irving (2015):

In the context of activist organisations that become service delivery agencies, the collective learning that was once so central to their formation runs the risk of being lost. The ongoing reflection, renewal, and critique required to maintain an effective activist role locally and beyond needs to be nurtured (Ibid., 23).

English and Irving (Ibid.) call for a reclaiming of critical and collective learning spaces that provide opportunities for non-formal and formal learning and education. While lamenting the loss or erosion of such spaces in many cases, they also describe the ways in which many feminist organisations and networks have resisted the

replacement of movement ideology and practices by neo-liberal priorities and who continue to both understand and enact their role as spaces for critical learning and education. Providing spaces and “*rejecting a notion of time imposed by the system for the sake of an internal time*” (Zibechi, 2012, 25) in which this thinking together and “*thinking struggle*” (Harley, 2012, 11) together can be done is itself an act of resistance against the logic of the neo-liberal state. It is one way in which social movements can create an emancipatory climate in which participants can learn through practice and in spaces created for critical thinking (Harley, 2012, Zibechi, 2012).

Movement spaces for non-formal and formal learning

To develop a collective consciousness of the struggle at hand and to generate knowledge that will inform collective action, participants must have an opportunity to think together and to “*think struggle*” together (Harley, 2012, 11). Without spaces in which to critically reflect on experience and collectively generate useful knowledge, learning can act to disempower and silence participants and thus weaken the movements’ transformative potential (Foley, 1999). Studies of informal learning in feminist organisations reflect some of the concerns that motivate this study. English (2005, 2006) found that despite a stated intention to facilitate shared learning and meaning making, a lack of shared spaces in which to critically reflect on how power operated within women’s organisations impeded a level of collective learning about the importance of praxis. In some organisations, long time or founder members, or those perceived to be “strong feminists”, were invested with the power to speak, to the detriment of newer members or other members who questioned some of the “regimes of truth” that had developed over years of practice. English (ibid.) concludes that valuable learning at an individual level included that some members learnt about feminist principles from observing and experiencing the implications for themselves and others when these principles were not embedded in practice.

While this learning may be useful, English does not identify the implications for feminist movements when this learning is about learning when to stay silent to keep

oneself emotionally safe or about learning to resist the dominant discourse within an organisation by leaving it. Developing an individual and collective identity as resistant to dominant thinking and acting is disrupted when the stated vision of a world transformed is not lived in the daily life of a social change organisation or movement. Whilst recognising the external forces that can act to constrain movement practices, I agree with Zibechi who argues that in order to see the world that we envision “*being born in movements’ spaces and territories*” that we must have

... patience and perseverance in the face of our own temptations to cut corners that, as we know, lead nowhere (2012, 20).

Learning within social movements, therefore, is about much more than learning through experience. Although this is an important dimension of learning, this form of learning is largely tacit and embedded and participants cannot fully utilise the potential of this learning in their practice (Foley, 1999). Social movement learning, to be really useful is learning in praxis, where education and learning are seen as everyday movement activity. Reflection on action and action in reflection means that movement participants do not focus only on “getting things done”. Thompson (1997) describes this preoccupation with ‘rolling up the sleeves’ to ‘get things done’ as a form of action without reflection. She contends that:

... disclaiming theory in the pursuit of practicalities... sustains systems of oppression rather than acknowledging the complexities of how power and ideologies operate. It doesn’t, in the end, do anyone we care about any favours (Ibid., 150).

Social change movements provide many different kinds of opportunities for critical learning. Like Zibechi, Cox describes these opportunities as spaces for self-education which enable the “*articulation, sharing and formalisation of ... forms of activist knowledge*” (2014, 965). Collectively generating knowledge in these spaces is not removed from practice but provides a space for people to distance themselves from their practice, to contextualise it, to make connections through a socio-political and cultural analysis and to practice reflexivity in a more conscious way. Participating in these collaborative learning activities enables people to direct their attention to the

ways in which they may inadvertently perpetuate the very ideology and practices they want to unlearn and to consider the creation of alternative ways of acting to effect social change (Steinklammer, 2012).

Cox (2014) writes about some of the more recent approaches to knowledge production as employed in social movements such as the Occupy movement or though initiatives such as the Grassroots Gatherings in Ireland, a space where activists from different movements came together to articulate, share and critically reflect on their practice. In these spaces, Cox describes activists as *“talking between worlds”* (Ibid., 954) rather than trying to develop and promote a unitary approach to social change work. Core to these democratic, open, collective and practice based learning spaces, is that the starting point for learning is from the needs and practice of social movements rather than from the theory or teaching of experts. In this sense, Cox describes this form of education as a form of research in which new knowledge is generated rather than extant knowledge is studied. This does not mean that activists do not engage with theory, but the focus is on *“uncovering that which has not previously been known”* (Ibid., 966).

Uncovering the ‘truth’ of a situation has always been the focus of feminist and other forms of consciousness raising, and in this sense, the group work that characterises feminist education and learning continues to provide a model for collaborative learning. However, these newer ways of approaching movement learning provide a useful way to think beyond the boundaries of organisations or single issue movements by providing a way in which anti-domestic violence movements can learn how to broaden its identity by building alliances with those involved in anti-racist and anti-capitalist work, both of which are essential elements of transformative feminist practice in anti-domestic violence work (Ritchie, 2000). In addition, the kind of listening and learning that needs to happen within traditionally white and increasingly professionalised anti-domestic violence movements can be facilitated in such spaces.

The processes that characterise emancipatory learning environments in social change movements correspond to those that distinguish feminist pedagogy as an

approach to education. In the next section, I review literature on situated learning within a community of practice which, while overlapping in some respects with social movement learning, provides some further insight into how people learn as they participate in the life of an organisation and what supports this learning.

Situated learning in a community of practice

The locus for practice and learning for domestic violence workers is primarily at organisational level and the entirety of their days is primarily spent as practitioners, responding to individual women's experience of coercive control. The characteristics of a community of practice, rather than that of a social change movement more accurately reflect the reality of frontline domestic violence work. The kind of questions that are asked about how to provide for meaningful learning as workers participate in a community of practice are therefore pertinent to the question at the heart of this study which is, what approach to education and learning is compatible with feminist anti-domestic violence work. As the primary locus for domestic violence workers is within a community practice, I argue that when considering how to provide learning and education for workers we need to start from where workers are at, which is within their organisations.

Theories of learning that are encompassed within a wider concept of communities of practice as developed by Lave and Wenger (1991) and Wenger (1996, 1998, 2010), enable a conceptualisation and articulation of how we learn through participation in the social world. This understanding is essential if we are to interrogate our assumptions about learning when we decide that we want to do something it. Communities of practice theory is neither inherently concerned with or unconcerned with emancipatory practice. However, it shares with theories of social movement learning an understanding of learning not as an activity that is separated from the rest of our activities but *"as much part of our human nature as eating or sleeping"* (Wenger, 1998, 3). This epistemological position reflects my own stance on learning that we come to know, at both tacit and explicit levels, through experience and feeling, as we participate in our families, social networks, communities and workplaces. (Wenger, 1998). Such a perspective informs how organisations can be

structured to support communities of learning that can provide meaningful trajectories of learning for workers. Before focusing on the contribution community of practice theory can make to designing an approach to learning for anti-domestic violence work in Ireland, I provide a summary of some of the epistemological assumptions that underpin this theoretical framework.

Practice, meaning and identity

Applying theories from within the field of communities of practice to thinking about practice within domestic violence organisations brings into focus how our practice emerges not as an outcome of individual endeavour but through the collective construction of practice at a local level. Practice is not just about doing. It is *“doing in a historical and social context that gives structure and meaning to what we do”* (Wenger, 1998, 47). What we understand about what we know or don’t know, what we do or do not do, what we pay attention to or ignore, say or don’t say, are not individual choices but are shaped through our participation in communities of practice. This negotiation of meaning is influenced by a myriad of elements including our relationship to the history and social location of the community of practice, knowledge of pre-determined policies and procedures, and the tools available to us to do our work. But it is primarily through our engagement with other members of our organisations that we negotiate the ever-shifting and dynamic nature of being a domestic violence worker within a community of practice that exists within a larger social context (Lave and Wenger, 1991, Wenger, 1998).

Lave and Wenger (1991) and later Wenger (1998, 2010), describe how within a community of practice, a dual process of meaning making and the production of physical and conceptual artefacts, including texts, tools, and other objects, engages participants in a dynamic and continuous process. Over time, participants’ experiential knowing and the production of conceptual artefacts are intertwined to create a social history of meaning within that community. This produces a ‘regime of competence’ which is a set of criteria and expectations by which participants recognise membership of the community of practice (Wenger 2010). This competence includes an understanding of what the community is about and how this

gives rise to its particular perspective. It enables the learner to engage productively as a participant in the community and to use its resources effectively and appropriately. Wenger defines learning as:

... not just acquiring skills and information; it is becoming a certain person, a knower in a context where what it means to know is negotiated with respect to the regime of competence of community. (Ibid., 2)

Focusing on participation as the locus of learning does not eclipse the individual nor see identity formation at individual and collective levels as a dichotomy but rather locates identity within *"the pivot of the individual and the social"* (Wenger, 1998, 146). As we participate in a community of practice, learning is about coming to be a certain kind of person within that community and in this sense, learning and developing a sense of identity as part of that community are inseparable (Lave and Wenger, 1991). The more our learning trajectory moves towards full membership of a community of practice, the more our competence is expressed through our identification with that community. Developing a community of practice requires that:

... members can engage with one another and thus acknowledge each other as participants. As a consequence, practice entails the negotiation of ways of being a person in that context (Wenger, 1998, 149).

Community of practice as a learning model enables a conceptualisation of how the negotiation of meaning and coming to know as a process of identifying with a regime of competence are continuous and dynamic processes through engagement with others with whom we share a joint enterprise (Wenger, 1998).

Accepting Wenger's assertion that learning and social participation are intertwined it is clear, as Wenger (1996) argues, that communities of practice are already learning communities but the most critical question to be asked is, what kind of learning is happening? Wenger et al (2002) acknowledge that communities of practice are neither inherently positive nor negative.

The very qualities that make a community an ideal structure for learning – a shared perspective a domain, trust, a communal identity, long standing relationships, an established practice – are the same qualities that can hold it hostage to its history and its achievements (Ibid., 141).

De Palma (2009) acknowledges some of the critiques of community of practice as being unsuited as a model of learning for communities involved in transformative social change work. At the same time argues that it provides the possibility to design a learning architecture that can provide for outbound and transformative learning trajectories. He articulates a position that aligns with my belief that as domestic violence organisations are already learning communities, it is essential to think about the kind of structures, processes and relationships that nurture learning from within a feminist social change paradigm and that a community of practice model of learning can contribute to the development of a learning architecture for anti-domestic violence work in Ireland.

Optimizing learning through participation in communities of practice

In seeking to optimize learning through participation for anti-domestic violence workers in Ireland, De Palma's (2009) and Roberts' (2006) focus on organisations as distinct from communities of practice is helpful. A number of communities of practice can exist within the one organisation that has within its membership groups of workers who are engaged in different joint enterprises. Small organisations, where the workforce cooperates closely on a shared enterprise may constitute a single community of practice. This is more likely to characterise domestic violence organisations in Ireland although, even within these micro organisations, distinct communities of practice could be discerned between frontline workers, administration and finance staff, Board of management members and childcare staff, if the organisation responds to children's experience of domestic abuse. Wenger argues that the apparatus of the organisation should be in service to practice and therefore the role of organisations at institutional level should be to recognise communities of practice within it and to:

... provide the resources and information to help them locate their practice in a broader context and align with one another in order to work together (1996, 23).

An organisation that recognises and values learning through participation will therefore work with the internal logic of learning through participation rather than against it (Wenger, 1996, 1998). Recognising and valuing informal learning as the primary mode of learning in organisations is a prerequisite to understanding that learning is part of the work itself rather than as something separate from it. Organising work environments from this perspective, Wenger (1996) recommends that physical spaces are constructed that foster communication and collaborations. Resources need to be made available to encourage the formation and sustainment of communities of practice and to enable workers to act as “brokers” with other communities of practice within organisations and in the external environment. This will ensure that learning is not merely reproductive of knowledge, but open to new ideas, challenges and innovations.

Education as a structuring support for learning in practice

Wenger’s conceptualisation of communities of practice has been critiqued as being too focused on closed and reproductive systems (De Palma, 2009). Wenger certainly seems to elevate learning in practice as most useful but is clear that participation in education is necessary to open up new and outbound trajectories of learning for participants in a community of practice. I agree with De Palma (2009) that in a community of practice where the joint enterprise is to work for emancipatory social change goals, it is essential that meaningful learning trajectories traverse beyond the parameters of an organisation to learning within wider social change movements and in spaces where different movements come together to, as Cox (2014) articulates it, *learn between worlds*. In this respect, participation in both non formal spaces, as described by social movement learning theorists, and formal learning, through participation in education, is essential.

Fuller et al (2005) have critiqued Wenger as failing to understand the value of formal education, however, my interpretation of Wenger’s views is not that he de-values

participation in formal education but that he argues against education that attempts to:

... extract knowledge from the communities of practice where it is kept alive, to transform this knowledge into a curriculum, and to deliver it outside of practice (Wenger, 1996, 22).

Wenger (1996, 1998) argues for education to be provided in an integrated way with learning within a community of practice and for keeping *“learning as close to practice as possible”* (1996, 22) so that it is designed around communities of practice and can act as a resource to the kind of emergent learning within them. Curricula therefore, are always dynamic and responsive to the learning that workers bring into an education programme rather than being predefined and static. Wenger states that this does not mean there should be no proposals around which participants can negotiate meaning and identity, but that teaching should be opportunistic enough to enable an *“interaction of the planned and the emergent – that is, the ability of teaching and learning to interact so as to become structuring resources for each other”* (Wenger, 1998, 267). The logical implication of such an approach is that education cannot be frontloaded before or at the beginning of a person’s career but must be available throughout the time they participate within a field of practice.

The communities of practice model of education and learning provides the possibility to ensure not only that learning trajectories for domestic violence workers are meaningful but that a lifelong learning approach would be nurtured. As a concept, community of practice has been critiqued for being de-politicised and for lacking an analysis of how power operates within communities to both privilege and marginalise participants as knowledge producers (Fenwick, 2003; Jewson, 2007; Roberts, 2006). Accepting that without an explicit attention to power, privilege and oppression and how they can manifest in practice and other learning settings, I am encouraged by those who study and write about communities of practice who argue that it is a concept in development, open enough to be adapted to many different contexts (Hughes et al 2007, De Palma, 2009). The steadfast attention paid to praxis in committed and engaged feminist organisations, can, I argue, provide the possibility

for a community of practice approach to education and learning to be adapted by the anti-domestic violence movement in Ireland. In turn, feminist communities of practice can contribute to sustaining “*creative and politically alive spaces*” (Irving and English, 2015, 25), dedicated to transformative change towards the eradication of gender based violence and all forms of oppression.

Conclusion

This chapter identifies theoretical frameworks that align ontologically and epistemologically with the logic of feminist anti-domestic violence work. Feminist pedagogy is both of and for the movement for women’s emancipation from all forms of gender oppression and as such provides a compatible model of education when seeking to nurture learners as feminist practitioners and actors for transformative social change. This chapter illustrates how bringing the knowledge of how people learn through struggle as they participate in social change movements and as they participate within communities of practice, can maximize the potential of feminist education to strengthen and sustain feminist practice. By foregrounding the importance of an approach to learning that supports an active interplay between situated learning and feminist education, I prepare the reader to consider the findings of this research and the conclusions and arguments that form the basis of the final discussion chapter.

Chapter 4 Methodological approach

Introduction

The principal aim of this study is to generate useful knowledge that will address an identified lack of an education and learning framework specific to domestic violence work in Ireland. To achieve this aim, the central research question is:

What approach to education and learning responds to the mission, values and goals of feminist anti-domestic violence work?

In this chapter I describe the methodological approach chosen for this study. I begin the chapter with a review of literature that illustrates how the core assumptions and practices that characterise feminist research methodologies are congruent with the goals of this study. I forefront literature on feminist standpoint epistemologies as relevant to the goals of this research.

The imperative to generate knowledge that would be useful in the ongoing work of the anti-domestic violence movement in Ireland and to ensure that the research process was in itself an experience of empowerment for all participants led me to identify Feminist Participatory Action Research [FPAR] as a suitable methodology. In the second part of this chapter, I discuss the aspects of FPAR that align with research goals. I draw heavily from collaborative inquiry, as a methodology from within the wider field of participatory action research and I focus on specific aspects of this approach that guided me in the design and facilitation of the group inquiry. Following this section, I describe the implementation of the research plan. This section includes a reflexive consideration of key factors that both enhanced and limited the quality of this inquiry. I outline several ethical considerations in relation to this project and how research carried out from within a participatory paradigm requires a commitment to everyday ethics through a lived commitment to an ethic of care, equality, and collaboration. Finally, I focus on data analysis and presentation.

Feminist research

As this research evidences, the experience of domestic violence workers in services for women remains largely unseen, undocumented and under-valued. By employing a feminist participatory action methodology, I sought to carry out research on an aspect of women's lives (Hesse-Biber, 2007) previously unexplored in the Irish context and relatively unexplored in the international context. My aim is to create an opportunity for domestic violence workers to collaboratively make meaning from their experience and to use this knowledge towards the social change agenda of the women's anti-violence movement. It is, therefore, a natural expansion for me as I move from advocate to researcher, to apply the feminist principles and practices that I learnt over 30 years of practice to how I carry out this research.

Feminist research:

... is committed to the production of information women want and need in their struggles to survive and to flourish-information about our bodies and our children's bodies; our environments; economic, governmental, and legal institutions and practices; international relations; and so forth. And it is thereby directed by commitment to the high value of women, their activities, needs, and desires (Harding, 2009, 193).

Feminist research is concerned with the relationship between power and knowledge and how what is seen as valid knowledge and who are seen as valid knowledge producers profoundly affects the lives of people, privileging certain groups and controlling, marginalizing and oppressing others (Byrne and Lentin, 2000; Collins, 1997, Letherby, 2003; Harding, 2011; Brooks and Hesse-Biber, 2007). The aim of feminist research is to foreground women as knowers and knowledge producers and to disrupt androcentric and positivist claims about women and society.

Crucially, feminist research is concerned with producing useful knowledge that can be used in making a difference in women's lives through contributing knowledge for social and political change (Letherby, 2003). In this project I was not interested merely in supporting individual participants to reflect on and make meaning from their experience, but also in how we as a group of domestic violence workers could

generate a collective standpoint from which we could act for change within our movement.

Feminist standpoints theory

The power, privilege, and entitlement that individual men use to enforce dominance in intimate relationships is socially constructed (Stark, 2007). Domestic violence workers as a group therefore must “*constitute themselves as resistant and oppositional subjects*” (Sandoval 1991, 11 quoted in Harstock, 1997, 372) to contribute towards the transformation of the oppressive social structures that underpin the prevalence of domestic violence (Dobash and Dobash, 1992). While our day-to-day work is strengthened by our capacity to manifest that oppositional consciousness in our one-to-one work with women, in our knowledge production endeavours, I argue that it is our collective standpoint that matters. As Collins states:

The notion of standpoint refers to groups having shared histories based on their shared location in relations of power - standpoints arise neither from crowds of individuals nor from groups analytically created by scholars or bureaucrats (1997, 376).

I employ feminist standpoint theory as a research approach because I understand that the context within which domestic violence workers practice is profoundly affected by gendered power relations that structure how society works. Feminist standpoint theorists argue that research must start from the experience of women who have normally been excluded from knowledge production about their own lives (Brooks, 2007; Letherby, 2003). Standpoint research is not merely about the “*spontaneous subjectivity*” (Sprague, 2001, 529) of individuals within a group or a particular social location, but rather it is about a conscious and mutual effort to re-interpret our lives and to generate knowledge about them (Harstock, 1997).

Experience is not knowledge, for the latter requires kinds of critical reflection and collective legitimation that are not characteristic of women’s or anyone else’s experiences... standpoint knowledge requires collective intellectual as well as political struggles (Harding, 2011, 60).

Individual perspectives about people's lives are not standpoints. Collins (1997) and Harstock (1997) maintain that standpoint theory does not seek to understand the systemic power relations in society from an individual or multiple individuals' point of view, but from a collective point of view. Various feminist standpoints are achieved through a "*conscious and concerted effort to re-interpret and restructure our lives*" (Weeks, K. 1996, 101 quoted in Harstock 1997, 372) and this is achieved through collective rather than individual effort.

Standpoint theory has been critiqued for essentialising women's experience by seeking to generate an "*authoritative truth to ground feminist theory*" (Hawkesworth, 2007, 485). Working from within a post structural feminist standpoint epistemology, I understand that knowledge is partial and situated, and that there is no one standpoint but rather multiple standpoints from which to view society (Collins, 1997; Haraway, 1988; Harding, 1997; Harstock, 1997). For this reason, I use the term standpoints rather than standpoint. Further, standpoints epistemology as a methodology is centrally concerned with the interconnectedness of power and knowledge. The researcher working from within this perspective seeks to answer questions about the nature of social relations, not just as they structure and manifest in the topic being researched, but also as they are present and impact on the research choices and process itself.

Standpoint theory... is a political stance and a methodological strategy, it poses political questions for each scholar: whose questions do we ask; from whose lives, needs, and interests do we begin; whose ordering of experience do we take seriously; to whom are we responsible to communicate; when has a question been adequately answered? (Sprague, 2001, 534).

Black feminist theorists such as Patricia Hill Collins (1990), Audre Lorde (1996) and bell hooks (1982) have articulated that feminist concepts of a commonality of experience and sisterhood may have no relevance for those women who have been excluded from mainstream, white, Western, middle class, feminist thought. hooks (1982) proposes that rather than apply the concept of "sisterhood", which implies a shared experience and shared struggle, that feminist researchers should seek to develop theories that can be understood collectively and thus lead to collective action from a position of solidarity. In our quest to produce useful knowledge

therefore, we attempted to hold an awareness of our *“race and class-bound imagination”* (Marilyn Frye quoted in Reinharz, 1992, 257) and how these impact on the usefulness of this research to the ongoing struggle against male violence.

Gaining a deeper understanding of feminist standpoints epistemologies enabled me as a lead researcher to gain a better understanding of the complexities involved in shaping shared standpoint. While seeking to facilitate this group of peer researchers to shape a shared understanding on the ways in which power, privilege and oppression shape our lives and the lives of women for whom we work, I was at the same time cognisant of the need to recognise, value and utilise different perspectives as valuable knowledge. Employing the skills of feminist reflexivity, I strove to hold an awareness of the situated and partial nature of both individual and group standpoints and to interrogate how power relations both within the group and in relation to participants’ positionality impacted on our ability as a group to generate *“good quality knowledge”* (Letherby, 2003, 58) that would be useful in the ongoing feminist struggle against gender based violence.

Reflexivity

Feminist theorists assert that knowledge production is never value free and that the researcher’s identity, history and ideological perspective influence what is researched, how it is researched, and how the data or empirical information is interpreted (Alvesson and Skoldberg 2010; Hesse-Biber et al 2004; Letherby 2003). Positivist critiques of feminist research claim the knowledge produced is polluted by the subjectivity of the researcher who brings their own biases, interests, and priorities to the research process. I align myself with feminist researchers who counter this claim by asserting that all people bring their personal histories and social situatedness with them into the research process (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2010; Letherby, 2003). An awareness of my own positionality as a woman who has worked in the domestic violence sector for over 30 years means that I am studying a phenomenon that has real meaning and connection to my own history and current position as a researcher. I view this study as another way in which I can continue to contribute to the work of the women’s anti-violence movement in Ireland and

therefore my strong political commitments are inevitably going to influence some of the choices I make. It was essential therefore, that I committed to reflexivity at every stage of the research.

The central question of what we can know and how can we know has led to the development of the concept and practice of reflexivity (Hesse-Biber and Piatelli, 2007). Reflexivity is a holistic process that the researcher engages with at each stage of the process, examining and acknowledging how our own positionality impacts on every stage of the study, from its initial conception to the life the study will have long after the research project is finished. I aimed to reflect truthfully about how I made decisions about the questions I initially asked at the beginning of this study, about the choice of methodology, and the interpretative framework used in analysis (Letherby, 2003). Whilst the group made some of these decisions, I remained in a more powerful position as a decision maker throughout the collaborative inquiry and it is largely my individual biography and positionality that needed to be scrutinized as I made these decisions.

For example, I was aware that the power and privilege I had as someone who was engaged in full time study provided me with an opportunity to take time out of frontline work and to access and engage with theory and critically reflective spaces with others about the study topic. This was in contrast to my co-researchers who were all coming from frontline work, where, as the findings will illustrate, they have little time to reflect or engage in critical thinking with others. This difference in position meant that I came to each session refreshed, having had space to reflect, read, think, discuss, and plan, while my co-researchers often came to our collaborative inquiry sessions exhausted by and pre-occupied with the stresses of everyday work in domestic violence services. As the initiating researcher and facilitator, I took care to acknowledge this difference within the group, to intentionally name this difference as a factor impacting on the process and outcomes, and to work collaboratively with co-researchers to minimize the impact of this inequality in resources and position. Furthermore, I am also a co-subject in this research and therefore, I have had to work hard to remain reflexively aware of the

actual experience of carrying out research, politically and emotionally, as I struggled to hold the dual role of co-subject and co-researcher. The feminist understanding and practice of reflexivity has been crucial and central to every aspect of this research project. I have integrated reflexive considerations in this chapter and the end of each of the findings chapters.

Reflexivity is necessary not just in making choices about how the research is carried out, but also in being open to having my world view challenged and to experience the kind of disorientating dilemma that can act as an impetus to transformative learning (Mezirow, 1997). In the course of this study I experienced such a shift in perspective when, as a result of engaging with the scholarship of Black feminist writers and activists, I began to understand that my assumption gender as a unifying and unitary concept for understanding the diversity of women's experiences of domestic abuse was not only inadequate, but contributed to the perpetuation of oppressive ideologies and practices within domestic violence work (Crenshaw, 1991; Mc Phial et al, 2007; Ritchie, 2006; Sokoloff and Dupont, 2006, Sudbury, 2006). As a practitioner and activist who viewed myself as being committed to equality for all people and who sought to be inclusive in my work, I had to experience and acknowledge what my feelings of discomfort taught me about the privileged position I occupied as a white, middle class woman who believed there was no need to look further than gender oppression as a socio cultural construct for understanding the prevalence of domestic abuse. With an awareness to how my positionality and that of my co-researchers impacted on the usefulness of the knowledge being produced, I acknowledge the limitations of this research.

Acknowledging these limitations, I also believe that utilizing Feminist Participatory Action Research as a methodology enabled this group to co-generate knowledge that will contribute to future feminist action on the issue of male violence against women within intimate relationships.

Feminist Participatory Action Research

An aim of this study is to produce knowledge that will be used in establishing an emancipatory education and learning framework that all domestic violence workers can benefit from and that accrues benefits to the women and children accessing domestic violence services and wider social change efforts. I am acutely aware that the realisation of this vision can only be collectively realised and that collaborations are key in how this may be achieved. I determined from the beginning of this research project that the methodology would be participatory and collaborative. Participatory Action Research seemed to me to provide a methodology that will support these goals (Frisby et al, 2009; Reid, 2004, Reid and Frisby, 2011).

PAR emerged as a research practice from parallel and interconnected movements for popular education, social change and democratisation, mostly in the global South in the 1960s and 1970s (Rahman, 2009). Reason and Bradbury (2008) provide the following definition.

Action research is a participatory process concerned with the development of practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes. It seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people, and more generally the flourishing of individual persons' and their communities (Ibid., 4)

PAR combines education, community based research and collaborative action aimed at social change (Brydon-Miller et al, 2011). Paulo Freire's (1972) concept of conscientisation is central to PAR projects, where people reflect on and dialogue about their lived experiences to develop their own independent analysis and to mobilise to act for change, sometimes at a small scale in their communities and sometimes at a much wider level (Rahman, 2008).

Following on Reid and Frisby's (2008) critique of some of the androcentric underpinning of PAR theory and practice, I employ an approach that is clearly informed by a feminist lens and have been guided by practitioners and scholars who promote Feminist Participatory Action Research [FPAR] as a synthesis of feminist research and Participatory Action Research [PAR]. I have found in this synthesis an

approach that counters gender-neutral perspectives that can sometimes typify PAR theory, whilst also addressing some of the gaps found within literature on feminist research in relation to how to bring the knowledge produced in research to bear on social change efforts (Maguire, 2001; Reid, 2004; Reid et al, 2006; Reid and Frisby, 2008, Weiner, 2004).

Feminist action researchers clearly identify the ways in which FPAR as a research methodology corresponds considerably with the goals of feminist research (Reid, 2004; Reid et al 2006; Reid and Frisby, 2008, Krumer-Nevo, 2009).

Aspects of participatory research and feminist research cohere ontologically and epistemologically as both seek to shift the centre from which knowledge is generated. As well, they share an avowed intent to work for social justice and democratization (Reid, 2004, 7).

FPAR provides a methodological approach that aligns with my ontological and epistemological assumptions. I was particularly attracted to feminist participatory action research as a methodology that grounds research in the *“the context of the community”* and that contributes *“something of value to the community in which the research is conducted”* (Reid, 2004, 4). FPAR centres women as knowers and knowledge producers. It is:

... an approach to producing knowledge through democratic interaction and relationships that are committed to making diverse women’s voices more audible by facilitating their empowerment through *“ordinary talk”* (Maguire, 2001, 2006). The aim is to connect with the often hidden or invisible structural and social institutions that define and shape our lives. This can foster the development of strategies and programs based on real life experiences rather than theories or assumptions, providing an analyses of issues based on a description of how women actually hope to transcend problems encountered (Reid and Frisby, 2008, 98).

FPAR provides not only space and opportunity for women to voice their experiences but crucially through reflection, critical thinking and dialogue, to be knowledge producers.

Like Krumer-Nevo (2009) I found in FPAR “*Democratic, participatory and action-orientated characteristics which seemed to me to be the essence of feminism*” (279). FPAR provided an opportunity to invert traditional research approaches that locate power and authority with the academic researcher (Reid, 2005, Reid and Frisby, 2008). I wished to co-create a research process with inquiry group members in which power and responsibility was shared and reciprocal relationships beneficial to all participants were supported (Brydon-Miller et al, 2011). For me, democratising the research process and sharing power was not only important because of a commitment to imbue feminist values in this research, but also because I believe that the potential to produce useful knowledge is maximised when people are involved as fully self-determining participants in knowledge production (Heron, 1996).

Feminist participatory action research as praxis

Praxis refers to two dimensions of FPAR research. Firstly, in being explicitly about knowledge production for social change and integrating actions for social change into the research project, FPAR projects support “*informed and committed action*” (Kemmis, 2008, 123). Participants and a wider community of inquiry reflect on the efficacy of actions, if and how democratic values imbue social change efforts, and what the implications are if a drive to action undermines those values. These reflections in turn create new knowledge and insight that are used to inform ongoing actions and in this way a community of inquiry engages in an ongoing cycle of reflection in action and action in reflection (Noffke and Somekh, 2011; Swantz, 2008). FPAR provides a methodology where knowing and doing are integrated.

People with problems figure out what to do by first finding out their causes and then acting on insight. Through action we learn how the world works, what we can do, and who we are – we learn with mind and heart – and this is how we become aware and emancipated, or how we learn our powerlessness (Reid, 2004, 10).

Feminist research has always been connected to social change (Reinharz, 1992). What participatory action research adds to committed and engaged feminist research is a methodology in which the emancipatory vision and values that inform the goals of the research also shape the process and underpin decisions made at

every stage (Reid, 2004; Reid et al, 2006). A commitment to feminist praxis is focused on how the research process in all stages can be imbued with those values and practices that are envisioned as characterising the changed world we seek to create (Gaya Wickes et al, 2008; Krumer-Nevo, 2009; Reid, 2004). The centrality of praxis in FPAR is a primary reason why I determined FPAR was the most suitable approach to this study. An engagement with literature from within the wider field of participatory action research led me to collaborative inquiry. The following sections foregrounds those aspects of collaborative inquiry that shaped this feminist participatory action research project.

Adding collaborative inquiry to the methodological mix

Collaborative inquiry is one of a number of action based and participatory research approaches within the wider family of Participatory Action Research [PAR] and shares much with the principles and practices of FPAR. Like FPAR, it is a collaborative method that brings together people who have shared concerns and interests and provides them with an opportunity to collectively generate new knowledge about how to act to change things they want to change (Heron and Reason, 2008). Reason defined co-operative inquiry as:

... a way of doing research in which all those involved contribute both to the creative thinking that goes into the enterprise - deciding what is to be looked at, the methods of the inquiry, and making sense of what is found out - and also contribute to the action which is the subject of the research. Thus, in its fullest form, the distinction between researcher and subject disappears, and all who participate are both co- researchers and co-subjects (1998, 1).

Similarly to FPAR, collaborative inquiry rests within a participatory paradigm which is located at the far end of the spectrum from positivist research approaches (Heron, 1996). Collaborative inquiry is a later term for co-operative inquiry, first developed by John Heron as a research methodology and further developed by other practitioners most notably Peter Reason.

We believe that good research is research with people rather than on people. We believe that ordinary people are quite capable of developing their own ideas and can work together in a co-operative inquiry group to see if these

ideas make sense of their world and work in practice (Heron and Reason, 2017, 1).

Reading the literature on collaborative inquiry, I found so many similarities to FPAR that I had to consider whether it was a methodology that brought different and additional benefits to this study that FPAR did not. While I could not distinguish major differences between FPAR and collaborative inquiry as research approaches, I concluded that there were aspects of collaborative inquiry that met the specific needs of this project. For example, the emphases on initiating researchers sharing both co-subject and co-inquiry roles enabled me to see how I could both lead and participate in this study as an inside researcher. At the same time, collaborative inquiry in its fullest form would require that research roles of planning, organising and facilitating the inquiry sessions, and recording and summarising the data are shared by at least some of the group, rather than held solely by the initiating researcher. As the transition to shared ownership of these roles did not evolve in this project, I frame this research as a feminist participatory action research project that draws heavily on collaborative inquiry in shaping the research methodology. When I use the term collaborative inquiry in the text, I use it to describe what our group research felt like, rather than to imply that the project met fully criteria that meet the standards of collaborative inquiry as set by its primary proponents (Heron, 1996; Reason, 1998).

In the following section I discuss how collaborative inquiry as located within a participatory paradigm shaped this research project.

A participatory paradigm

Heron defined the two “wings” of the participatory paradigm on which collaborative inquiry rests. The first is an epistemic wing, concerned with truth-values and the nature of knowledge. Heron argues that human experience cannot be understood through experiments or collecting data from other people. Drawing on his own experiences with phenomenology, he argues that human experience can only be truly understood from inside, that is, the researcher must have authentic experience

of the phenomenon to gain an authentic understanding of it (Bray et al, 2000; Heron, 1996).

This holds that there is a given cosmos in which the mind creatively participates, and which it can only know in terms of its own constructs, whether affective, imaginable, conceptual or practical. We know through this active participation of mind that we are in touch with what is other, but only as articulated by all our mental sensibilities. Reality is always subjective-objective: our own constructs clothe a felt participation in what is present. Worlds and people are what we *meet*, but the meeting is shaped by our own terms of reference (Heron, 1996, 11).

Co-researchers in a collaborative inquiry are therefore subject-object. Subject because they are examining their own life world, and object because they are reflecting on, perceiving and attempting to make sense of their experiences (Heron, 1996). This approach to research resonated with my belief that knowledge production about the unseen, under-researched and under-valued experience of domestic violence work had to start with those people whose understanding and knowledge was formed from inside the experience of being a domestic violence worker.

The second “wing” to Heron’s participative paradigm is political. He argues that people have a right to be involved as fully autonomous participants in research as only as fully self-determining people can they flourish as humans.

Human flourishing is intrinsically worthwhile: it is valuable as an end in itself. It is construed as a process of social participation in which there is a mutually enabling balance, within and between people, of autonomy, co-operation and hierarchy. ... What is valuable as a means to this end is participative decision-making, which enables people to be involved in the making of decisions, in every social context, which affect their flourishing in any way (ibid., 12).

Collaborative inquiry emphasises people’s involvement as fully autonomous participants at every level of the research project. This resonated with my intention to initiate and lead a process in which the research group itself would shape the research focus and collectively formulate a research question that was meaningful for and responded to concerns that were shared by all participants. I agree with

Heron that a research process underpinned by a commitment to human flourishing is more likely to result in the generation of useful knowledge towards supporting action towards the change that people affected by the issue at hand want to see (Bray et al, 2000; Heron, 1996, Reason, 1998).

The political argument for collaborative inquiry is underpinned by an expanded concept of human rights as not only being exercised in the political, civic, and social spaces but within all spheres, including the personal. This concept of “*universal political rights*” (Heron, 1996, 16) thus leads to people having the right to participate in any decision making at all levels on issues that affect their lives in any way. The participatory paradigm of collaborative inquiry provides a corollary to the feminist principles underpinning this study: primarily that the research process itself must be experienced by participants as empowering and emancipatory.

I highlight two further dimensions of collaborative inquiry that correspond with core feminist research principles. These are, collaborative inquiry as an extended epistemology and the centrality of critical subjectivity to the production of useful knowledge.

Collaborative inquiry as an extended epistemology

The concept of wholeness that Reason writes about recalls what Reinharz (1992) refers to as the “*epistemology of insideness*” (Ibid., 260) that sees life, work and research as being intertwined for feminist researchers. Heron and Reason (1998) emphasise concepts of wholeness, seeing one’s existence in the world as part of a unitary system, where people are part of and participate in the whole. An implicit aspect of wholeness is the participation of all its parts.

The emphasis on wholeness also means that we are not interested in either fragmented knowing, or theoretical knowing that is separated from practice and from experience. We seek a knowing in action which encompasses as much of our experience as possible (Reason, 1998, 11).

Collaborative inquiry encapsulates four ways of knowing. The first is *experiential knowing*, rooted in a participatory worldview, which Heron and Reason (2002) state is based on the foundation of “*human perceptual sensibility*,” the capacity of people

to feel when engaged with what is “*participating through the perceptual process, in the shared presence of mutual encounter*” (Ibid., 369). The second is *presentational* or intuitive knowing, expressed often through art and which can be pre-language. Presentational knowing often helps us get to the affective and intuitive aspects of knowledge, that is how emotions and sensory feelings provide useful knowledge for us. Thirdly there is *propositional* knowing where we intellectually conceptualise meaning and knowledge. Building on experiential and presentational knowing when we propose new meanings and concepts, we most often express this form of knowledge in language and the written word. Finally, there is *practical knowing*. Heron and Reason (2008) argue that this is the highest form of knowing. Practical knowing builds on the other three forms of knowing and is expressed through the exercise of skill. While practical knowing is argued to be the highest form of knowing, all four of these ways of knowing are in a constant and dynamic interplay with each other.

Heron (1996) and Reason’s (1998) argument that practical knowing is the highest form of knowledge links to feminist theory, which seeks the recovery of intuitive, grounded and practical knowledge as that which is really useful knowledge in the on-going struggle for women’s liberation and liberation for all oppressed peoples (Reason, 1998; Thompson, 1997). My concerns about quality in this research centre on how the inquiry process we employed produced sound and supportable knowledge. In reflecting on the validity of our collaborative inquiry process and outcomes, I do not mean that we collaboratively constructed knowledge that was close to some ‘knowable’ truth in the external environment nor that the knowledge we generated was generalizable to other contexts. What I understand by validity in the context of our participatory research is how we assessed that our inquiry was faithful enough to rigorous and trustworthy criteria, that we felt safe enough to act on the knowledge that we generated as a group (Heron, 1998; Lincoln and Guba, 2000).

Participants’ experiences of coming to know in a practical sense, through their collaboration in this research project, the importance of collaborative, dialogic and

critical learning spaces, adds validity to our findings, and it was this experience of practical knowing that as one participant said, “*put fire in the belly*” (Charley) to take collective action for change. While I propose that the validity of the knowledge we produced is illustrated in the practical actions we took as a group to effect change in our community of practice, I hold an awareness that the knowledge we co-generated is partial, situated and temporal. A critical awareness of how our own positionality and subjectivity impacts on the quality of our knowing is crucial in all feminist research projects (Alvesson and Skoldberg 2010; Hesse-Biber et al 2004; Hesse-Biber and Piatelli, 2007; Letherby 2003; Sprague, 2001). Thus, Reason (1998) emphasises the importance of facilitating critical subjectivity within a collaborative inquiry.

The centrality of critical subjectivity

Reason (1998) talks about naïve subjectivity, which is like the knowing of a small child. While this form of knowing is engaged, committed and dynamic, it is prone to distortions arising from our own prejudices and unexamined assumptions. In collaborative inquiry, as in feminist research, critical subjectivity is valued as:

... a quality of awareness in which we do not suppress our primary subjective experience; nor do we allow ourselves to be overwhelmed and swept along by it; rather we raise it to consciousness and use it as part of the inquiry process (Ibid., 120).

Reason (Ibid.) argues that we do not abandon all of the aspects of the positivist scientific world view in that we integrate ideals of critical and public knowledge. He further argues that by insisting that valid inquiry rests on an “*a very high degree of self-knowing, self-reflection, and co-operative criticism*” (Ibid., 13), that collaborative inquiry is more demanding in terms of validity than orthodox science. Reason describes the ways in which critical subjectivity can be maintained while also elevating a holistic form of knowledge production that refuses to fragment ways of knowing in people’s lives. Reflexivity is consistent with Reason’s argument that “*a very high degree of self-knowing, self-reflection, and co-operative criticism*” (Ibid., 13), results in collaborative inquiry being more demanding in terms of validity than research from within a positivist paradigm that claims to be value free. Maintaining one’s critical subjectivity in the moment, or reflexive practice in feminist terms, is

challenging and is something that requires much practice. While some of my initial anxieties about not “measuring up” to standards for validity in research remain, I nevertheless believe that learning about critical subjectivity as core to collaborative inquiry helped me to maximise critical subjectivity in the moment, to recognise when I failed to do this and to analyse how this impacted on the quality of the inquiry.

Reading about the theory and application of collaborative inquiry helped me to feel, as Kate Mc Ardle (2004) said in her thesis, that participatory research was “*doable*”. As much of the literature referenced in this chapter is drawn from the field of collaborative inquiry, I use the terms FPAR, collaborative inquiry and group inquiry interchangeably, whilst recognising that as this study does not meet the objective criteria for collaborative inquiry in its fullest sense, this research project more accurately reflects a feminist participatory action research project.

In the following section I describe the research design before going on to discuss the implementation of the research plan.

Overview of research design.

This research was **an internally initiated inquiry** in that as a person with a long history in domestic violence work, I shared the experience of my co-inquirers and felt invested in the possible outcomes of the research. I had left frontline work 12 months before the first meeting of the group, but I mostly felt like an insider when it came to the research process. There were a few times when I felt that position shift slightly to set me somewhat outside the experience of other group members who were, all but one, still working in frontline work.¹⁰ For most of the time however, I collaborated as a peer co- inquirer and co-subject with nine colleagues from the domestic violence sector in Ireland.

Our inquiry was **a full form inquiry** where all participants acted as both co-subjects and co-researchers (Heron, 1996). This does not mean that we shared all the roles

¹⁰ One other member of the group was in frontline work when the inquiry group was recruited and forming but by the time the first inquiry session happened, the refuge she worked in had been closed temporarily and she was seconded to work in a unit in a state agency.

involved in progressing a collaborative inquiry. Throughout the research project I held on to specific roles including facilitation, transcribing, and summarising while as a group we collectively agreed the focus for each subsequent day's inquiry and the ongoing inquiry route.

The focus of this research was primarily **an informative inquiry resulting in propositional outcomes** (Heron, 1996) that describe and explain participants experience and understanding of our work as domestic violence advocates. Our inquiry was focused on enabling us as co-researchers to come to the best assessment we could on the values and concepts that underpinned effective practice in responding to intimate partner violence. The second half of the inquiry focused on describing an approach to education and learning that would support and sustain workers in their dual roles as advocates within a community of practice and as activists for social change. Our knowledge is captured primarily in propositional mode through the production of written reports that the group is using to extend this inquiry to a wider community of colleagues.

The inquiry was carried out over nine full days within a 13-month period starting in October 2017 and ending in November 2018. The first seven days were single days, interspersed by a number of weeks. These seven sessions were held in Women's Aid Dublin who provided a meeting space free of charge to the group for these sessions. The last two days were held together in a hotel close to Dublin. This residential session enabled the group to finish the inquiry at a more relaxed pace and to celebrate our achievements in a social space.

An iterative cycle of reflection and meaning making

Reason (2002) argues that the quality of a collaborative inquiry is grounded in recycling through the reflection action cycle and that this is an essential factor in improving the quality of knowing and in supporting critical subjectivity of the co-researchers. Reason (1998, 2002) and Heron (1996) outline four stages of the inquiry cycle. Stage 1 is the first reflection stage where the group of inquirers identify shared interests and concerns and agree the focus of the inquiry. A launching statement and/or research question(s) are agreed, and the group agree how to carry out this

research. In Stage 2 the co-researchers are now co-subjects. They inquire into some aspect of the inquiry topic using a range of skills. Stage 3 has been called the “touchstone” (Heron, 1996, Reason, 2002) of collaborative inquiry. Heron describes participants in this stage as being “*in a state of deep immersion in the action phase, a full engagement with the relevant experience of practice*” (Heron, 1996, 84). In the final stage co-inquirers engage in a phase of reflection to make sense of their actions and experiences. They may modify, re-frame or reject their original questions and choose to focus on an adapted or different topic or aspect of their experience in the next cycle of reflection and action, or they may continue to focus on the same aspects of the topic. The group will agree an action plan for the next inquiry cycle.

By employing FPAR I hoped that the inquiry group would be able to assess the usefulness of the knowledge we generated by cycling through successive reflection and action phases. Initially, I expected that we would identify certain actions that each member could take in between sessions that we would then individually and collectively reflect on and dialogue about in each subsequent reflection phase. Our experience of the process was somewhat messier and less straightforward than this and did not strictly follow the four stages as outlined in the collaborative inquiry literature.

Our nine-day inquiry became one long reflection and meaning making phase and it was only after we had spent this time together that we came to a point where we felt ready to use the knowledge we had collaboratively generated and to act. Group members said many times that the time and space they had to reflect and dialogue was so different from their everyday experience where they were “*doing, doing, all of the time*” (Rachel). My nine co-researchers said that they craved time away from their everyday work to reflect on their experience of domestic violence work and the many contextual issues that impacted on them and on the women and children for whom they worked. I learnt to let go of anxiety about staying in a reflective meaning making space for the duration of the inquiry and came to appreciate that taking nine full days out of busy frontline work in the context of ever-increasing pressures to “*get things done*” (Thompson, 1998, 150), could be seen as a radical act for many of the

group (Zibechi, 2012). The process was shaped by the needs and the decisions of the participants who were clear that what they needed was time and space, both in the sessions and between sessions, to reflect and critically examine their own and others' experiences, assumptions and perspectives (Patterson and Goulter, 2015).

I agree with Reason (2002) who states that a more complete inquiry happens when the reflection action cycle has been completed several times. The soundness of our assertions and usefulness of the knowledge generated will be tested in subsequent action stages as this inquiry continues. I see the inquiry being reported on in this thesis report as a mini-cycle within what I envisage and hope will be a major cycle of inquiry involving the original 10 group members, but also others as we extend our inquiry into the wider domestic violence movement and beyond (Reason, 2002).

Both Heron (1996) and Reason (1998, 2002) acknowledge that the doing of collaborative inquiry is organic and advocate for emergent and creative approaches to inquiry that are *"supportive of the interaction between emotional arousal and creative imagination in planning successive cycles and in sustaining the forward thrust of a co-operative inquiry"* (Heron, 1996, 51). The four stages described above provide a logic of inquiry that in a sense should be secondary to this forward thrust of inquiry and should not in any sense disrupt people's authentic engagement with the inquiry. At the same time, Reason argues that the *"discipline of the research cycle is fundamental"* (Reason, 2002, 172) to successful collaborative inquiry. I was initially concerned that our group inquiry failed to reach the standards implied in the fundamental importance of these four stages of an inquiry cycle but was re-assured by Heron.

I do not consider that adopting these stages, explicitly or tacitly, is *the* way to do a co-operative inquiry; it is only *a* way. There cannot be in this field such a thing as the one and only right, proper or correct method. There can only be my, or your, or our view as to what is a good method (Heron, 1996, 49).

Implementation of the research plan

In this section, I provide a description of how I initiated this research and how the research design developed as a result of the emergent nature of FPAR as a research

approach (Heron, 1996, Reason, 1998). This inquiry encompassed four distinct phases over a period of 21 months 1) initiation 2) launching 3) collaborative knowledge building and 4) preparing for action. A table with a breakdown of research actions and timeframes is provided in appendix 2. An overview of the nine collaborative inquiry sessions is provided in appendix 3. In the following section, I describe the implementation of the inquiry in each of these phases.

The initiation phase.

My first task in the initiation phase was to transition from thinking, reading and writing about the research topic to making myself visible as a researcher within the network of women's domestic violence services in Ireland (Bray et al, 2000). In the initiation phase, the focus is on creating the conditions *"from which inquiry as a pattern of behaviour between people rather than a "thing" can emerge"* (Mc Ardle, 2008, 603). I was aware that the choices I made about how I approached and communicated with my colleagues in initiation phase would have implications for how any subsequent collaborative inquiry would proceed. In opening up and making a proposal to my colleagues, I wished to communicate that although I was transitioning from frontline worker to research practitioner, that I saw my research practice as continuing to contribute to the work to respond to gender based violence, and that I intended that this research would contribute something of value to the community of domestic violence organisations in Ireland (Reid, 2004).

My goals in this initiation phase were primarily to ensure that colleagues in the domestic violence sector were informed about the research and that I could recruit participants for the collaborative inquiry from within this community. Before initiating contact with organisations and colleagues I prepared information materials about the research project including a flyer inviting colleagues in the sector to contact me if they were interested in joining the collaborative inquiry group.¹¹ Follow up emails and phone calls were made to each organisation listed on the Safe Ireland website to offer a phone conversation or a visit to the organisation to meet with staff.

¹¹ See appendix 4-8

I received a response from all but two of the 40 organisations listed on the website.¹² Meetings were set up with 27 out of the 40 listed organisations and I travelled to meet these organisations in their locations over the summer of 2017. I had conversations by phone with a number of managers in other services who were not available to meet with me during this period.

The series of meetings in themselves were highly informative, enabling me to gain a greater appreciation of the vastly differing contexts in which workers respond to women and children experiencing domestic violence. Facilities ranged from a multipurpose, two-story, purpose-built building in its own compound, with landscaped gardens, a 14-family refuge on the upper floor, and a dedicated children and young person's service, support and advocacy service and training and education spaces on the ground floor, to a support and advocacy service in a small rural town occupying two cramped rooms on the first floor of a 19th century building. Both services were the only domestic violence service for their counties, demonstrating the uneven and ad hoc nature of funding and development of domestic violence organisations in Ireland. I requested to meet with full teams if possible and this was facilitated in several cases. After each meeting I recorded a brief description of the meeting and my impressions and reflections.

While I was not recording these meetings for use as data in this research, I noted in my records responses ranging from strong and enthusiastic support for the proposal, with offers of help from many organisations and colleagues, to a small minority of instances in which those present were not hugely responsive to my proposal. What these silences or disengagements might mean I cannot tell. On a practical level, the meetings seemed to drive the recruitment of participants, as all women who expressed an interest in joining the collaborative inquiry group worked in organisations that I had visited during this phase.

¹² I subsequently discovered that one of these organisations was in the process of closing during this period.

Recruitment of co-inquirers

Recruitment for this FPAR project was through invitation to colleagues within the domestic violence sector who worked directly with women who experience intimate partner violence. To draw on a level of experience and knowledge that has been developed over several years, I set a criterion that group members must have worked for a minimum of four years in frontline service provision for a minimum of 17.5 hours a week. In information materials and at meetings, I communicated that ideally the group would comprise a good mix of workers holding three different roles within the domestic violence sector; service managers, support and advocacy workers, and refuge workers. Inclusion of a diversity of women based on social differentials, including age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and geographical location was also highlighted as a priority.

Following my invitation to colleagues to join the inquiry group 11 women expressed an interest in participating in the research and they were invited to an orientation session. This group was reduced to nine after one participant had to withdraw because of personal commitments and another potential participant could not attend due to health reasons. The research group, including myself, was comprised of 10 co-researchers and co-subjects for the duration of the inquiry.

Profile of inquiry group members

As co-subjects and co-researchers (Heron, 1998) we were ten women who all worked, or up to recently had worked, in frontline domestic violence services. We worked in different service settings including community-based support, advocacy and court accompaniment services, refuges, and helplines.¹³ All of us shared the same roles in domestic violence services in the sense that we specifically provided support, information and advocacy support directly to women who experienced intimate partner violence. Appendices 8 provides a brief overview of the participant profile and appendix 9 provides their full name and organisation.

¹³ One group member was working in a refuge when the inquiry started but the refuge was closed temporarily due to health and safety issues and she was seconded to a policy unit within a state agency on an interim basis.

Launching the inquiry

Creating the conditions for group learning

As initiating researcher and facilitator my focus in the launching stage was on how I supported group members to create and sustain the conditions for group learning (Bray et al, 2000). While recognising that creating the conditions for group learning is an ongoing and collective endeavour throughout the lifetime of our group inquiry, at the launching stage there were specific things that needed to be done to establish a group learning culture. Heron (1996) cautions against rushing this stage of the inquiry and I therefore planned that the entire first day would be primarily about creating conditions conducive to collaborative knowledge building.

After initial introductions, each person was asked to reflect on and articulate their expectations, their hopes and their aspirations as potential participants in this research and we each shared these reflections with the rest of the group. In the subsequent dialogue there were clear articulations from group members about the importance and the timeliness of this research. This conversation inevitably progressed into *how* we would do the research.

I felt it was important to be clear about the values that would underpin the inquiry process before people committed to ongoing participation. I described collaborative inquiry as a democratic approach to research that reverses traditional research approaches and returns power to those people who are affected by the phenomenon being studied. I positioned myself as a feminist practitioner and researcher and that I believed research must be connected in principle to action for social change. I also positioned myself as a novice researcher, setting out on a research journey with a group of peers. At this point in the session, I proposed that we would create a group contract so that people could get a clearer sense of how we would be working together before they decided about their ongoing participation. Each member shared their needs from and commitments to their co-inquirers and the group agreed a contract for how we would work together (see appendix 10).

Following on from agreeing this contract, we addressed practical issues and discussed matters relating to consent, confidentiality and the storage of records. I had prepared a consent form and I went through this point by point with the participants (Appendix 11). All present immediately said they wanted to join the collaborative inquiry group and they signed the consent form. People had a choice to remain anonymous or to be named as members of the inquiry group. All members said they wished to be identified as co-inquirers in the research. We were ready to move on to agreeing a research focus.

Agreeing the research focus and a launching question¹⁴

Launching a collaborative inquiry requires that a transition occurs in which the question originally defined by the initiating researcher is set aside and the group collectively shape a research question (Bray et al, 2000; Heron, 1996). During the initiation phase, I had posed the following question in all the information literature and in my interactions with colleagues:

What are the education and learning needs of domestic violence workers in Ireland and what would be the most appropriate response to those needs?

I sought to keep the research question as general as possible as I was aware that the group itself would identify the focus for inquiry and formulate the questions that would map out our inquiry route (Reason, 1998). Between session 1 and 2, I invited each member to set *my* question aside and to reflect on what issue, problem, concern or dilemma they wanted to address in the group inquiry.

In subsequent group reflection and dialogue in session 2, three shared interests were identified as motivating group member's participation in the research. These were:

1. The need to create a common foundation for domestic violence work in Ireland
2. The need to recognise and value the existing expertise held by the sector and the impact this expertise and the action of the DV sector has had on Irish society

¹⁴ The process through which the group identified the research topic and question is described in chapter 7

3. The need to ensure that any approach to education and learning is appropriate and fitting to the domestic violence sector in Ireland.

The challenge at this stage was to frame a launching research question that could encompass all these concerns but that allowed for the different perspectives in the room to be fully inquired into. Working in three groups, each group drafted a possible research question and then we cut, spliced, and made amendments, suggested additions, and eventually reached agreement on the following research question:

What approach to education and learning will recognise, value and build upon our feminist foundations and existing expertise and provide collaborative, progressive, dynamic and open learning for the domestic violence sector in Ireland?

The group were now ready to dive deeper into the inquiry.

The collaborative knowledge building process

Heron (1996) distinguishes between an informative inquiry as that which is “*descriptive of some domain of experience, being informative and explanatory about it*” and a transformative inquiry as that which explores “*practice in some domain, being transformative of it*” (Ibid., 48). Our inquiry was largely descriptive and informative about our work and imaginative in visualising and conceiving of changes that could happen in the future. This does not mean that there was no change for group members. Inherent to any research process is learning and with learning comes change (Bray et al, 2000; Heron, 1996; Reason, 2002). For our group, learning and change centred around consciously utilising inquiry skills to make explicit much of our tacit and embodied knowledge and using this knowledge to learn more about what approach to education and learning would be congruent with the values and goals of domestic violence work.¹⁵ In the following sections I focus on the group’s utilisation of reflection, storytelling and dialogue as inquiry methods.

¹⁵ Findings in chapter 12 illustrate some further learning outcomes for participants in terms of how they related to domestic violence work.

Reflection and storytelling

Reflection on experience provides the basis for dialogue towards collaborative knowledge construction. In this inquiry, we engaged in three forms of reflection: descriptive reflection where we described some aspect of our experience; evaluative reflection where we assessed and evaluated that experience; and practical reflection, which we employed to plan the next stages of the inquiry (Bray et al, 2000). Our reflection centred around questions formed by the group as we moved through significant stages of the inquiry. For example, after launching the inquiry, the group agreed that we needed to divide the question into two parts, firstly, what constituted the foundations of effective domestic violence work and secondly, what kind of approach to education and learning would best suit the needs of domestic violence workers. We agreed a set of questions that would guide our inquiry through the first part and started to utilise our inquiry skills more consciously at this stage by each reflecting on and sharing with each other our journey into and through domestic violence work. People took time to reflect individually and then presented and told their story to the rest of the group, after which we spent time dialoguing to identify commonalities, themes and differences in perspectives.

Story telling was used consciously as an impetus for dialogue and in a more emergent way as people told stories to illustrate aspects of their experience and articulate their perspectives. For example, in session 5 Maureen used a story from her early days in domestic violence work to illustrate her belief in the importance of experiential learning. She spoke of how she *“had to learn boundaries through experience and watching”* and provided an account of how a lack of awareness of the need to manage self-care in the early days of her career led her to overextend herself in supporting a woman and how this meant that work related stress bled into her personal life.¹⁶ Maureen’s generosity in sharing a story about a time when she was vulnerable in the work provided a grounded example of why experiential learning has to be valued and supported. Her story led us to dialogue about our experience of learning cultures within organisations and to agree on the importance of an open

¹⁶ Maureen’s story and how she made meaning of this experience is detailed in Chapter 9.

learning culture that understood mistakes were inevitable and that supported and valued open disclosure.

Dialogue

Throughout this nine-day inquiry, our reflections and storytelling were followed by and integrated with dialogue where as co-subjects we shared our experiences and perspectives and as co-inquirers we used our inquiry skills to critically examine our own and each other's perspectives and assumptions. Through dialogue, we mapped out our shared values and beliefs and identified divergences in perspectives and experiences about the issue of domestic violence. We considered the implications of working from different perspectives as we sought to build agreements on what we assessed as the most accurate knowledge underpinning effective practice. Then, we considered the kind of education and learning that supports and sustains those responses. In between sessions, I provided the group with transcripts and a summary of the previous day's dialogue and agreements. Each member was invited to bring questions, challenges and concerns back into the group if there was any aspect of our tentative agreements that they were troubled or uncertain about. The group then engaged in further dialogue and meaning making, moving on to build agreements about knowledge claims or noting where differences of perspectives and questions remained. We recycled through this iterative knowledge building process numerous times in our nine-day inquiry.

This process, as a I write it, seems to be linear, neat, clear, and consistently deployed, but of course it was none of these things. There were many instances in this inquiry where we got lost and felt confused. However, we managed to emerge from each confused and meandering section of our inquiry journey to agree key dimensions of our conceptual and practice framework and to build agreement on congruent approaches to education and learning. For example, following on our individual reflections on our journey into and through domestic violence work, it was difficult to see what was emerging from sharing our stories that could be useful information. We spent some time trying to identify patterns and themes but seemed to be engaged in creating a long list of these without any real dialogue about our

experiences. We became more focused when Maureen talked about the importance for her of working from a non-woman blaming attitude and how this was a “red line” issue for her. This provided me with an opportunity to ask the rest of the group to talk about their “red line” issues and what belief or understanding was fundamental to how they practiced as domestic violence workers. Our dialogue led us to agree several key values and concepts that we agreed must underpin effective responses to domestic abuse.

Transforming “I” knowledge to “we” knowledge

Our reflections were focused on bringing our tacit and embodied knowledge to the surface and thus to assist us in making this knowledge explicit. Mc Niff (2013) talks about how this process enables people to transform ‘I’ knowledge into ‘we’ knowledge, a form that is more articulable and sharable. My goal had always been that as a group we could generate a collective standpoint and in this sense group learning was key. Similar to the group of collaborative inquirers writing about their experience in Bray et al (2000), we found that there was learning at group level as we traversed in a very non-linear way through experience and meaning making. As the collaborative inquiry neared its completion, we realised that there were key areas where we now collectively understood something from our individual experiences that we had not understood nor been aware of before the inquiry. Bray et al (2000, 72) refer to coming to these insights as “ah ha” moments. An example of this was experienced in our final process evaluation when we *did* as a group have an “ah ha moment”. This was when several group members said they realised that what we were advocating for in future education and learning was what had happened in the group. The collaborative learning we had experienced in this inquiry resulted in group members regaining a sense of connection and community that they said had been lost to them for some time. In this respect, our experience of the collaborative inquiry constituted a practical knowing, where we as a group were able to validate our propositional statements that collaborative learning was a key component in a future education and learning framework for domestic violence workers (Heron, 1996, Kasl and Yorks, 2010; Reason and Heron, 2008). This group insight would not have been possible in the earlier stages of the inquiry.

Recording our group learning

The inquiry group began to collaboratively build knowledge right from our first session, although what we had dialogued about seemed to be very disjointed and wide ranging, particularly in our first three days together. A process evaluation at the end of this session 3 indicated a level of frustration felt by group members. A few group members expressed anxiety that we weren't really getting anywhere with our inquiry. I was in a privileged position as recorder of our inquiry and so I could see that there was a lot of knowledge being generated, albeit in a very non-linear way. In between session 3 and 4 I summarised the transcripts from previous sessions for people to read so that we could have a sense of what we had reflected and dialogued about. This decision and action on my part proved to be key in providing a building block structure to our inquiry.

Reflecting on the process to date in session 4, group members said they really appreciated the summary and they could see that we were generating considerable knowledge as a group. The summary helped people see where there was a commonality of perspectives and experiences and to also see differences of perspective that needed further exploration. Using the summary of the transcripts as a guide, the group chose different sections of our recorded dialogue that they wanted to return to for further inquiry. I continued to provide summaries of the transcripts between subsequent sessions. This seemed to be a factor in enabling the group to trust the process as meaningful and useful. As the inquiry progressed, people reported feeling less anxious about the messy and emergent nature of the research and less focused on outcomes. Charley reflected this journey from confusion to clarity when in our final evaluation she reflected that *"in the first one, two or three sessions, it was like, we didn't know where we were going"* but that clarity *"did sort of sneak up on me when you started putting structure on it, it was, now I can see something that's great"*.

Engagement and disengagement in preliminary data analysis

Knowledge building was clearly aided by summaries of the transcripts that I produced and sent to each member between sessions. I realised that in doing this I was

engaging in a preliminary form of analysis and unilaterally taking a step towards knowledge construction without the input of my co-inquirers. In this respect, I felt the inquiry was very much diverging from some of the principles of collaborative inquiry, and yet taking on this role seemed to be key in enabling the group to construct knowledge in a more ordered way. Group members were invited to feedback on any inaccuracies or concerns about how things were grouped or named under category headings but there was little feedback. In process reflections, I raised my discomfort at taking this role and the level of power it gave me to interpret data in what should have been a collaborative knowledge building project. My co-inquirers were less concerned however and felt that it would simply not have been feasible for recording and summarising to be a shared task. They felt confident that the summaries were accurate representations of the group dialogue and said, that as I always brought summaries back to the group, they trusted they could raise any issues or seek amendments if they wished.

While I held an influential role in preliminary analyses, my co-inquirers did engage in some level of data analysis in and between group sessions. For example, we agreed to read through transcripts and summaries between sessions 4 and 5 to enable reflection on some of the key learnings for each of us to date in the inquiry. In session 5, each group member reflected individually on their learning and we then shared our reflections with each other. This enabled dialogue through which we made links between what we had learnt and the implications of this for a future education and learning framework for domestic violence workers. This exercise enabled us to see that we had already defined the 'what' of education in some detail but that we had only addressed the 'how' in very cursory terms. The group generated a set of questions to aid a deeper inquiry into *how* education and learning should be organised and provided for and our inquiry focus shifted to reflecting on and evaluating our experiences as learners, particularly as domestic violence workers.

Recording our experience and analysing the data we generated was an important step in enabling our group to make decisions about how we wanted to use the

knowledge we had generated. In the following sub-section, I provide a brief overview of the preparing for action stage of this collaborative inquiry.

Preparing for action

In our nine-day collaborative inquiry we did not as a group move into an action phase, nevertheless, as a group we were always clear that the knowledge we generated would be used for positive change to benefit women and children experiencing domestic violence. The findings chapters report on the outcomes of our inquiry in detail but in summary, the collaborative inquiry group generated knowledge that we were then able to shape into a framework for the foundational and lifelong learning for domestic violence workers. Group members expressed emotions of excitement and pride at our achievement. Some felt impatient to get going in the work to make this proposed framework a reality. Many talked about feeling a renewed sense of hope and motivation that collectively, we, with our colleagues in the sector, could take action that would bring about needed changes.¹⁷ The question then arose: what do we do with this knowledge, and how do we use our hope and our excitement to get that change?

There was a clear sense as we neared the end of our inquiry that as a group we had created something of value that would make a difference in the ongoing work to tackle domestic violence and group members wanted to share this with colleagues in the sector. Contributions from members indicated a collective ownership of the outcome of the research and a shared commitment to act. The group agreed that our focus after the inquiry would be on initiating conversations with our colleagues within the wider sector about what we had learnt through our collaborative inquiry. Our longer-term aim was to motivate a collective project towards establishing an education and learning framework that would be available to the domestic violence worker throughout their career.

While our focus in this session was mostly agentic, even here we continued to generate knowledge and insight into our work. Group members were excited and

¹⁷ Group members' reflection on their experience of the collaborative inquiry and the changes that happened for each of them as a result of their collaboration are described in Chapter 12.

motivated to take action but at the same time they expressed anxieties about making themselves visible as workers who advocated for feminist perspectives. Our preparations to extend the inquiry necessarily included taking time to examine some of our anxieties in further detail and to identify how we would respond to challenges and different perspectives to that which underpinned the framework we had created. Having to think about how we brought our collectively produced knowledge to others acted to refine and deepen our knowledge (Bray et al, 2000).

The group identified that we needed a written document that encapsulated the key findings from our research as a launch to start our communication strategy with our colleagues. Producing a document collectively would have required a commitment of many more hours from co-inquirers and as this was not possible, the needs of the project again took precedence. I agreed to produce a draft that each member would sign off on before we distributed it. Once the report was distributed by email to all organisations, our plan was to communicate with the sector in various ways to ensure that we reached as many individual workers as possible.

While I continued to hold a coordination role for this action phase, all but one group member¹⁸ was all committed to participation in this phase by taking on to organise and participate in different aspects of the action phase. This action planning stage brought us to the end of this part of our FPAR project. In the following section, I reflect on some factors that I assess impacted on the quality of the inquiry.

Factors impacting on the quality of the inquiry

In this section, I reflect on three aspects of this collaborative inquiry that I assess impacted on the quality of our research process. These are, my role as the facilitator, the impact of holding multiple roles as facilitator, co subject and co-inquirer and the impact of group dynamics and relationships on the inquiry process and outcomes.

¹⁸ This group member was leaving domestic violence work.

My skills as facilitator

I came to this research with some experience of facilitation but not as an experienced facilitator. Facilitation, particularly within the context of participatory action research, is a demanding and complex task. Mackewn describes facilitation as both a science and an art.

It is a science in that it draws on theory and evidence; it is an art in that it requires precision, attention and timely action. As an art form it does not and cannot follow any one methodology or pre-determined plan. It is an art in which we facilitators can with practice and reflection develop our skill, commitment, creativity and sensitivity to the specific dynamics of any given situation so that we can rise to the challenge of our task and make our own discernments from moment to moment about what is needed in that situation. (Mackewn, 2008, 628)

While it is encouraging to see collaborative inquiry as a research process that anyone can engage in, I nevertheless believe that effective facilitation is key to a successful inquiry. It was this aspect of the inquiry that I found most challenging. In my role as initiating researcher and facilitator, I needed to attend to various dimensions of the inquiry and to the power and politics that are in and around a research group (Drennan and Cevero, 2002). This required me to exercise a broad range of skills, including listening, reflecting, questioning, summarising, and re-framing. In addition, Heron lists several special inquiry skills needed for a collaborative project. These include an ability to be present and to bracket *“conceptual labels and models embedded in the process of perceiving people and the world”* (1996, 58) so that I could remain open to considering alternative perspectives and to reframing assumptions and conceptual models. As well as being responsible for how I employed these skills, I also had a role to support my co-inquirers to utilise their inquiry skills and to step in when I felt that we needed to step back and consider alternative perspectives.

Looking at the video tapes and reading through transcripts, I can see that I do facilitate well at times. I can see where I am attentive to issues relating to people’s participation and the emotional and interpersonal well-being in the group (Heron, 1996). I intervene in dialogue to invite people to articulate alternative views, to

question when there seems to be ready agreement on an issue and to articulate alternative perspectives that I suggest the group may wish to consider. But my utilisation of these inquiry and facilitation skills was inconsistent. I was not always able to respond to what was going on in the room on a moment to moment basis in a way that facilitated a consistently high-quality attention from my co-inquirers to process and outcomes (Mackewn, 2008). Many times, it was only on viewing tapes and in transcribing that I noticed an interaction in the group that could have been better facilitated or a dynamic that I could have drawn attention to. Heron states:

May I suggest to the reader who... starts to find the account of all these skills daunting and disheartening, that the discipline of engaging in a co-operative inquiry and its cyclic process is itself a means of developing them. Furthermore, while the description of them can appear immaculate, the occurrence of them is maculate, fractal, earthy, irregular and granular. We are all beginners (1996, 115).

I can accept that inconsistent application of facilitation and inquiry skills is inevitable to a degree, but believe that an aspect of my position in this research that further impacted on my facilitation practice was the multiple roles of facilitator, co-subject, and co-inquirer that I held. In the following section I reflect on how the experience of holding these multiple roles impacted on the inquiry process and outcomes.

Holding the multiple roles of facilitator, co-inquirer and co-subject

I agree with Heron who argues that the quality of a person's participation depends on their authentic engagement in each action phase and in the degree to which in each reflection phase, they are "*fully expressive, fully heard, and fully influential in decision-making, on a peer basis with every other group member*" (Heron, 1996, 61). My experience of facilitating the authentic participation of my co-inquirers was much more complex and challenging than I could have imagined. Looking back on the video tape of the collaborative inquiry sessions, I noted several missed opportunities primarily caused by my absorption in my role as co-subject, resulting in a failure to attend to dynamics and opportunities within the group. In the transcripts, I can see where my immersion in my subject position prevented me from picking up on cues from group members that could have aided a deeper level of inquiry into people's

understanding of key aspects of their experience. For example, Maureen identified that there were different understandings in the sector about the goal of advocacy and our role as advocates. Rather than probe for group members understanding of this key issue, I stepped into define what this aspect of our work meant to me. On the video tape I can see and hear that I provide a comprehensive definition in an emphatic tone of voice and refer to definitions of advocacy in the literature on domestic violence work.

Had I not been the initiating researcher and facilitator this contribution may have been appropriate here but in holding these roles I had more power and authority than other group member. I can see in the transcript that other group members do not add anything in terms of their understanding of advocacy after my intervention and I did not check for alternative perspectives or meanings here. There are other instances in the nine-day inquiry where a definitive statement from me seems to frame subsequent dialogue or to hinder further discussion. In contrast, when I stayed in the facilitator role, questioning, probing or just staying quiet, my co-inquirers were more likely to drive the dialogue and to share their understanding of key aspects of our work.

My experience leads me to question the limits of facilitating groups members' full participation when holding the facilitation role at the same time as that of co subject and co-researcher. I invited group members to step into facilitation roles on at least three occasions, but this did not happen, and my co-inquirers said they would prefer if I continued in this role. Group members repeatedly said they appreciated being able to just talk, reflect, and dialogue without having to take on other responsibilities. While regretting that facilitation was not shared, I also feel that it was right to adapt the collaborative inquiry methods to the needs of the group and to the project. This was a time limited inquiry in which nine busy, under resourced and over pressured domestic violence workers gave up their time to participate in this project. I felt that continuing in this role was something I could do that was appreciated and valued by my co-inquirers who had far less time, resources and support than I had to give to

this project. Perhaps holding only the facilitation and co-inquirer roles might have enabled a greater level of authentic collaboration from my co-researchers.

Alongside evidence in the transcripts and videotapes of imperfections and limitations of this inquiry, there is also much evidence of full and active engagement of all the group members and there are clear examples of group meaning making that led to valuable knowledge generation. Reason states the quality of an inquiry rests less on *“impersonal methodology”* and more on *“the development of healthy human interactions in a face-to face- group”* (Reason, 2002, 172). In the next sub-section, I discuss how group dynamics and relationships impacted on the quality of the inquiry.

The impact of group relationships on the quality of the inquiry

Any form of emancipatory research is in essence a relational process where democratic, nurturing and mutually beneficial relationships provide a bedrock for equal and full participation of all members (Brydon-Miller, 2008; Maguire, 2002). Much of our conversations in the initiation phase were about how we create a level of trust and safety that would support such relationships. Through forming a group contract, we individually and collectively took responsibility to create and support open, respectful, and democratic interactions. In process evaluations in sessions 3, 6 and 9, group members described relationships within the group as good humoured, respectful and open. As will be illustrated in Chapter 12, the support, trust and the safety created and held by the group was a key factor in enabling people to be open and to take time to fully articulate and critically examine their perspectives. Paradoxically however, I suspect that a desire to protect this group rapport affected our capacity to attain a deeper level of critical subjectivity and that this resulted in a certain amount of avoidance when it came to issues that could have led to the emergence of conflict within the group (Bray et al, 2000, Douglas, 2002).

The process was difficult and chaotic at times, but we found that we were able to emerge from this disorder and to build agreement on substantial areas in relation to the foundations of effective domestic violence work and an approach to education and learning that would be congruent with our values and goals. Both I and some of my co-inquirers did question the seeming ease with which we built agreement and

puzzled over the lack of group storming. In our process reflections we identified that there had been an absence of conflict in the group, but we were unable to explain why this was. I continued to hold a question about this lack of conflict and wondered if it was problematic or if it merely represented the fact that there was a substantial level of coherence in what people believed and thought.

After the collaborative inquiry finished, I was able to gain some insight that the lack of conflict in a group could result in a superficial level of inquiry. It is when conflict emerges that deeper learning can happen when the facilitator can support the group to delve deeper into their strongly held beliefs and attitudes.¹⁹ This is where discomfort and distress can emerge and where there is a fear that group togetherness will be ruptured (Douglas, 2002; Heron, 1996). However, a group of inquirers must be able to tolerate this discomfort and fear to enable a level of critical subjectivity in which we employ *“a very high degree of self-knowing, self-reflection, and co-operative criticism”* (Reason, 1998, 13).

I can see on reflection where we did avoid a deeper inquiry, particularly into issues relating to racism and how this could manifest internally in our organisations and in ourselves. This would have required us to be open to seeing ourselves and how we internalise racist assumptions reflected in the challenges of our co-inquirers. A deeper inquiry would most likely have brought up much distress and discomfort and possibly have led to conflict in the group. We stepped away from that challenge, instead concluding that this was yet again an area that needed deeper inquiry within the domestic violence sector.

Our group had quickly formed a culture that valued our togetherness and I question now whether the desire to maintain group cohesion took precedence in this instance, over a deeper and more honest look at an issue that is of central importance to our work (Douglas, 2002). As a peer and co-subject in this group, I too experienced the warmth and support of the group and I was reluctant to risk the positive group

¹⁹ I was able to gain a better insight into the implications of a lack of conflict in conversation with Dr Laura Formentti who provided this feedback to me about my research at the ESREA Spring Research School in April 2019.

dynamic that existed. This reluctance combined with some lack in my facilitation skills resulted in me missing an opportunity to support my co-inquirers to generate useful knowledge about themselves and their world (Mc Ardle, 2008). This experience emphasises the importance of engaging in ongoing and rigorous first-person inquiry, particularly when holding the role of facilitator in a collaborative inquiry group.

Ethical considerations

Collaborative inquiry is an emergent research process, where power and responsibility are shared by the co-inquirers. Determining the risks at initiation stage can therefore be challenging (Banks et al, 2013; Boser, 2006; Locke et al, 2013; Long et al, 2016). However, as I was familiar with the community in which this research is situated, I identified a number of possible risks. In addition, some key issues in the literature pointed to ethical issues that had to be considered and attended at different stages of this research project.

In the initiation phase, I provided an outline of possible risks and the steps that would be taken to minimise these in information material sent to organisations and potential participants. An ethic of reciprocity must be at the heart of any PAR project ensuring that benefits will accrue to all participants in the project and to the wider community (Long et al, 2016; Maiter et al, 2008). It was important that I be open and honest with participants and the domestic violence sector about the possibility that it may not be possible to resolve all issues and concerns through this research study. At the same time, I outlined the potential benefits that could result from the research project for individual participants, for the wider movement and the women and children that we work for. I was also clear about the benefits that I personally expect to gain in terms of gaining a PhD and career progression.

Participation and representativeness

Questions relating to how I as a researcher ensured that the recruitment process was fair, equitable, transparent, and accountable were considered. During the recruitment phase, I made detailed information about the approach to sampling available from the very first approaches to organisations and workers. The sampling approach used was intended to be as inclusive and representative of the sector as

possible with the only limitation being that participants must have a minimum of 4 years' service in a domestic violence organisation and that the inquiry group would have a maximum of 12 participants. I felt it was unlikely that there would be a surplus of volunteers wishing to participate in the inquiry and that a selection process would have to take place. However, planning for this unlikely eventuality, I committed to using the selection criteria and to provide information on the outcome of this to the sector. As nine women signed up to the inquiry a selection process was not needed.

Risks for participants

I viewed the participants not as vulnerable people but as empowered individuals who were able to weigh up the risks and benefits of participation in this research project and to make an informed decision about their involvement. Acknowledging the power and agency of each member, I nevertheless held a discussion with each of them individually prior to their participation to make sure they were fully aware of any potential risks. One of these risks was that as the women participating in this research were being released from their work to participate, their managers and colleagues knew of their involvement. The consent form contained a specific clause where participants were given the option to be identified as a member of this co-inquiry group or to remain anonymous. I warned group members that if they chose to remain anonymous, all attempts to protect their anonymity would be taken by group members, but that there was a risk they could be identified by a person external to the group who knew they were participating.

All of the participants chose to be identified as group members, however, as the inquiry approached its conclusion and we considered how the research report would be received, group members identified that within the report and any subsequent research outputs they wanted their individual contributions in the text to be anonymised and all identifying details to be removed. Thus, participants are named as members of the research group but pseudonyms are used in the text.²⁰ Both the joint research report and drafts of findings chapters were supplied to participants

²⁰ With the exception of the initiating researcher

before submission so that they could request the removal or editing of any text that they felt identified them or that created risk for them or another person.

The processes used in the co-inquiry group necessarily attended to the impact of participation and affective aspects of participants' experience and involvement in the research. Integrated in the process were on-going de-brief sessions and experiential exercises to enable members to become reflexively aware of how they are affected by their participation and how they could continue to contribute to open, democratic and mutually beneficial relationships. Most importantly, I knew that the positive relationships built in the group would be the foundation on which the success of this collaborative inquiry depended. The findings illustrate this groups' commitment to a set of covenantal ethics that nurtured interactions and relationships that were characterised by collaboration, respect for difference, self-care and care for others.

Power and relationships

How power relations are located and operate within the domestic violence sector emerged as a concern within the group. The inquiry group identified some troubling dilemmas within the domestic violence sector that impact on their work and they were unsure of the reaction if they raised these issues. Group members expressed fears that doing so could create conflict and division within the domestic violence sector or create risks for the sector in terms of how this information would be interpreted by more powerful state agencies. We were aware that the funding and monitoring structure for the domestic violence sector was under review and that organisations and advocates were operating in a very insecure and shifting funding and policy environment. In this context there was a risk that some of the "uncomfortable" data or "bad" news (Fine et al, 2000) generated by the research could be used to justify a reduction of or re-allocation of resources or the imposition of conditions of funding that could undermine the mission and goals of the sector. However, we were uncomfortable with avoiding challenging "truths" about the domestic violence sector and felt that it would be meaningless and antithetical to the goals of this research if the knowledge generated was not shared with our colleagues (Banks et al, 2013, Fouche and Chubb, 2016).

Having discussed these fears, the group agreed a strategy that would enable them to share the findings of the research in such a way as to minimise any possible negative consequences. The group committed to engage with colleagues and others in a respectful, honest and solution focused manner and to keep the focus on a structural level analysis rather than placing responsibility for any failures or weaknesses with individuals or individual organisations (Fine et al, 2000). We recognised that it was vital to place the knowledge generated from this research in context, particularly in relation to the chronic underfunding of the sector. We also agreed that it would be essential to place the information in the context of the strengths, achievements, and successes of the sector. Group members identified the importance of maintaining a commitment to open, collaborative, and inclusive processes and relationships that characterised our collaborative inquiry experience as we continued to work together towards the realisation of our shared vision.

Ethical approval was granted for this research by the Maynooth University Research Ethics Committee on the 16th March 2017.²¹

Data analysis and presentation of findings

Organising and making sense of the data

The data generated in this inquiry was substantial running to 507 pages of text. I was faced with a somewhat overwhelming task to organise this data in a way that I could code and analyse the contributions of each of the 10 inquiry members over eight days²² of reflection and dialogue and portray as accurately as possible the dialogic process which enabled us to gain a deeper understanding of and build shared standpoints on some key aspects of our work. I identified thematic analysis as developed and explicated by Braun and Clarke (2006) as an appropriate method to organise and analyse the data set.

²¹ See appendix 12.

²² The collaborative inquiry was nine days in total, however, session 1 was not recorded and there was no transcript of this session to draw from when generating findings.

Initially, I attempted to analyse the data with reference to theory that informs my interpretation of the findings. I found that this got in the way of presenting the voices of group members as accurately as possible and in portraying the process of collaborative inquiry that we employed. For this reason, I chose not to apply a theory driven analysis to the data nor to include a discussion section within the findings chapters. My analysis of the data is to some degree data driven, as it was initially the questions that we as a group formed and the ways in which we categorised the data that provided the preliminary structure for coding (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Both I and my co-inquirers had done some organising and analysis of the data during the collaborative inquiry. We were in effect creating memos from the data in an iterative process to help us become more conscious of the knowledge we were co-generating, of the shared standpoint we were building, and of differences and convergences in interests that complicated a seemingly cohesive standpoint in the group (Braun and Clarke, 2006; 2016; Savin-Baden, 2004). Working with the same categorisations as created by the group as a starting point. I soon found that I needed to add to, merge, and splice categories to capture the totality of the data generated and the connections between categories.

Voice and representation: Reconciling individual and group perspectives

One of the biggest challenges for me in producing this thesis has been to reconcile my position as being solely responsible for writing this thesis with the collaborative nature of our inquiry. I have been acutely aware that in this endeavour I have moved further away from our shared project of knowledge creation into a position where I have taken sole responsibility and credit in producing this thesis. For some weeks I struggled with just whose voice was predominant in this report. Was I giving voice equally to all ten participants or was it my voice that was centre stage? As I analysed the data and drew interpretations from it, was I responding only to the questions generated by the group, or was I being led by questions and interests I had which, although they overlapped substantially with those of the group, also differed in emphasis and focus in some ways.

I have been helped to answer some of these questions by reading about Natasha's Klocker's (2012) account of her predicament as a PhD student employing Participatory Action Research. Klocker conceptualised her individual project to produce a thesis and the collaborative research project "*as two separate but overlapping bodies of work*" (2012, 155). By conceptualising this research project in this way, I have been able to gain clarity about the boundaries and overlaps in *my* research project and *our* research project. Our research project was a collaborative inquiry out of which we generated much data. The group analysed and interpreted this data to produce a report for our wider community of practice and we continue to work together to use the knowledge we collectively generated to motivate change in the field of education and learning for domestic violence workers. My thesis draws from the same data, but the analysis and interpretation of this data is informed by my individual perspective and the specifically feminist research and theoretical lens I bring to this undertaking.

Presenting the data

I have two goals in presenting my analysis of the data. Firstly, I present the findings to illustrate the knowledge that was generated by this group of co-inquirers about their work and some of the critical issues and dilemmas that trouble them as domestic violence workers. Secondly, throughout the presentation of findings, I attempt to make visible the process of collaborative inquiry and how it facilitated collaborative knowledge generation. There are four core elements to our group process that I wish to make discernible. Firstly, how collaborative inquiry enabled each group member to reflect on and share their experiences and perspectives, thus making their tacit knowing explicit, articulable and available for critical reflection. Secondly, how the dialogic process core to collaborative inquiry was key in deepening knowledge about aspects of our experience. Thirdly, how the process of collaborative inquiry enabled the group to shape shared standpoints. Finally, how group members came to know through their experience of participation in this inquiry, the importance of collaborative, democratic, and dialogic learning spaces.

Each chapter ends with a section I call reflexive considerations. In this section, I reflect on the findings in each chapter with reference to our process of collaborative inquiry and the merits and limitations of our methodological approach in generating really useful knowledge. This section is written as a first person inquiry and I reference some of the literature that helped me develop my thinking as I reflected on the process and my role within it.

Our inquiry route, while meandering and nonlinear at times, did follow a trajectory in which we built on the knowledge and group standpoints agreed in previous sessions. It was important to present the findings in a way that the reader could get some understanding of the knowledge building process. Therefore, the findings chapters are largely ordered chronologically, following the inquiry route that we took as a group. This chronological presentation of data is disrupted somewhat by additional data generated in session 8 when a review of the draft framework we produced helped us deepen our understanding about critical aspects of our work. There are also places in the findings chapters where I include a quote from a session other than the session that is the primary focus of the chapter. This is to make links to, contextualise and provide further illustration of group members' perspectives. However, in general, each findings chapter draws from data generated in one session or over two successive sessions, where a focus on specific aspects of domestic violence continued from one to the other.²³

Summary

My intention as the initiating researcher of this collaborative inquiry was that by utilising feminist participatory action research methodologies I would help create the conditions in which domestic violence workers were centrally situated as knowledge producers. I hoped that the participants, as fully self-determining people, would be equally involved in decisions relating to the research content and method. I wanted to centre an intersectional and reflexive approach to our inquiry and to support an extended inquiry within our wider community of practice. In FPAR I found a methodology and method that met these criteria.

²³ For a guide to reading the data see appendix 13.

FPAR enabled us as a group of women invested in the work and future of the domestic violence sector in Ireland, to draw on our experiential and tacit knowing to generate a shared body of knowledge for use in motivating and informing changes towards restoring the emancipatory potential of our work and activism. The emergent nature of this research was at times challenging but ultimately this enabled the group to develop a method that met our needs. Staying in a reflective and dialogic space for the full nine sessions contrasted with group members every day experience. We had so much experience to draw from, much of it unexamined, that it was clear that these nine days were needed for the group to feel that we had excavated our experience for meaning to the extent that we were then ready to act by bringing our findings to our wider community of practice.

Reflexive considerations in this chapter identify factors that both enhanced and undermined the quality of this inquiry. The dynamics and relationships in our collaborative inquiry group intersected with my dual role as a facilitator and co-subject and impacted in both helpful and less helpful ways on the quality of this research. There were some instances where we drew back from confronting difference most likely because of fear of conflict and disruption of the positive group dynamic that developed from early in the project. However, our reflections on the process indicate that group members felt they were able to make their unique contribution and to express their views and differences. There were high levels of contributions and engagement from all co-inquirers and while the inquiry was not ideal, I believe we created a research process that was *with* people and not *about* people (Heron, 1996; Mc Ardle, 2008). Reflexive considerations at the end of each of the following findings chapters provide the reader with further insight into how the chosen methodology was utilised and some of the merits and limitations therein.

Chapter 5: Prologue to and overview of findings

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to contextualise the findings chapters by presenting data from the launching phase of the inquiry that illustrates how the group came to agree a focus for the research which was then reflected in the formulation of an overarching research question. In the previous chapter, I briefly referenced the three shared interests that group members agreed would form the focus for this inquiry. The chapter starts with a presentation of findings that illustrate how the group came to agree these three key aspects of the research focus. The chapter continues with a presentation of findings focused on how the group formulated the research question and identified a topic that would enable us to get into the inquiry.

Identifying the inquiry focus: Agreeing three shared interests

The focus for this inquiry was jointly developed by group members. Participants reflected on and shared with their co-inquirers what motivated them to get involved in the research and what they hoped could be achieved through their participation. Numerous concerns and hopes were articulated by each group member. In subsequent dialogue, we built agreement about three key research concerns related to our work as domestic violence workers. They were: firstly, a belief that a shared education and learning framework could contribute to the establishment in practice of a consistent and coherent approach within the wider sector responding to domestic abuse. Secondly, group members were concerned that a future education and learning framework would build upon the knowledge and expertise of the domestic violence sector and thereby strengthen workers' capacities to engage in the multi-faceted and wide ranging nature of domestic violence work. Group members believed that a recognised framework underpinned by this knowledge and expertise would help in addressing the under valuing and lack of understanding for the role and contribution of domestic violence organisations and workers. Thirdly, group members wished to see approaches to education and learning that are congruent with the values, goals and practice of domestic violence work.

Creating a common foundation for domestic violence work

A shared desire to see the establishment of a common foundation for domestic violence work was identified as one of the primary motivations for people's participation in this collaborative inquiry. All group members perceived the domestic violence sector to be one in which there were differences in relation to how workers and organisations both understood and responded to domestic violence. Claire, feeding back to the large group after the small group discussion said:

Another thing we said as well is that there is a lot of diversity in the belief systems of services so a focus on education will bring that diversity together so that we have a common platform, and that was something that we thought was really important because the idea of trying to get everyone to understand domestic violence in one way... you can't force people to do that but having a platform to bring that diversity together is crucial because otherwise it just gets lost in bubbles and lost in the ether and a lot of really important knowledge and experience gets lost too.

While recognising the value of diversity within the domestic violence sector, Claire nevertheless felt that it was important to:

... figure out where does some of that diversity come from and does some of it need to be challenged and some of it not? Because ... I think if you go back to the idea that lots of services and organisations can be working in bubbles, sometimes you are working with the best of intentions but you do not realise that something is not a good idea because you are not getting a chance to be objective about it so diversity, yes, it's necessary and it's good but there needs to be some sort of parameters around that.

Tessa, who had been in this small group discussion with Claire, interjected to clarify what they identified as a diversity in perspective within the sector.

Just, if anyone is wondering what the diversity was, the diversity is maybe in a political thing, in that, what standpoint is it? Is it about human rights, is it about social justice, is it a feminist perspective and then with diversity again do we work with just women and children? Do we work with perpetrator programmes? If we work with women can we support men who are being abused? So, there is so much, in the 41²⁴ when we meet. We never know who

²⁴ Reference to number of domestic violence services that met under safe Ireland umbrella. This figure is currently 39.

is doing what and “Oh, you started working with men! When did that happen?” That kind of thing, wasn’t it? Like we are just surprised. We were wondering, how can they do that? We think that’s quite difficult and how do they decide they are going to do that?

Tessa identifies that organisations within the sector have different ways of framing domestic violence as an issue and how some have different views of their role and subsequently develop responses that seem to challenge basic assumptions about the purpose of domestic violence work. Responding to Claire and Tessa’s reflections, Aoife spoke about how, in her experience, the spaces that used to exist in the sector for discussion and knowledge exchange are no longer available to domestic violence workers.

I think it was interesting what you were saying about diversity Tessa, you know, about that whole sector now being expected to work with perpetrators, or that some parts of the sector are now working with men, and where did that discussion happen and that to me is really missing and you know? ... God, I miss the bad old days ... when we’d be having rows about things. But they were constructive in the sense that we could debate this out in the open, you know? And it’s like that’s not happening now and we don’t know what each other is doing. So that seems to be a bit of a common theme as well I’m hearing, is what’s happening to the sector.

Aoife’s concern was not only about how this lack of coherence would be perceived by those external to the sector but also about how it would impact on the women for whom we work.

... if there is no common, common foundation or belief it can go all over the place and there is a danger there that how I work with a woman is completely different to how Jane works with a woman and then that woman is caught in the middle. If there are two workers in a refuge say who work differently. I mean, we all work differently but if there isn’t a common belief, you know.

Aoife identified how this inconsistency in practice not only fractures a sectoral response but can also lead to an incoherent response within domestic violence organisations.

Both Claire and Aoife’s reflections referred to their experience of working in what Claire termed as “*bubbles*”. A lack of opportunity to dialogue with colleagues about

some of the critical issues named resulted in these group members' lack of understanding about why some decisions are made. In addition, Claire stated that she believed that the fragmented nature of domestic violence work resulted in a lot of valuable knowledge and experience getting lost. A shared concern about the impacts of fragmentation on domestic violence work intersected with a shared belief within the group that workers practice and well-being would be strengthened and sustained by the provision of an education and learning framework underpinned by knowledge and expertise developed by the domestic violence sector.

Building on the expertise and contribution of the anti-domestic violence movement.

Passing on the knowledge

Claire's concern that the fragmented nature of the domestic violence sector led to workers "*getting lost in bubbles*" and her belief that this resulted in the loss of valuable knowledge and experience was shared by her co-inquirers. Group members spoke of their experience of domestic violence work as being complex, multi-faceted, and challenging, and they were concerned that the lack of a shared education programme meant that it was difficult to pass on the knowledge and expertise developed within the sector to new and more inexperienced workers. Access to education and learning opportunities was thus identified by all group members as key in the development of the domestic violence worker as a knowledgeable and skilled practitioner. In the following segment, three group members reported back from a breakout group discussion on the shared interests that they identified drew them to participate in the research.

Grainne: ... a person would have to be trained in many hats, to wear many hats, because our work is so diverse and a person could be doing this one day or that another day, a radio interview one day, you know, or listening to somebody another day so, it's all so diverse. So maybe a build-up of modules. Things like advocacy, brief intervention, motivational interviewing, those kinds of things would build towards education, but the big thing would be understanding the dynamics of domestic abuse and how it plays out. We touched on vicarious trauma as well, as the workers are hearing so much, dealing with so much, having to worry about so much, that self-care needs

to be part of anything. That the person needs to understand the need for self-care to be able to handle this work.

Charley: Another thing we touched on, there's lots of things we touched down in our...

Rachel: Meanderings

Charley ... people come into this work from very diverse avenues of life anyway. Some are survivors, some are community development workers and they all come with a very different level of expertise and skills set and that's why we digressed into jumping ahead of ourselves. Thinking about what would make the curriculum up an (inaudible). It's probably going to be at degree level by the time we incorporate everything for the amount of work that needs to be done. But we also identified that it would be important that if there was going to be a qualification at the end of it that it was going to be reviewed yearly because of changes in the law or social trends and things like that so it could always be updated. So, anyone who was going through the education and getting qualified would be completely up to date with what's happening, and the here and now.

Grainne: Yeah, we also spoke about passion for the work, people bring a passion for the work and it's kind of different to maybe, you know, an office clerk who doesn't need to be too passionate about his work

Aoife: Because we're all in it for the pay (laughter).

Grainne: And then temporary workers and CE workers who may be as happy going anywhere, you know? They just land in a service, that you know, working alongside people that may not have the passion as we have, that can present its own difficulties.

Charley: Yeah, we also said, we touched on it last time, that the different entry levels, that the qualification, it was more that if it was going to be a frontline service, that it would be kind of an a la carte type modules, that these were the important things you need to be doing if you are going to be working in a frontline service whereas if you are working in a refuge, there is a different skill set that needs to be identified and trained in as well and its different if you work in a helpline. So, it's almost like different entry levels, that sort of you, that might be quite helpful to the service, to the sector.

Rachel: The fact that we are all motivated in the same way, that we always expend ourselves, that we always go one step beyond what we're expected to do or we are asked to do because we always have the service user in our frontline basically, that I suppose in terms of how we are dragged between this and that, that it would be great if it was a multi-skilled, a multi-faceted approach to education. I don't know how we do it, ... How can you write down how we do it?

In this segment Grainne, Charley and Rachel begin to identify why an education and learning framework is important for domestic violence workers and they emphasise the need to equip the worker to respond to the multi-faceted and wide ranging nature of the work in different service settings. The challenge of capturing the multi-faceted nature of domestic violence work and the multiplicity of skills needed by a domestic violence worker is referred to by Rachel who also talks about an apparent boundlessness to domestic violence work, where the worker is “*dragged between this and that*”, motivated by their willingness to go one step beyond what they are expected to do. Group members perceived the multi-faceted nature of domestic violence work to be both a strength and a challenge.

Tessa: Can I add in something? Well, I’ll see what everyone thinks. We had a conversation earlier today about how women who might present to services, that they might have other stuff happening in their lives. They might have addiction or mental health issues, or their children might have additional needs, whatever, so just to recognise that a woman who accesses our service, she’s accessing our service for domestic violence, but our support goes beyond that. And if we are developing an education or a training programme that we need to be aware of and can respond to those additional facets of her life. Rather than just say, well we just train in domestic violence, and, off you go.

Rebecca: I’ll only ask you that one question.

Tessa: That’s exactly it. But just to be aware that things will come up and it’s not in addition to domestic violence, it is her issue and that’s what we will help her with. And court is, and all those things.

Me: Yeah, I think that’s important because our expertise, we must be able to respond to those complex needs, don’t we? And we have to be able to provide a holistic response to women. You know, I can only deal with the fact that you are abused but the fact that your homeless.

Rebecca: Nothing got to do with me.

Me: And I do think that is one of the huge strengths of domestic violence services, is that we refuse to fragment women’s lives like that, whereas often they’re sent from billy to jack, from billy to jack elsewhere, whereas we do try to hold that complexity. I think it is a strength.

Aoife: On the other hand, there’s an expectation that we do everything as well.

Researcher: Yeah, that is true. Well people will always try to pass the buck if they can.

Charley: Is that just the recognition that the impact of domestic violence, we are going out into every aspect of the woman's life. It's not just as simple as just sitting there and give her tea and sympathy and saying, right off you go.

Incorrect expectations of and misunderstandings about domestic violence work and workers emerged as a concern for group members and they wished to contribute to creating a clear profile of domestic violence work through their participation in the inquiry.

Creating a clear profile for domestic violence work

In early stages of this research a number of group members identified that the lack of a clear profile for the work of domestic violence organisations impacted on their work in various ways. Both Tessa and Charley had encountered other professionals who believed that domestic violence organisations only provided refuge and they had no understanding of the community based support and advocacy services they offered.

Tessa: I don't think people realise the extent of services out there, the opportunity. I had a chat on Friday with a barrister and he does some work with [name of two domestic violence services]. This was the most bizarre conversation, he's lovely, but I had the most bizarre conversation, he said, so you don't have a refuge, so, where will I meet the women? It was like, we have an office. "It never occurred to me, it never occurred to me that you have an office".

Charley: Because some social workers assume that every domestic violence service has got a refuge. I know, we've had that quite a lot, right, I'm coming to your refuge and we're like, we're sorry, we don't have one, we're just a service, we're not attached to a refuge. And some people just can't get their head around that at all. And there does need to be that distinction made.

These experiences suggest that domestic violence work is synonymous for some with refuges and this creates a lack of visibility for the range of other responses provided by domestic violence organisations.

Group members identified that in addition to a lack of understanding of their work, stigma and secrecy still surround the issue of domestic violence, resulting in negative perceptions of domestic violence work. Maureen talked about how people "took a

step back” when she told them what she did. Group members perceived that women blaming attitudes contributed to the stigmatisation of women who experience domestic abuse and by implication therefore, to domestic violence organisations.

Grainne: You’ve a lot of sympathy for sick children and it’s totally not their fault. Older people and all this but women in domestic violence it’s, they’re somewhat to blame, they’re grown up women, they should know better.

Tessa: I find it works the same with addiction. I worked with the (inaudible) services and it’s always the addict’s fault, you know? As far as people are concerned. So, do you know, they’re similar.

Maureen: I even read, it’s funny I read a report this week and it was saying that lung cancer, they’ve done a study that just came out and people are less empathic for people who have lung cancer (inaudible) because it’s considered as (inaudible) and you knew what you were doing.

For women experiencing domestic abuse, this questioning of the legitimacy of a woman’s claims to support and protection contrasts with that of children, who in a sense are seen as the “deserving victim”. The legitimacy of providing services to people who are perceived as culpable in the abuse they are subjected to is questioned.

Claire: ... there is still stigma about domestic violence work, there is no doubt about that, you see it all the time.

While we may wish to create a greater awareness of domestic violence work as a valuable profession, our own desire to avoid negative reactions and our fears for the safety of the women we work with can prevent us from speaking up and challenging misconceptions.

Rachel: I was thinking about the confidentiality and the stigma because the stigma is there, it’s just tangible or you just know, or you can sense it but there is that kind of confidentiality around. I know when I went to work in a refuge first, I was afraid to tell anyone I worked in a refuge because somebody might know somebody who might know somebody, do you know what I mean? And then the sensitivity around women’s experiences that you didn’t talk about and just that piece as well. So, I’m just trying to see where both maybe fit in together where you can be, you can talk about the issue openly and honestly without divulging the information about a woman, do you know what I mean?

Misunderstandings about our work, negative and stigmatising attitudes about women who experience domestic abuse and the organisations set up to support them, and our own need to maintain privacy and confidentiality contribute to a context in which group members experienced that they struggled to be heard and to be taken seriously by other agencies and practitioners with whom they sought to cooperate.

Valuing the contribution of domestic violence organisations, workers, and survivors.

Aoife referenced a recent experience of this struggle when a state agency initiated a major national programme addressing domestic violence without taking on board the views of the domestic violence sector.

... we weren't consulted and it's not the kind of campaign we would run as a sector and one of the women said it was offensive and I'm thinking, but they just won't listen. I do think we need to be getting back to the grassroots to get the voices of those women heard.

Rebecca talked about hearing views expressed by personnel in a state agency that funded organisations that refuge was no longer needed as service for women.

It's being going around a long time now and it is becoming more... you're nodding (indicating Jane) and it's like refuge is crisis, and that's what they seem to forget. That's for "I need to be in that, and the doors are locked and closed and I'm safe and I can rattle in here if I need to". And like its "no, they need a different house to live in, move them here". No, they need a safe place to be able to fall apart and then pull themselves back up again and whether they decide to go home again or move on, but there will always be a need. That just blows my mind when I hear that, there's no need of refuge. It really, really scares me.

Rebecca's knowledge of the risks and impacts of domestic abuse for women informs her understanding of refuge provision as core to what the domestic violence sector offers to women. She went on to share several experiences of where she heard misinformed attitudes and ideas being expressed by state actors with more power than her refuge organisation and expressed fear about the future for domestic violence services and women and children. Rebecca had had to counter arguments from powerful state funders who critiqued refuges for "*creating co-dependency*

here” because of their open door policies and the fact that many refused to put a limit to the time a woman could stay in them. Rebecca experienced that she and her colleagues were not heard when they attempted to inform personnel from state agencies about the necessity for refuges and explained the reasons for their open door and open ended policies.

Alongside these experiences of not being heard and the de-valuing of the knowledge and expertise of domestic violence organisations, group members spoke of some successful collaborations that resulted in positive outcomes for women. Charley provided an example of how a recognition of the expertise of her organisation has influenced court decisions in her region. As a result of her and her colleagues ongoing court advocacy, their District Court Judge has changed his opinion because *“We’ve educated him so now he has a better understanding.”*

Some group members emphasised that it was not only recognition of and value for the knowledge of the domestic violence sector that was important, but recognition and value for the contribution of the sector and the resultant benefits this work had brought to society. Jane felt that it was important to recognise that as a result of the anti-domestic violence movement:

... experience that has been gained and the influence that it has had... And the influence that has had, it’s not just if we know a lot, it has made a difference.

This recognition had to include an appreciation of the role that women who experience domestic violence have contributed as knowledge producers. Group members acknowledged and valued the knowledge and understanding they had accumulated as a result of their ongoing interactions and encounters with women who as Charley stated, *“are the ultimate knowledge creators”*. Grainne felt it was important to *“acknowledge that our expertise comes from the women”*. Some group members, including myself, also positioned women as agents of change.

Me: ... for every woman who does regain her power and gains insight that this is about his power and his abuse of power and about male power, there’s change, you know, accumulating all the time.

Thus, while group members were concerned to assert the value of the knowledge and contribution of the domestic violence sector, this did not mean positioning themselves as more knowledgeable about a woman's situation than she was herself, but that women and workers supported each other's' knowledge building as they interacted with each other in domestic violence services.

Jane: It's a feedback, isn't it, that what we do is fed into our work by the women we work with, so it's not just us and our opinions, it's also what we are getting back. And talking about peer support groups and things like that.

Charley: Yeah, it's that collective way of working.

Positioning women as agents of change alongside the worker reflects Aoife's statement about women needing to be heard by the state and her belief that restoring the grassroots nature of domestic violence social change work was essential so that the knowledge that women experiencing domestic violence and the sector held informed the state in its responses.

And I suppose it's not as much about slating [name of state agency] as much as it's about, hold on a minute, we are the sector, we know what we are talking about, women know what they are talking about and they need to inform you and it needs to stop coming this way (indicating top down movement).

For Aoife as for some other group members, restoring and valuing what Aoife defined as, "*our grassroots origins*", not only related to ensuring that this accumulated knowledge was valued and instrumental in influencing positive change, but was also about concerns that any future education and learning contributed to this restoration and was congruent with the values and goals of domestic violence work.

Seeking a congruence between approaches to learning and domestic violence work

As illustrated in the previous section, group members emphasised the need to ensure that the knowledge and expertise that had been accumulated over many years of practice within the domestic violence sector provided the foundation on which education and learning was built. Feeding back from a breakout group discussion, Charlotte stated that an education and learning framework must provide:

... a solid foundation formed from the recognition and value of the expertise that currently exists, what would be an effective and appropriate approach to create a qualification in DV... We just felt it was important to get it sort of watertight, so that it couldn't be diluted. Say [name of state agency] got a hold of it and wanted to accredit it, they can't dilute it down.

Charley's statement reflects a shared concern in the group that a future learning framework could be shaped by priorities and demands from more powerful state actors rather than by the domestic violence sector. She identified that this could "dilute" an approach to education and thus to domestic violence work, indicating a fear that this would weaken the sector through a co-optation of its work.

Jane and Aoife talked about their concerns that increasing professionalisation through university based education and qualifications would result in a further de-valuing of the sector's expertise and undermine the nature of women-centred domestic violence work. They shared the view that an education and learning programme needed to counteract the kind of professionalisation processes that had resulted in the erosion of feminist practice and social change work:

Aoife: And in some ways with the professionalisation and the funding, we kind of lost solidarity with women seeking support from the point of view of em, ... it became more of a them and us, you know? We're the experts and professionals that are going to help you. And then we talked about the importance of moving back to empowering women, but really, I think the key thing is taking that learning that we have, the knowledge that we have and valuing it, you know? Doing something with that, because we have it. And I think we were talking about as well, less of a degree course and more of an apprenticeship, because one of the concerns that we had in our group is that if people just went off and did a degree in it, does that make a "they're the experts" and the them and us thing, and excludes and maybe makes it a very middle-class movement then, the top down sort of thing. So that's what we ... eh, am I missing anything?

Jane: Just the one thing I would add is that, it's the thing about social change, it did make social change

Aoife: Yes

Jane: So that worked, okay? And if we go towards the academic, we throw that out, the social change we have made as a movement. Because none of this would be here, none of us would be here, if those women who started it went there. They worked with women, you know that solidarity part, none of

that change would have been made, we'd still be, you know, women would have to leave work when they get married, you know, all that stuff, we'd still be at that point. So, value that, that's important, we can still do that.

At this early stage of the research, not all group members had such clear stances as Jane and Aoife on where education and learning should be located and how it should be provided for. Nevertheless, other group members did have concerns about the kind of approach that would be taken. Claire talked about the need to create a balance between creating a framework that had external value but that did not exclude learners who had not participated in formal education at 3rd level.

... the balance is that you create something that people really value. So, it's valued but you are not alienating people out who have not been in formal education, maybe ever, but they have this wealth of knowledge and experience. And they could be afraid that, Jesus I've never written an essay, ever, and that can be really terrifying for people and immediately they say, "no, I can't do that". How awful and what a loss. So, it's having the balance that you don't alienate people but that you create something that people think, oh, sure anyone can do that. You know what I mean? That some people may have an attitude towards something that, you know, it's like, that's not a great qualification or it's not whatever.

Other group members felt it was essential that the approach to education and learning centred on collaborations with and accountability to women who experience domestic abuse.

Me: ... at the end of the day the women who can validate it, are the women themselves. You know, we can validate it to a certain degree, from our experience, we own our experience, and we have a lot of knowledge, but at the end of the day, the people who can validate and say "yeah, that's going to work" are the women themselves.

Group members came to the research with an awareness of the challenges inherent in seeking external legitimacy for domestic violence work while seeking to protect the core values and practice principles that they believed underpinned effective responses. Thus, a focus for the research was not only on how the expertise and knowledge of the sector could underpin a future framework, but on how approaches

to education, learning, and formal recognition must both protect and restore some of the core principles and processes of effective domestic violence work.

Some group members felt ambiguous about the professionalisation of the domestic violence sector and yet there was a shared understanding of the need to be seen as equal partners with other professionals in the community. Tessa encapsulated some of the unease about formal recognition for the knowledge and expertise of domestic violence workers.

Do you know earlier that we need to be recognised as professionals, and my fear is, well it's not a fear. What I wouldn't like to see is us being a type of professionalism that our funders would approve of. I want us to be professional, a professional qualification that we can stand by and be proud of, not something that they can be like "I like that".

Tessa's concern that professional qualifications would be of a kind that the sector could "*stand by and be proud of*" reflects concerns expressed by Charley, Aoife and Jane about the risk of co-optation by state agencies on whom organisations depend for their survival. An awareness of the implications arising from different approaches to education and learning was thus a third shared interest of the inquiry group members.

Having agreed the shared interests that would form our research focus, the group then worked collaboratively to agree a launching research question that would encapsulate all of these three interests.

Formulating a research question

Building on our agreements about a focus for our joint inquiry, the group proceeded to shape a research question. Participants suggested wording to include in the question which was then accepted, modified or set aside by the group. A focus on ensuring that the question referred to the knowledge and expertise of the domestic violence sector and a recognition that a future education and learning framework should build upon this foundation was emphasised. Charley proposed that the research question should address how education and learning could contribute to :

... a solid foundation formed from the recognition and value of the expertise that currently exists.

Claire's suggestion for wording also reflected this concern.

... what education/learning framework will recognise, value and build upon our existing expertise.

As we worked collaboratively to agree the question wording Aoife said:

I think that what is striking me is the importance of the question itself, the research question, from the point of view of, like what you were talking about Claire. If it's outsourced to somebody else. If we frame the question and it's ours, that informs what the education and training needs are. Am I making sense? And somebody else, well maybe they could, but if out's our wording, then [name of state agency] can't come along and say, well we're going to take that and, am I making sense?

Aoife's recognised that how we formed the questions could have implications for the direction we took in our inquiry. She asked of the group:

... is there a place for, like, there is no denying where this work came from, it came from grassroots feminists, that's where it came from ... But with the foundations, how to people feel about feminist foundations. Is that a no, no?

Responding to Aoife's proposal Rachel said:

I think if we are holding on to the grassroots that's what it is you know, and then the research can inform if that is the right approach to that going forward, you know what I mean? So if we say it we're naming it.

Rachel, whilst agreeing to the inclusion of the word feminism in the research question provides provisional approval, indicating that part of our inquiry had to include critical reflection on whether a feminist approach was the "*right approach*".

Grainne felt that inclusion of the word feminist was important because:

It's setting us apart, well this is us and this is very clear, moving away from this generic DV stuff.

Group members agreed to include a reference to feminist knowledge in the research question, even though, at this early stage of the research, we had not delved in any substantial way into nor critically reflected on what a feminist perspective on violence against women meant for each participant.

Wording about the approach to education was also proposed for the research question. Charley suggested that the question should indicate our intention to identify *“an appropriate approach to create a qualification in domestic violence work”*. Group members considered what appropriate meant for them.

Aoife: Appropriate to me, well what’s coming up for me when my kind of slant on it is appropriate to the woman and therefore its reminding me of a conversation, we were having that somehow the education must be informed by the women. So, like it’s a co-educational approach whereby, so we were just having this discussion, so say if it was kind of like an apprenticeship that the steps would also be informed by the women.

Jane: Collaborative?

Aoife: Collaborative.

I proposed that the wording should indicate that education and learning was not just about building and passing on the knowledge of the domestic violence sector, but also be about continual learning and development. I proposed that the words progressive, open and dynamic be used in the question.

... progressive because its open to the new. There’s always going to be new research. Dynamic because it’s always moving forward and relating to other things, so it’s open, it’s not like stuck, and open, so it’s open to new perspectives. Do you know what I mean? So, it’s not just, you know, we have to bring in expertise and knowledge from outside as well, it’s not all just us.

Group members agreed to include these adjectives to describe the kind of approach to education and learning that we wanted to focus on in our inquiry. Some of the group members queried the use of the word qualification in the question, deeming it to limit the inquiry by setting an expectation at this early stage of the inquiry that this was what we as a group agreed was necessary.

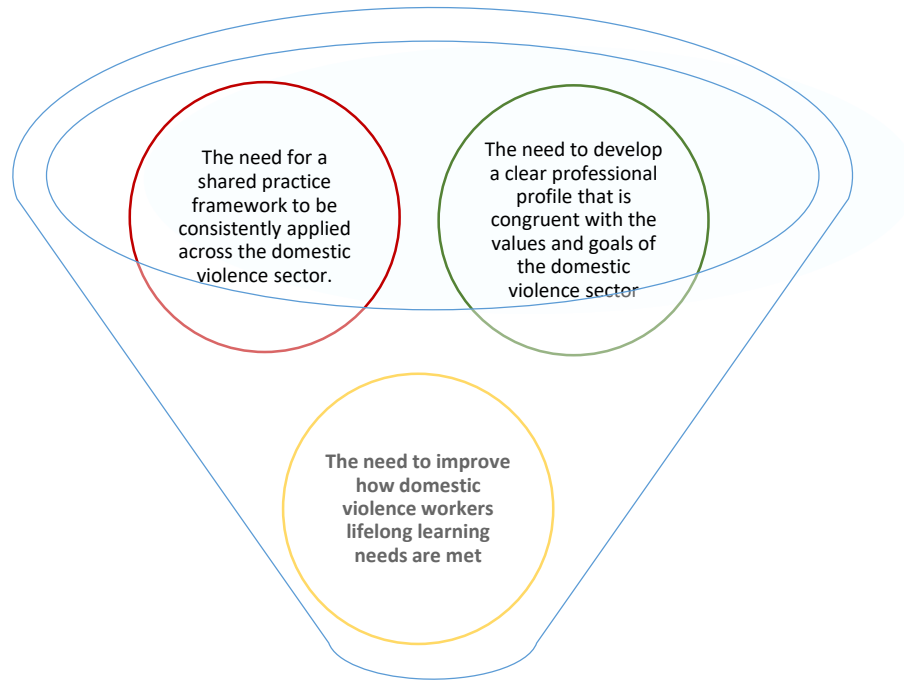
Rebecca: And that it doesn't have to be a qualification that you're thinking of, it could be an apprenticeship, whatever, but qualification was the word.

Aoife: It could be recognition

Rebecca: Recognition of it

The following figure illustrates the formation of the research questions encompassing the three shared areas of interest.

Figure 1: Research interests to research question



Over arching research question

What approach to education and learning will recognise, value and build upon our feminist foundations and existing expertise and provide collaborative, progressive, dynamic and open learning for the domestic violence sector in Ireland?

Having agreed this question, Jane posed the following question to the group:

Because if we're saying, education and learning, recognising, value and build upon our feminist foundation, I kind of wonder, it's kind of very, what can I say, a very nebulous phrase in a way. It means what I think it means to me. But I'm not sure, it means to me what it means to other people and if that's the foundation maybe that's what we need to be looking at first, so. How do we almost contain that?

Claire and Maureen, responding to Jane, were also keen to provide space for inquiry into people's different identifications with and understandings of feminisms.

Claire: But I think that piece is very important because it's assumed isn't it, oh yeah, feminist. But I think we need to have a conversation about it to be clear. And who knows we might all be on the same page but until we talk about that we won't know that.

Maureen: ... but and the same with the feminist foundations, it's a small group and we're probably a lot on the same page as well which I am conscious of, you know. We might need to bring in other perspectives that aren't our perspectives if you know what I mean? Just to challenge us. Particularly for the feminist foundations part of it.

Thus, feminism as a framing perspective for domestic violence work was identified at this early stage of the inquiry as fundamental to some group members' identity as domestic violence workers but as a perspective that needed to be subjected to critical reflection as part of our inquiry. We agreed that inquiring into what each of us understood as the foundations of domestic violence work would therefore form the first topic area for our inquiry.

Conclusion

In the launching stage of the research, the group began to unspool threads of inquiry that we followed throughout our nine days together. In this stage, we were attempting to scope out the parameters of the inquiry without entering into, in any substantial way, an inquiry about the named issues. We nevertheless began to articulate perspectives and generate data about the concerns and dilemmas that troubled us in our work. Whilst we agreed to categorise our concerns under three

distinct headings, the way in which we engaged in dialogue about these issues illustrates the interconnectedness of these issues as experienced by group members.

Group members were concerned that the knowledge and the expertise that had been built over 40 years of work in the domestic violence sector in Ireland was unrecognised and under-valued and that it risked being lost as a resource to future generations of workers. Participants perceived the de-valuing of this knowledge and expertise to be implicated in the fragmentation of responses within the sector. Despite the existence of a published framework for domestic violence work in Ireland, group members perceived that some organisations within the sector develop responses that question the very purpose of women's domestic violence organisations.

Recognised education and learning were perceived as a route to legitimacy for domestic violence workers and organisations and yet there was some ambiguity about adopting a style of professionalism that was approved by those agencies with whom we sought to collaborate. Thus, questions about what kind of approach to education and learning would enable the sector to develop the kind of professionalism *"that we can be proud of"* (Tessa), rather than bending to the expectations and pressures of the state was identified as a core focus for the inquiry.

Agreeing the three categorisations enabled the group to shape a launching research question and to move into the collaborative knowledge building phase. The following findings chapter will illustrate how the group followed these threads of inquiry to a point where we responded to the jointly agreed research question and achieved our goal in describing an approach to education and learning that we assessed as compatible with the values, goals and practices of domestic violence work.

Reflexive considerations

In this and in subsequent findings chapters I present myself as a co-inquirer and co-subject. My role as initiating researcher and facilitator is in effect invisible in how I present and discuss the data. My aim in including a reflexive section at the end of each chapter is to make visible the impact that my multiple roles had on the process

and on the quality of the inquiry and to reflect on the strengths and limitations of collaborative inquiry as a research method. In this launching phase, I was necessarily active and visible as a facilitator. In contrast with the collaborative knowledge building phase of the research, my task in the launching phase was to facilitate the group to transition from individually held research interests to agreeing a group research focus and question (Bray et al 2000; Heron, 1996). The process in the launching phase was designed by me and approved by the group members. I took leadership in inviting group members to individually reflect on and share their research interests, in inviting the group to further dialogue about the named issues, in inviting group members to begin to group the named interests into categories, and then facilitating each group member to express their agreement or disagreement with the categories suggested. I also actively facilitated the formation of the research question by asking each member to suggest wording and by picking up on suggestions for inclusion or exclusion of wording. Therefore, while the research focus and question were jointly agreed, it is important to acknowledge the disproportionate influence a sole facilitator will have in the initiation stage of the process.

Chapter 6: Laying the foundations: Identifying the values, beliefs and knowledge that underpin effective domestic violence responses

Introduction

In this chapter I present data that illustrates how we defined the values, beliefs and knowledge that we assess as underpinning effective domestic violence responses and how we built a group standpoint on this. This goal was achieved in the early stage of the research and in effect, laid the foundations for the rest of the inquiry. The findings illustrate that a coherent analysis of domestic violence can exist alongside a recognition of differences and nuance in group members' orientations towards domestic violence work.

The impetus to focus on this aspect of our work was driven by a shared concern about what group members experienced and perceived as a lack of coherence within the domestic violence sector. Group members' involvement in this research was motivated by their wish to identify a pedagogical solution that would contribute to a shared framework for domestic violence work in Ireland.

I begin the chapter with an analysis of group members individual accounts of how they came to work in domestic violence organisations and why they stayed in the work. The chapter continues with an analysis of significant sections of dialogue in which group members agreed a set of core concepts, underpinned by an understanding of the gendered nature of domestic violence. Subsequently, data is presented which exposes the limitation of reliance on gender as a unitary concept for domestic violence work.

I conclude the chapter with a reflexive consideration on collaborative inquiry as a methodology and how holding the multiple roles of facilitator and co-subject/co-inquirer impacted on the quality of the inquiry carried out in session 3.

Different journeys, shared values

Pathways to domestic violence work

The focus of this first part of the research was to make explicit the tacit and embodied knowledge of each of the group members and to enable each of us to articulate core values and beliefs that informed our practice. Telling stories about our journey into domestic violence work seemed like an obvious place to start. Each member took time to reflect on the experiences and factors that brought us to the work. In sharing our stories with each other, we were presenting ourselves and our stories became a way in which each member positioned themselves in relation to domestic violence work (Heron, 1998).

The following fragments from group members' accounts illustrate that there was no clear pathway that led group members to the domestic violence sector.

Jane: I came in basically through politics, I think. I would have been very much an activist in HIV work and gay politics and women's politics, you know, politics, with a small p. All along I needed a job and it was the late 80s, so they were hard to find. And a job came up in the refuge in [name of town] and I applied for it ... I got accepted

Claire: ... So, I did my training in counselling and psychotherapy ... I was setting up privately but I needed to get into an organisation that can just get me a little bit more known and know sort of, because you know, once you get into an organisation they tend to know somebody who knows somebody and so on. So, I put the feelers out to many places and it was [name of organisation] that came back, ... So, I went in in a counselling role, initially voluntarily and then a small bit of funding came in so I was doing that in tandem with working externally, privately.

Maureen: To be honest with you I was in [name of town], which, like, I was surprised to find myself there. With three very young children and I'd been out of work for 8 years. And I'd always worked in NGO's. So, I was always in that kind of helping, wanting to do something, be useful as a person... and this job came up ... So, I went down, I applied and I got the job. So, that's why I got into that but for me what is the bigger thing is what kept me there.

These accounts illustrate that there was no clear route that group members took into domestic violence work. Some had been previously involved in the NGO sector and clearly identified with domestic violence work as another way in which to engage in

social justice work or work that was about helping people who experienced difficulties in their lives. Others saw domestic violence work as a continuation of their professional career, such as a counsellor or childcare worker. Most of us found a way into the work by circuitous routes and few had identified domestic violence work as a preferred profession before we came to the work through necessity or after spending substantial time in other fields of work.

Shared values

Maureen's statement that what kept her in the work was the "bigger thing" was reflected in the accounts of other group members. It was in these narratives that we began to see that we shared much in terms of our values and our motivations. For Rachel, the women she worked with inspired her and their knowledge and resilience motivated her to stay in the work.

Rachel: ... the sustainability as well is the hope that the woman through the support of expert services feel empowered to live the life she wants to live with confidence and feelings of safety. And, the strength and courage of women I have worked with, I have always found inspirational to me and then that kind of supports me in my work.

Jane, who had worked in various service settings spoke of how witnessing women take back control of their lives helped sustain her in the work.

It was seeing women come through. They'd been through the crisis and you just saw women blossom. It was like watching a flower open, it was beautiful. Some women they didn't, but the majority, they just took off, they took their lives back and it was beautiful.

Group members spoke of multiple factors that motivated their continuing work. As well as being sustained by witnessing women's empowerment, Jane specifically made a connection between her struggles as a girl and a woman within a patriarchal culture and her work in domestic violence organisations as a factor in why she felt passionate about her work.

And it just for me, it completely matched with my own discontent as a child. With the possible roles that were ahead of me as a woman. You know, when I grow up, what was I going to do? Have a career, no, no, don't worry about

that you'll get married, you know. Boys could have a career, but they were also going to get married. So why was it not important for me not to have, you know, that ... But that was really, really core for me. It was the inequality, the injustice that was there. And that women's lives were so judged. Because you must remember... there was the Kerry babies, all that stuff, Ireland was not a good place for women. It was not. It was terrible. And there was such a double standard and it was so blatant, you know? So, for me that was, got me really, I suppose, passionate about the work.

Other group members also found that domestic violence work resonated with their experience as women and helped them make sense of these experiences. Both Maureen and I had come to an understanding of feminism through our involvement in domestic violence work and we had benefitted by gaining insight into some of the constricting experiences and conditions of our lives:

Maureen: ... the longer I worked there the inherent unfairness of it and injustice of it. And, it coincided with, and this might sound strange but, being a mother as well and being a wife. And kind of seeing how women's choices are dictated to them and how limited they are once they have a family and children and how domestic violence... so many women had children and that was one of the reasons why they were stuck. And it just resounded with me as I started to live my life as a Mom as well, to see how unfair. And I suppose what's kept me in it is that because I've had that realisation through the work rather than coming to the work knowing all this and then staying there, for me it was more like I came to the job kind of by accident and then as I worked in it just starting to seem, to me just the overall inequity in the whole thing, for women, do you know? It just resonated with me.

Me: ... so, when I went in it was like going through this portal into another world that I never came back out of, do you know what I mean? It just changed my life completely. It changed my perspective, everything. And all these questions that I had as a young woman, and I was a very lost young woman who didn't know, really my place in the world. No confidence in myself and constantly putting myself down, you know, and I came in with all these questions and (this) is where I started getting answers. So about how the world worked and why it was difficult to be out there in the world as a young woman who didn't feel like I fit in with anything. I never felt right... And I just felt, oh this is where I belong... and it just changed everything for me.

The sense of belonging I talked about was also attributed to the feminist processes that characterised much of the interactions between women and workers in the organisations I had worked in.

... just that strong sense of belonging, you know, for me it was about much more than a job. It was about my life, and just passion for the work and just the solidarity with women, all women together, all women working together and the women that we work for.

Like Jane, working in a domestic violence organisation provided for me an antidote to a sense of alienation from normative cultural values and practices and this led me to also describe my attachment to domestic violence work as passionate. For Maureen and I, coming to view domestic violence and our work through a feminist lens was inextricably linked with a developing consciousness of the inequality and injustice that all women experienced in patriarchal society.

Tessa and Grainne did not name feminism specifically as informing their choices but were clear that they chose work that was about redressing inequality and injustice. Both had previously worked in social justice organisations addressing issues of poverty and other forms of oppression, and they spoke of how they consciously chose domestic violence work as a way to continue to work for social justice and equality.

Tessa: And as I grew up, I realised others don't have what I had. And that made me, I don't know when it started but anyway, I was always looking for injustices like, why, why? Why does that happen? Why is it somebody gets born in that family, why do they have a life of poverty ahead of them, why is something... Anyway, that's what I started off with and everything was like, why? And you know, who decided, who decided that for who? ... and for me domestic violence is just a continuation in my mind of tackling injustice.

Grainne's account of how she became involved in the work was traced back to her observations as a community development worker of how Gardaí responded to women experiencing domestic abuse. Her decision to leave community development and to work in a domestic violence service was motivated by a desire to redress what she saw was unfair and unjust responses that further harmed women and children.

And another occasion, a woman had to bring her children to the Garda station to hand them over and the young woman Garda said, "now this is bad for the children you need to go home now and sort this all out". And I thought oh, she knows nothing, and I could just, I just wanted to get stuck in and start

changing attitudes and all sorts like that. But the unfairness of it all was the thing that resonated with me the whole time, you know. I just wanted to be an agent for just shifting the balance a bit, make things fairer and help with people.

Both Grainne and Tessa identified their motivations as wanting to make a positive difference in the lives of others who experience oppression and injustice, but unlike Jane, Maureen and I they did not identify themselves as women who share with women abused by male partners, experiences of inequality or injustice.

Efficacy and hope

Group members accounts indicated that the alignment of personally held values and the values imbued in domestic violence work are a key factor in sustaining a commitment to this work over time. The majority of participants also talked about how a sense of efficacy as domestic violence workers contributed to a belief that change was possible. Feelings of satisfaction about our work and a hope that we would continue to make a difference in the lives of women and children was a feature of almost all group members reflections.

Grainne: When I... started my job, it was mostly around the city and everybody in the city knew what the refuge was and where the services were but the organisations' understanding of community were people off down the road or within the city and I was saying but the community extends right out to the border of (*names three adjoining counties*). So, I tried to get that, that's working now. That's something that made me feel satisfied, you know, that things like that could happen. I suppose what keeps me doing it is there's always more. There's always more, I can never be finished, I know that.

Claire also identified that it is the belief in the importance of the work and the hope that her interventions could continue to benefit women that sustained her over time:

Claire: And I think that's so important, you know. It's the smallest thing you might be doing you know? You can get so bogged down with the systems that aren't working. So, you (indicating Rachel) were saying with the Guards and all that, but it's keeping that hope all the time it's saying, this hour for this woman could change something. So, I think, as the time has gone on, I think that's become very, very important to me and that keeps me in the work as well.

For some of the group, this sense of efficacy and realising the potential for further change was not just about contributions as individual workers but also about the achievements of the wider domestic violence movement. Like Jane, I valued being part of a wider social change movement.

And just a sense of hope, because I had seen the changes that we'd made, like, I could see that difference in individual women's lives and at a broader level, even though there is just so much to be done. I could see that we could have an impact and that we have the potential to have a much greater impact and I wanted to be part of it, I didn't want to step away from it, do you know?

Commonality and difference

Reflecting on this dialogue we identified that while our journeys into domestic violence work were undertaken for different reasons, we shared a set of values that corresponded with those values inherent to domestic violence work and it was this sense of complementarity that kept us in the work. Our shared values included a belief in the inherent injustice and inequality that both underpin and are reproduced through domestic abuse and a desire to redress these wrongs. We believed that domestic violence work was important, and continued to believe that as workers and organisations we could make a difference to women and children's lives. For some group members, involvement in and knowledge of the gains of the wider women's movement and the anti-domestic violence movement in particular informed their optimism. Those who articulated a feminist perspective also spoke of how domestic violence work resonated with them as women and helped them make sense of some of the constraining conditions of their own lives.

In our group dialogue, subsequent to the sharing of individual reflections, Grainne noted that while there was a commonality in motivations to be in domestic violence work in this group, that in her experience, some women come to the work for very different reasons.

... some workers are in the business because they can do flexible hours or it suits them to work at night. That there's some people who are not as altruistic I suppose in why they're there as well and we must take account of that, you know. It's a job and I've spoken to colleagues now who say that, it's great that

I can do mornings because my children are small, you know? And maybe later on I'll move on to full days and there's a lot of flexibility, that would be in our organisation anyway. So that's what keeps a lot of people there who would love to move on to other things.

Responding to Grainne, I expressed my view that:

... regardless of why a person is in the job we want that everybody is delivering an effective service and it's OK for someone to be just there for the salary, there's nothing wrong with that either. But we can't have a situation where everybody just comes in with their own opinions and framework and says, well, I'll just work out of that.

I suggested that as a group we would need to gain clarity about the:

... approach or belief system or whatever it is that we would like to call it, that we would like to see holds every domestic violence worker in their practice regardless of why they are in the work or not.

In response to this statement Maureen expressed what for her, was fundamental to effective responses.

Like the culture of blame and who's to blame for domestic violence and why it happens, I think it's a key question. Because I don't think you can do the work effectively, if you blame the woman, do you know? I just think that that's a red line issue.

Picking up on Maureen's naming of a "*red line issue*", the groups' focus shifted to a consideration of aspects of knowledge that we wished to designate as foundational to effective domestic violence work. Findings in the next section illustrate how we came to identify that we each shared in an analysis of domestic abuse as a form of sexual violence and a profoundly gendered phenomenon.

Gathering around a gendered analysis of domestic abuse

The following segments of group dialogue illustrate how the group began to define what it was a domestic violence worker had to know and understand about domestic abuse. While this dialogue was seamless and different aspects of our knowledge

about domestic violence were woven in and out of the conversation, I have presented the dialogue mostly in chronological order to show how the group traversed from defining coercive control to then identifying adult intimate relationships as the context in which coercive control primarily happens. Group members emphasised that it is the sexualised nature of the abuse of women in intimate relationships with men that distinguishes it from all other forms of domestic abuse. This led the group to identifying oppressive gender stereotypes and cultural norms as underpinning men's justification for their use of violence and abuse.

Coercive control

Me: So, what would you want people to believe then? What do you want people to understand as opposed to, well she's somehow complicit in her own abuse, she's somehow to blame for her abuse? What will we say is the other side of that?

Grainne: That they could come to an understanding of how she's a psychological captive, you know, and that she can't just walk away. And the other factors that keep a person in the relationship.

Me: Yeah. A real understanding of what domestic violence is? (Yeahs, nodding)

Claire: And the impact of that going back to what we were saying earlier, you know, physical abuse is one thing but emotional abuse, first to be able to name that for the women to figure out what that is. But people's lack of understanding, it's like, ok we've named it, now we know and now she'll leave. But recovering from emotional abuse, it's not an event, it's a process. And that process really, really takes time. So, it can be that feeling, we want to fix. So, the answer now, we know that's it and this is what we need to do, you know?

Me: Yeah, yeah. well that doesn't work. So, what we want, and let's check that everyone agrees with this, because this is where we begin to form a consensus around these few things, is that domestic violence workers have a real understanding that it is the nature of domestic violence itself, that entraps a woman in domestic violence. That she's not complicit she's not to blame, and so they must understand the real details of what domestic violence is about. Is that right? What is the nature, what is the perpetrator doing that results in an adult woman, who is the same as you or me being, feeling that she doesn't have choices or feeling trapped in a situation that's really harming her? Now I'm kind of saying that from my perspective, not necessarily as the facilitator, you know.

Claire: To have a proper understanding of coercive control. Really understanding what that is and what is the impact of it. And I think the definition now of coercive control has been broadened with Evan Stark, so he's really looking at that now as well and a proper understanding of that is crucial.

Grainne: And then the law is changing now as well, that it's going to be an offence, coercive control, so it's very important then, and it will be out there in the public area. Up to now it was a thing you did at a higher level of training you know but....

Me: So that understanding of coercive control is key yeah? (Yeahs) Does anybody want to come from a different perspective than that or feels there is a different perspective we need to look at in relation to that?

Maureen: I'm sure there is one.

Me: I suppose you did articulate a different perspective Grainne, that she's somehow to blame. Not that you hold it but you're articulating a perspective that exists out there.

Grainne: Absolutely. And I came across it very strongly last week. I was giving a talk to a women's group. They were all around the table, all really entering into it and one woman said she had a good friend and there was three of them that met her regularly and her husband did this and he did that and the other and they keep saying to her "You're a strong woman why are you putting up with this, you could do this". And they keep on nagging her really, why she's.... So, I was trying to get them to change the conversation, like the postcards there at 16 Days and I said, what would it be like for you to say "you don't deserve to be treated like that, why is he treating you like that?" And they were, oh god, yeah. You know, that they just hadn't thought of it that way, he was kind of out of the picture all together, it's all to do with her.

Me: Well doesn't that mean that the focus must be on the perpetrator and how he is doing, how he is operating, his tactics, his intentions. And that is one of the big shifts I think that must happen in society because in my experience working with agencies, they don't think about him. They all focus on her, all the time and the person who is causing the problem is invisible

Grainne: And when the woman is released, to access visits with this person, you know. And she must deal with that on her own. There's nobody around helping her with the access then when she's gone from the service.

Me: Yeah. Tessa did you want to say something?

Tessa: You said what I was going to say. But no that's great, because we are thinking alike. What I was thinking was, is I suppose, that the underlying message that we would give to the women attending the personal development group is that the perpetrator has abused deliberately. They have chosen who to abuse and they have planned how to abuse you, OK. And

for the woman to recognise that. Because they are, how did I fall into this, you didn't fall into this, you were chosen, you were groomed.

Grainne: Yeah, because you were kind.

Tessa: Exactly, you were groomed into a situation where you felt you could no longer leave. So, that's I suppose the other side of the conversation, there is a man, or a woman, whoever is abusing the woman, is doing it deliberately and they're the active agents there who are stopping her from making any change.

In this section of dialogue group members identified many of the core characteristics of coercive control as the process through which abusive men entrap women within an intimate relationship. Rather than blame the woman for not leaving an abuser, group members felt that domestic violence workers had to understand that it was the process of coercive control, and primarily emotional and psychological abuse, that entrapped her and resulted in her feeling that she did not have choice or autonomy. Understanding the intentionality of the perpetrator and the tactics they employed to assert their dominance and control was key to enabling domestic violence workers support women to recognise that they did not "fall into" a relationship with an abusive man, but that they were chosen and groomed. Tessa referred to abusers as "*the active agents*" who are preventing a woman from making any change to their situation. At a later stage in this dialogue, Jane emphasised that domestic abuse is about:

... taking power from somebody and making them cooperate with that, without being, willingly cooperating ... it's about how do you get them, how do you coerce them so it looks like your willing.

She identified that core to this coercion is the abuser's targeting of the woman's personhood where they "*make you doubt yourself, doubt your own core beliefs.*"

The implications of not understanding coercive control

Woven throughout the dialogue are comments on the implications for women when domestic violence workers and others do not understand coercive control as the form of domestic violence most often and primarily experienced by women. Firstly,

Claire reflected that a lack of understanding of coercive control leads people to think that “fixing” the problem equates to naming the issue and knowing which actions will result in women leaving the abuser. As Claire emphasised, leaving is a process, not an event. Secondly, Grainne identified how the invisibility of perpetrators in discourses of domestic abuse lead to women blaming attitudes. I expressed my belief that the invisibility of abusive men as the problem shapes state agencies responses to domestic violence which, as Grainne pointed out, means that once women leave their abuser, they are expected to continue engagement with perpetrators to facilitate child contact with no help from those agencies who expect them to leave in the first place.

In the following segment, three group members discuss people’s resistance to the theory of coercive control because to embrace it as an explanation for domestic abuse means that:

Maureen: ... anyone could be a victim. You and you and you. And people who feel strong say, no, I’m not going to be a victim. I would never be a victim.

Grainne: Yeah, that’s it, you must have the low self-esteem and you must ...

Maureen: I would never let that happen to me you know? And that’s a real challenge for people.

Tessa: I (inaudible) because it could have happened to you and that’s kind of ...

Maureen: Yeah, that’s kind of the nub of it.

Tessa: ... it could happen to anybody. Because this notion of the victim, she’s going to be somebody who is meek and quiet and will roll over, that’s not the women we see coming in, is it? (*No’s*) It is the everyday, every woman who gets abused. So, to change that picture.

Inferred in this section of dialogue is a further implication that not understanding domestic violence as a process of coercive control results in the pathologising of women who experience abuse as being low in self-esteem, passive and submissive. Grainne identified how failing to understand coercive control impacted on practice.

... the perspectives, beliefs, like if somebody believes, this woman is coming here, and we need to fix her, you know. Telling her she’s got low self-esteem,

telling her that she's got this, that and we need to fix her up, build her up and leaving the perpetrator out of it all together, you know? Because that happens. And it can come from the attitude of the worker maybe that, if the worker believes that these women are all... the same, with low self-esteem or whatever, and they need to be fixed.

Group members' experience of other people's reactions to information about coercive control illustrate that the othering of women who experience domestic violence as different from the "strong" woman who would not "let" domestic violence happen to her, strengthens women blaming narratives that mirror the justifications used by abusers and ultimately further entraps women.

A question from Claire enabled the group to shift our focus from the process of coercive control to the context in which coercive control is most likely to characterise an abuser's course of conduct.

The sexualised nature of men's violence and abuse against women

Claire's posed a question about whether we should include interfamilial violence as part of our practice.²⁵ Her question enabled the group to further refine our description of coercive control as being specific to women's experience of domestic abuse within an intimate relationship with men, as distinguished from other contexts in which people can experience abuse in domestic settings. Her question elicited a shift in focus on to the sexualised nature of intimate partner violence.

Grainne: It's so different to community violence or just families who are violent generally, the whole family. They shout at the neighbours or whatever that, they're different to the ones inside the house. But then the intimate partner, the love relationship if you like, is different again, the sexualised type of relationship.

Jane: So, I think now that it puts it into quite a different place, you know? The sexual element of it to any other intimate, close relationship. Because I think it's one of the things for women that's really threatening, frightening and it's a very quick method of holding someone, undermining them.

²⁵ Interfamilial violence abuse refers to a family member perpetrating violence and abuse against another family member outside of the context of an intimate relationship; e.g. sibling to sibling, adult child parent., parent to adult child.

Me: It's so much about that sexual entitlement that Don Hennesy²⁶ talks about. It's like I married you or we're in relationship so I have access to you sexually any time I want and in any way I want, do you know?

Many organisations provide a service to women who experience abuse from other family members. The experience of group members is that the dynamics that characterise abuse in other adult family relationships were different to men's deployment of coercive control. A core and distinguishing feature of men's abuse in intimate relationships with women is that their violence and abuse is sexualised in nature. Naming the sexualised nature of men's domestic violence as a defining characteristic of coercive control generated further dialogue in which the group members explicated an analysis of domestic violence as being rooted in male sexual entitlement and in the shaping of a group standpoint on the gendered nature of domestic violence.

A gendered analysis of domestic violence

In our dialogue about the sexualised nature of men's use of violence against women, Rachel reflected on the difficulty that women had in naming their experience as sexual coercion and violation. Following on her reflection our dialogue shifted to an analysis of the discourses in wider society that underpin male sexual entitlement.

Rachel: it's very hard for women sometimes to articulate that that is an issue themselves, do you know what I mean? Because of the relationship they're in. Be that a long term intimate relationship, they're married, or they're not married but they've been together as partner of 10, 15, 20 years, so you know?

Jane: Part of being an adult is being sexual, a sexual being.

Rachel: Yeah, absolutely.

Maureen: And part of being an adult woman is putting up with a lot of shit. Like, my point being, it's part and parcel of a lot of adult women's experience. It's kind of at a low level and it's all about the power and going into the patriarchy or whatever. So that it makes sense that it would be a distinct intimate relationship because all women must put up with it.

²⁶ A practitioner who has written about and provided training on the justifications and tactics of abusive men.

Jane: It's just an extension of something.

Maureen: That's right, personally, I don't know, I might be going too far but ... there's a big conversation going on now with the whole MeToo thing and the sexual assault thing and was that sexual assault, was it coercion, was it consent and like I would have thought that a lot of things were, oh fine, but now I'm like, that wasn't fine, when I was like 20, do you know? And I think that rolls under everything with domestic violence because, you know.

Jane: Prepares the ground.

Maureen: Yeah, it's just there for men in a way as a tool that's not there for women, you know ... Because culturally we're hearing about men's entitlement, entitlement, entitlement, entitlement, entitlement, entitlement. So, it just becomes absorbed.

Claire: Entitlement, also a word you come across a lot is healthy. It's a healthy thing for a man to want sex all the time. That's just healthy. And when a woman is hearing that, so we would kind of hear back, that really clouds her judgement because she's, well maybe that is healthy and then I'm wrong. So, it's that word, it's almost like linked with your health. So how can you go against that, then there's something up with me.

Jane: But also, then the woman's health, sexual libido is not OK.

Me: Yeah, so if she's the initiator or the instigator, expressing her desire.

Jane: Her sexuality is depending on his. So, then everything is being set up, my initial perception of my sexuality is dependent on somebody else. Does that make sense? (Yeahs)

Maureen: That's why jealousy becomes a tool as well, the sexual policing that happens then.

In this dialogue, the group identified that cultural norms and stereotypes about gender and sexuality underpin the prevalence of domestic violence. Maureen stated her belief that women's experience of male violence is a continuation of the experience that women as a group have when living in a patriarchal society. Group members named a continuum of behaviours experienced by women in intimate relationships with men, from abuse, to coercion to consent and how coercion and abuse become normalised by discourses that frame men's sexual prerogatives as healthy. Group members understood that dominant discourses such as this led women to self-blame when they resist their partner's sexual dominance, coercion, and abuse. Thus, cultural justifications for sexual violence that centre on women's

sexuality as being contingent on male identified sexuality are reproduced. These prevailing ideas and normalisation of practices justify abusive men's use of jealousy and sexual policing to underpin their belief in male sexual entitlement.

In our identification of the wider social and cultural constructs that underpin men's use of violence and abuse, we focused entirely on domestic violence *as* sexual violence. Group members applied their analysis to contexts outside of domestic violence in which women are subjected to sexual violence, indicating an awareness of the continuum of sexual violence in the lives of women and girls. This perspective was held by all group members, and by taking time to reflect on, articulate and share with each other knowledge about the sexualised nature of domestic abuse, we could see that there was a shared understanding of domestic violence as a form of gender based violence and as a manifestation of gender inequality in wider society. Questions remain however as to whether gender as a unifying concept is inclusive of those women who experience same sex violence and can inform responses that are appropriate to their needs.

A gap in our knowledge: Gender and same sex violence

As we concluded our discussion on the core concepts that we assessed as essential to effective domestic violence work, I posed a question about whether this knowledge applied to women's experience of violence and abuse within same sex relationships. The group's subsequent discussion illustrates an absence of shared knowledge about or competence to respond to this critical aspect of women's experience of domestic violence.

Me: I don't know if the coercive control element applies in the same way in same sex relationships, in women's relationships. I don't know. If anyone else knows I would love to know. Like it's kind of my responsibility to go and find out, do you know, as well. Like that's one gap in my learning that even as a woman in a same sex relationship I'm kind of like, what is it in the context of my life, my work that I haven't gone out and found out about that.

Maureen: We're talking about training and education, though right? Do you know what I mean, where would you get the training and education? Like all of us, I didn't get any training in domestic violence in same sex relationships but it's important

Tessa: Did [name of organisation] do some research last year they were looking for...

Rachel: We spoke to [name of researcher], she came to visit [name of organisation] and I think that part of what came up in the research she was doing was that females in same sex relationships, that we, in the helpline, that we didn't identify that we are open to that or they didn't make contact. Now incidentally we do have male callers who are in same sex relationships who have no problem ringing us, do you know? Which is interesting, it's interesting. ... I'll just delve a little bit more into our stats, just to get a sense of, but it's, I've not heard of any woman in a same-sex relationship ring our helpline. That's not to say that it doesn't happen. It's just that it's not come up in our team, discussions, supervision, anything like that, so. I know that we were looking to link up with the LGBT helpline last year and just demands in other areas, but it is something that will happen.

Jane: I had a call, not last year, the year before and I, a lesbian, walked straight into the trap of what does he do. Straight into it. And she said well actually, she's a woman and I said oh, you know. You know what I'm saying?

The invisibility of LGBTQIA+²⁷ women's experience of domestic abuse stands out in this section of dialogue. The implications of this are illustrated Rachel's reflections on the fact that LGBTI+ women do not contact her organisations' helpline. Jane's reflection highlighted that even when an LGBTI+ woman does contact a service, assumptions about the gender identity of the perpetrators can negate the experience of the women making contact.

Our dialogue illustrates that a focus on gender as the sole analytical construct for understanding domestic violence is inadequate. The subsequent lack of capacity to respond to the experience and needs of LGBTQIA+ women is exacerbated by a de-prioritisation of this critical issue, resulting in a cohort of women being excluded and further marginalised. The issue is peripheral or entirely absent in both organisational and sectoral learning spaces. The findings point to a need to centralise an intersectional analysis of domestic abuse in the foundational framework that supports domestic violence work. Findings in subsequent chapters will further illustrate some of the challenges that face us as workers and learners in the domestic violence sector in relation to integrating an intersectional analysis in our work.

²⁷ Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersectional plus

Conclusion

Our dialogue revealed both commonality in terms of values and beliefs, and differences in terms of how some members orientated themselves towards domestic violence work. All group members shared a strong belief in justice and equality for all and in the power of people acting together for change. Some, but not all group members, associated these values with a feminist perspective and spoke of how the injustice and inequality they bore witness to in the lives of women they worked with resonated with their own lives. These different perspectives seemed to have no bearing on the cohesiveness of group members' understanding of domestic violence as a profoundly gendered phenomenon underpinned by unequal power relations in the wider society.

Each group member identified with coercive control as typifying the process by which abusive men achieve and maintain dominance of the women they are in relationships with. Knowledge of the implications of *not* working to a coercive control paradigm were key in aiding the group to describe what it is that perpetrators do to entrap women. In getting to the heart of the gendered nature of intimate partner violence, group members drew on their experience and knowledge of the sexualised nature of men's abuse. We reflected on our own lives as women, the experiences of women for whom we work, and related this to our awareness of the social and cultural conditions that underpin abusive men's sense of sexual entitlement. Our inquiry revealed however, that reliance only on gender as a unifying and unitary explanation for domestic abuse, while central, was not adequate to account for the experience of women who experience same sex violence and abuse.

The process of collaborative inquiry offered this group of domestic violence workers an opportunity to shape a shared standpoint on domestic abuse, something that none of us were sure was possible when we first came together as an inquiry group. The experience that group members had of fragmentation within the wider sector contrasted with the experience in the group in which there was a complementarity of values and beliefs and coherence around the gendered nature of domestic abuse.

Reflexive considerations

Reflecting on the ease with which we identified this shared standpoint, I have considered if I as the facilitator stepped out of my subject position enough to challenge what on the surface, seemed to be a clear consensus on the importance of holding a gendered analysis of intimate partner violence. Reviewing both the video tapes and rereading the transcripts of session 3, I considered if this was the case. The dialogue seems to be flowing and each group member appeared to contribute freely and fully as they described their understanding of domestic abuse as a phenomenon. On the face of it, it seems that challenging a group standpoint on the primacy of a gendered analysis of domestic violence would not have been useful. This is an understanding that is well supported by empirical research and scholarship. What value would there have been in taking time to critically analyse our centring of gender as the primary organising concept for our work?

On further reflection I identified that our focus on *alternative* perspectives to a gendered analysis of domestic abuse meant that we failed to think about what *additional* knowledge and perspectives were needed if we were to respond to the diversity of women's experiences. This opportunity presented itself when we realised that we were unable to assess if theories of coercive control and gender based violence apply to women who are abused by other women. The fact that few if any LGBTI+ women contact our services indicates that they do not. Our collaborative inquiry helped us expose this weakness in our analysis and our response. However, the opportunity presented to the group to delve deeper into why this was the case and how we should act to address the exclusion of LGBTI+ women from our services was not availed of. Recognising that there was a collective responsibility to maintain a critical subjectivity in our inquiry, it is useful to reflect on the specific role that I held as facilitator.

In retrospect, I can see how I was "*swept along*" (Reason 1998) by my preoccupation with my primary experience in which I perceived a feminist analysis of domestic violence as being under attack and believed that asserting the gendered nature of intimate partner violence had become ever more contentious and critical. My

attention was diverted from the need to invite group members into a deeper process of “*co-operative criticism*” (Reason, 1998, 13). A greater level of competence in bracketing off assumptions (Heron, 1996), could have helped me consider the possibility that our reliance on gender as *the* organising concept for our work is significantly implicated when it came to analysing why LGBTQIA+ women were invisible within and excluded from our organisations. With that awareness in the moment, rather than in retrospect (MacKewn, 2008), I could have facilitated my co-inquirers to utilise their inquiry skills and to enter into a deeper inquiry through which we could have generated a group understanding of how our failure to centre an intersectional analysis on domestic abuse impacts in real ways on women’s lives. Acknowledging that deficits on my part as facilitator and researcher were a factor in the limitations of this research, I also believe that an inherent limitation of collaborative inquiry as a research methodology becomes apparent when the task of maintaining a high level of critical subjectivity is constrained by the demands of holding multiple roles as facilitator, co-inquirer and co- subject.

Chapter 7: Digging deeper: The importance of a gendered analysis of domestic violence

Introduction

In this chapter, I analyse further data to illustrate how the collaborative inquiry group deepened its understanding of the importance of holding a gendered analysis of domestic violence. The inquiry route that we took in deepening our knowledge began with a focus on group members' concerns that the domestic violence sector, as a body of organisations who ostensibly are engaged in a joint enterprise, is a sector in which different and contradictory perspectives and approaches to domestic abuse exist. Through identifying the implications for women and children and for the work of the domestic violence sector, the centrality of holding a gendered analysis in responses to domestic violence was re-affirmed.

I begin the chapter with a focus on three critical issues that group members identified as impacting on our work practice. These were firstly, different stances within the sector on the engagement of women's domestic violence services with programmes for male perpetrators of domestic abuse. Secondly, the employment of men as frontline workers in domestic violence organisations. Thirdly, group members were concerned about the increasing number of women's domestic violence services that had begun to provide services for male victims of domestic abuse. Group members reflected on these critical issues and identified how some of these different approaches could have the potential to impede, rather than progress women's journeys to safety and empowerment.

I follow the first section with a presentation of data that illustrates how our analysis of the factors leading to disparate approaches coalesced around the dominance of gender-neutral narratives and hostility towards feminism within the wider cultural context. Our experience indicates that these same narratives underpin the priorities of state agencies on whom we depend for funding and this creates an unequal power dynamic that may push organisations towards adopting gender neutral approaches.

Working with perpetrator programmes²⁸

This issue of different stances within the domestic violence sector in relation to providing partner support to perpetrator programmes emerged several times in the collaborative inquiry. The group had discussed the topic of involvement in perpetrator programmes a number of times without forming a shared standpoint. Group members shared a number of concerns about the current situation in relation to providing partner support, but there were different views about whether or not organisations should continue to do so.

Two group members, Charley and Jane, work in organisations who have made a clear decision not to provide partner support to perpetrator programmes. Charley talked about the situation as it pertained to her work.

We've got, there's a ... group, unfortunately, in *(name of town)*, and it's referred to as the men's group and it's for the men in court, if I'll go up to the judge, *oh I'm in the men's group I'm going to get counselling*. And the minute we hear that we're oh shit that's (inaudible) because it's basically school. ... And the woman comes back and says everything's got worse, it's like he's been told what to do and I just thought, Jesus how do we? Now luckily *(name of organisation)* have absolutely refused to work with men or with perpetrator programmes because we're a feminist organisation so we're standing by that.

Charley's view is based on experience of working with women whose partners have been in perpetrator programmes. Grainne, who works for an organisation who does provide partner support and who had previously been a partner support worker shared the following experience.

And I had another woman who went along, and she said, they're learning from each other. This guy brought them down at tea break to lift the bonnet

²⁸ Cosc defines Perpetrator Intervention Programmes as a "a system of appropriate interventions to change the attitudes and behaviour of perpetrators of domestic violence in conjunction with measures to support the victims of their violence while this change is made" (www.Cosc.ie 2021). Programmes are provided by organisations outside of the network of women's domestic violence services. Programmes must identify an organisation that can provide partner support to women before they work with abusive men. Some of the women's DV organisations provide support to women whose partners are engaging in these programmes.

of a car to show how to disconnect the car, so she can't drive it and another fellow showed them how to break her arm ... I said to them I don't want to be involved in it anymore. ... I was on the steering committee and I said I can't buy into it anymore and they let me off it.

Grainne's belief that the perpetrator programme in her area was increasing risk for women led her to take a stand in her organisation and to refuse to do partner support work or sit on a multi-agency steering committee overseeing the programme. Aoife also provides partner support but is conflicted about her role.

Well I've a big confession to make. It feels like a confession. We started to work with them, we've taken on the contract, so I am the partner contract person ... and I'm really, really, really struggling, I need a bit of support. I'm really struggling with it. And I just think again as a sector it's not something that we've thought about as a sector, how to respond to this and how to, yeah, and it's difficult, it's difficult.

Aoife said that she was required by her manager to be the partner support worker for her organisation because she was the most experienced support worker, but her experience raised doubts for her as to the capacity of the programme to hold abusive men to account. She shared the following experience.

But I just want to give little example of something that happened, and I don't want to hog the whole thing, just a little example. This guy had a, blew up in the car with his wife and baby in the back of the car and she told him after this episode that she wanted him to move out after a couple of days just to let things calm down and, you know. And so, I informed one of the male facilitators who contacted your man and said he wanted to have a one to one session with him and basically challenged him on his behaviour. He came back the following week with something in writing. He handed it to both facilitators, basically saying he wanted to change his one to one worker. So, from the guy that challenged him, he wanted to have the other guy, right? And they allowed him, because they didn't want to lose him. Because he's doing well on the programme.

For Aoife, the main concern is that despite informing group facilitators of this man's continued abuse, the facilitators held the view that the programme was effective. In addition, allowing the man to switch key workers was in effect, allowing him to evade the accountability that is supposed to be at the heart of perpetrator programmes.

For Aoife, this indicated that the facilitators did not “*believe the woman’s truth*” and that they did not understand domestic violence and the risk perpetrators pose.

Claire shared more positive experiences of working as a partner support worker with the programme in her county.

... so whilst the programme is running, and the men have the one to one and then go into the group, but during that and even before it, you have risk management meetings. So, you’ll have the risk manager and you’ll have the two facilitators who work with the men and then you’ll have our partner care support worker. And so, they meet once a month to just basically, so if anything, major comes up from the woman that we think is going to cause more risk or then that can be filed there, so that then the facilitators are aware of that going back in. That seems to work quite well.

For Claire, one of the key factors in the programme working well is that two of the facilitators are very experienced and they understand coercive controllers. However, she did not feel that all facilitators had that level of expertise, indicating that there could be inconsistency in how the programme is delivered in this area. Aoife also shared a concern about the capacity of some of the facilitators of programmes.

But I remember we had to go to this training and there were two young women, I will never forget it, two young women from [name of town] who must have been in their 20’s. I’m not been ageist, but I just looked at the two, they’re facilitating. I thought they’d eat them up and spit them out for breakfast, you know? And they were being allowed to, you know?

The experience of those group members who had been required by their organisations to provide partner support indicated that rigorous standards and guidelines were not being adhered to in all cases. This was the reason why Tessa said her organisation pulled back from engagement with perpetrator programmes, until such time as these guidelines were proven to be consistently applied.

... each place is running it differently. Like there’s the facilitators meeting with the, the notes, partner contact. That’s happening in some places, not other places. Who should do the partner contact and you know, the reason we pulled back was because the guidelines were not being followed? So, it seems like yes, they might be doing them, but they are not following the guidelines, they’re not really doing it.

Despite all of these concerns and the critical nature of this issue, group members are aware that a number of organisations are engaging with perpetrator programmes by providing partner support. Rebecca expressed her view that core funders are increasing pressure on women's domestic violence organisations to provide partner support and that "*refuges have to engage*". For others, the pressure to take on the partner support work comes from fears that if they do not, practitioners who do not have expertise in coercive control and women's safety will take up the partner support work and further endanger women.

Me: Because I know... [name of perpetrator programme] contacted us and I was looking at the stuff and I was saying to myself, well would it be better if we worked with the women as maybe someone else would work with them and they don't know domestic violence and ...

Aoife: Yeah, that was the attitude our organisation took.

This lack of knowledge and capacity at organisational level, combined with a lack of a sectoral position on working with perpetrators programmes, was identified as leading to a situation where workers and organisations are engaging with perpetrator programmes in the "*context where there is so much uncertainty and so much concerns*" but "*no guidance*" (Researcher). As a group, we did not form a clear group standpoint on whether organisations should engage with perpetrator programmes or not, however, we did share a sense of discomfort, anxiety and uncertainty about these programmes and our role as domestic violence services and workers in relation to them. Group members agreed that behavioural change programmes for abusers were now part of the landscape of domestic violence work and that therefore there had to be learning supports for workers as women may have partners and ex-partners participating in them.

Charley: ... just because we don't agree with the perpetrator programmes doesn't mean we can stick our head in the sand and ignore them.

Jane: Exactly, they're going to be there.

Charley: And it's important that people get educated in them.

They felt that education and learning should be around a gender analysis and focusing on the perpetrator and about *“perpetrator tactics and ... that part of their tactics is to misuse these programmes”* (Charley). Grainne’s also emphasised the importance of knowledgeability about coercive control.

... because a lot of women are coming reluctantly to this and some women are putting their last hope on this. This is his big chance, you know. And they say, I’m only here to help him and all of that. So, you need to know, ... what’s going on, to keep the women and children safe. They need to know the way perpetrators think. The way perpetrators will use that programme and that the woman will be lulled into a false sense of security and drop her guard and become more vulnerable.

Providing a service to men experiencing domestic abuse

A second issue of concern to group members was that some domestic violence organisations within the wider sector had begun to provide services to men who experienced domestic abuse. For some group members, this development signalled a fundamental shift in purpose for those organisations who had expanded their remit to include men as service users.

Tessa: And I think there are some fundamental issues I think, working with perpetrators, working with male victims of violence, these are huge issues, you know? And it’s very difficult, even while, I’ve been attending Safe Ireland meetings, suddenly, there’s a few more people put their hands up “we work with men”. When did that happen, how did that happen, and how is that changing?

Aoife: Men as victims Tessa, is it?

Tessa: Yeah. Because we’ve never been asked by Tusla to do that and I’m wondering how, why are they being asked to that, or are they asking to do it or, what’s happening?

Maureen: I think it’s a fundamental thing that, I think you’re right. I often feel like, say to women when you’re with domestic abuse, it’s different from conflict and someone being angry and someone being a dick and not getting along. If you’ve ever been married you’ve had that experience.

Me: Married or not, long term relationships.

Maureen: You know, but I think the whole working with men things comes from, it’s about conflict, it’s about, maybe alcohol and drugs problems, it’s about socio economic problems. It’s not owning the gender part of it. That’s

it's about power that comes from gender differences. And that is a hard thing for our sector to own because it's risky, it's brave and it's tied to [name of state agency] which is a big, very conservative organisation.

Working with male victims was perceived as a fundamental change to the purpose of women's domestic violence services as providing a response to women survivors. Without an opportunity for dialogue between organisations, group members were unsure about where the impetus to expand to include male survivors comes from. While group members have no knowledge of demands from core funders that domestic violence organisations provide such a service, Maureen's statement that it is risky for domestic violence organisations to own "*the gender part*" of our work points to a perceived pressure from state funders as underpinning the decisions of those organisations who have expanded their remit. However, without spaces in which we can meet as a sector and critically reflect on our purpose and our work, group members continue to feel concerned about this development.

Concerns centered on the practical implications for women's safety. Participants believed that presence of men as service users could compromise women's safety and felt that services for men and women should be delivered separately. Fears about the merging of services for women and men was based on their knowledge of how some abusive men sabotage their partner's help-seeking by contacting and grooming potential support agencies that the woman may, or has, accessed.

Rachel: ... what if you're at a one to one appointment and you do meet a man in the waiting room and it's the same service.

Me: You're at a one to one appointment and you realize you're meeting the perpetrator and you met his wife last week.

Claire: I think it is a dilemma, given that we don't know how everyone is working. In our service we don't allow men to come in for the very reason that, if a man comes in and a woman sees them or if it's a potential perpetrator, so we just don't. And we'll refer to Amen²⁹ and, to go back to your point, it's for safety but not everybody's working that way.

²⁹ Frontline service for male victims of domestic abuse. Now called Men's Aid.

The group sought to identify factors that may inform the decision of some organisations to extend their services to male victims. Aoife identified the prevalence of a gender-neutral paradigm in wider society and a resistance to a gendered analysis of women's experience of intimate partner violence as the primary factor underpinning organisational decisions.

Aoife: ... like, there's something in this country, more specifically than in the UK or across the rest of Europe, we really have an issue with saying that violence against women is greater than it is against men. It's like this neutrality thing that we hold in Ireland, I think it's strong.

Jane: Except that it's not true. Violence against women isn't greater than violence against men but violence against men is committed by men. And that's not said, you know? There is an inequality of perpetrators. There may be equal numbers, is, of victims, but there is an unequal number of perpetrators. And that needs to be said

Group members believed that a lack of education about and therefore a lack of knowledge within the domestic violence sector itself about the specificities of violence against men as compared to violence against women within intimate relationships weakened organisational capacity to hold a position on the necessity for separate services. As we continued to dialogue about this issue, we shared information about our understanding and current responses to men experiencing domestic abuse, some of which centre a gendered analysis and therefore compliment rather than work against the goals of women's domestic violence services. Knowledgeability about the issue of domestic violence against men was identified as a component of worker education. Maureen suggested that:

... we should all maybe take a module about violence against men and what that looks like. Because I don't know anything about that, I really don't. Like that could be part and parcel of an overall thing.

The employment of male workers in domestic violence organisations

The issue of the employment of men in domestic violence services for women was another recent development in the domestic violence sector that illustrated for the group a lack of sectoral coherence. This issue emerged as a focus for the inquiry when Grainne asked the group if their organisations employed men as hers did. Grainne

talked about the reasons her organisation employed men to co-facilitate support groups.

Why we have the man in the supports group, he's only, he's external, he comes and does the support group and he goes away again. The thinking behind that was, it's not the very first support group women would go to, they would have all women in the first one, it's when the women would move on to the next level. And the idea was that they would model respectful behaviour between the male and the female during the facilitation.

Grainne's organisation also employed men as childcare workers. She identified that as her organisation was well resourced and had a lot of workers, that they were able to compartmentalise their services, maintaining the women only nature of frontline support, advocacy and refuge provision.

Until Grainne asked this question, the group had not identified the employment of men in frontline services for women experiencing domestic abuse as an issue of concern. Her statement however, elicited strong responses from some of her co-inquirers.

Aoife: my gut reaction was when you said that, that I was horrified when you said that. Because I hadn't even thought of it.

Jane queried why women's domestic violence organisations would ever have to justify employing women only.

Well, I also think, what is the problem with a woman only service. Why is it that needs to be changed, do you know what I mean?

For some group members, being part of a women's organisation that worked with women was a fundamental part of their identity as domestic violence workers. In response to information shared that two refuges now have male managers, Aoife said:

I think it's about the ethos for me, it's more about the ethos, because... we came close to, well, there was lots of rumors when we had no manager that it was a possibility... I just kept thinking of, we've got a very young team now, a very young, new team in the refuge and I just kept thinking that so,

somebody comes in as a manager, they're going straight in, not even starting from the ground and working their way up, what message does that give? That's the first thing. And then the second thing is, you have women coming into a refuge, getting away from power and control and the person with the power in the refuge is a man. It just doesn't, it really doesn't sit with me at all.

For Aoife, the purpose of women only services is to demonstrate a commitment to modelling female empowerment and to not replicating patriarchal power structures within domestic violence organisations. Grainne, while initially accepting her organisation's position on employing men as co-facilitators in group programmes began to question this stance during the inquiry for the same reasons.

I'm not sure about facilitating the support group because sometimes if women have always looked to a man for guidance, be it their father or their husband, and then, they're in a support group, would they hang on his every word? I haven't been in the group, so I can't say. But I don't know, that's a worry I would have

Not all members expressed their identification with the women only nature of services. Tessa queried the tenability of this stance, pointing out that:

... I suppose what we are looking at is violence against women so they, the perpetrators could be women. So, if we say that she can't work with a man as she was abused by a man, are we saying that a woman abused by a woman can't work with a woman? ... You know, where does that sit then? Obviously, men make up half of the planet but not all men are, there is a fraction of men who are abusers obviously.

However, most group members were troubled about this development. Concerns centered on the pragmatic safety implications for women and children and the impact on women of encountering men in what they would expect to be women only spaces. Rachel talked about her reaction when she heard there was a male support worker in a Dublin refuge.

I was more worried about Traveller women, given the fact that, ... well from refuge I suppose we know, well women tell us, Traveller women, tell us there's a culture of, she doesn't go home unless she's invited home, you know? There's certain things, do's and don'ts, wills and won'ts and one of

them is that if there was a man in the refuge or, she'd be beaten to ... Sometimes men do ring looking for their wives and if a man answers that refuge, they're like, do you know what? I don't know, I think it's risky, I think it's risky to women.

Rebecca feared that some women returning home from refuges where there were male workers would have to ask their children to lie to their father to avoid being physically abused.

Yeah, you know I think the saddest thing about that is, you know the woman goes in, she's going to tell her children to lie, do you know what I mean? Don't tell your Daddy there was a man.

She highlighted how this would have the potential to play into the abuser's agenda, especially if children have already been coerced and manipulated into spying and reporting on their mother and taking the abuser's side against her.

Rachel pointed out, there would be an escalated risk for Traveller women, thus creating an additional barrier to the myriad of barriers Traveller women experience when trying to access safety and protection. Aoife highlighted the risk this created for other minority ethnic women, who in her experience, would be likely to be deterred from accessing a service if it employed men.

... but also the other thing that we were discussing was that under the Istanbul Convention³⁰ you are talking about equal access to everybody and if you know, what came up in our staff meeting in discussion was, Traveller women will probably stop using our services if there was men working there and Muslim women will probably stop using our services if there are male workers there, you know? Or if they did use it, it would probably be under certain restrictions and you know, so it's just, it's just to be teased out.

Other group members agreed that the presence of men in domestic violence services could act as a deterrent to some women in accessing the services. Group members felt that women coming to domestic violence services are likely to expect a woman

³⁰ The EU Convention on Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence ratified by the Irish government in 2019

only space and that their understanding that they are contacting a women's organisation provides a level of reassurance and safety.

Me: ... what we can guarantee when you come here is absolute safety and one of the things that creates safety is that there are no men working here. So, we know that helps you to feel safe, we're able to guarantee her that there's no possibility that her partner could ever have engaged with our service, internally, do you know? ... in my experience, women found that very reassuring and it did help them feel safer.

In addition to the perceived deterrent effect of men working in frontline services, the impacts on women when they do come into a domestic violence service was also seen as a reason why women only spaces were important.

Charley: I think the problem is the women are getting forgotten about in all of this. ... these are traumatized women and yet we're re-traumatizing them by putting the male image of the abuser back in front of them again. Whether they're good at their job or nice people is irrelevant, I think. It's about the impact on the woman.

While some members considered the possibility of men working in some aspects of domestic violence work, there was an agreement that men working in frontline services for women, particularly refuges, increased the risk for women of violence and abuse from partners and acted as a deterrent, possibly preventing women, particularly minority ethnic women, from accessing a service. Despite the very real concerns identified by this group of domestic violence workers, their experience is that there is little opportunity to critically reflect with their colleagues in the sector on the implications of men working in frontline services.

Lack of spaces for dialogue

The existence of disparate approaches to domestic violence within the sector was attributed to the lack of collective spaces for domestic violence workers to connect and dialogue across organisations. Group members referred to and described working in domestic violence organisations variously as working in "*bubbles*" (Claire

and Rachel), *silos*, (Maureen) and *"fiefdoms"* (Jane). Referring to the employment of men in frontline services, Jane said:

But that's one of the things that, generally it doesn't happen on any issue, you know, interagency. So different agencies might talk about it. You might talk about it in your own agency, but not between agencies. There isn't that forum there.

Rebecca: But there is no, you're right, there's no way to do that.

Aoife reflected the experience of a number of group members who felt that opportunities at sectoral level for dialogue no longer existed and she missed the *"good old fights and arguments"*.

... where did that discussion happen and that to me is really missing ... God I miss the bad old days ... when we'd be having rows about things. But they were constructive in the sense that we could debate this out in the open, you know? And it's like that's not happening now and we don't know what each other is doing. So that seems to be a bit of a common theme as well I'm hearing, is what's happening to the sector.

Rachel shared an experience when she attempted to dialogue with another organisation about this issue.

And I was told, Rachel, are you aware that there's a man working in the refuge in [name of refuge]? Like, no, ... I was kind of a bit worried because we tell women, someone from the refuge will call you back but I was worried about saying, there's a man going to call you back in a few minutes like ... and I just said, look, I'm just wondering, I'm just clarifying, have you got a male support worker there and we're just wondering what the impact might be in terms of us telling ... Anyhow, I really was surprised at the response because it went completely into, well he's very well qualified, which is not what I asked. I wasn't asking about his qualifications. And he's this and he's that and he comes highly qualified and recommended, dah, dah, dah, dah. So, I don't know how, I don't know if they've seen an impact because I've never, I've never brought that issue up again because the response wasn't what my intention was. I didn't bother addressing it again

The response Rachel got from this organisation led her to conclude that:

... it was almost as if I was being discriminatory because he was a man and there was no difference between men and women.

Her experience of trying to raise the issue of male workers with this refuge:

... kind of began me thinking into equality, what are we thinking about, and that can be construed one way or another.

Rachel's experience of contact with this refuge reflects experiences of other group members who felt that a misappropriation of the concept of equality led to gender neutral perspectives that underpinned decisions being made by some organisation in the wider network.

Equating equality with gender neutrality

How organisations and workers identified or did not identify with a gendered analysis of domestic violence came to the fore as a being implicated in the fragmentation that in the view of this group of domestic violence workers, presented a dilemma for the wider movement. Group members identified that an ostensible "equality" agenda which meant that *"we treat everything as if they are the same"* (Aoife) was influencing the decisions of some domestic violence services.

Charley: Yeah... funders are starting to use this whole equality thing. ... To dilute the whole idea of and the analysis of that women are more predisposed to violence than men. And so, we talked about the awful campaigns that have been on TV.

Charley references a recent state run media campaign³¹ as indicative of the state's misappropriation of equality as meaning that they must promote a gender-neutral analysis of domestic violence. Rachel also believed that a gender-neutral perspective on equality was being driven by the state, and that this was shaping how some organisations understood their equality mandate. Reflecting on why some organisations employ men she said:

I think that gender neutrality is being driven by [name of state agency], do you know what I mean? There's no two ways about that and they see any issue as an issue of equality, so you know what I mean? And so, funding, they do hold the purse strings so I think services might be feeling that they must,

³¹ The perception of group members was that the campaign portrayed domestic violence against men to be as equally prevalent as that against women and that there were more visual representations of men as victims than of women in the campaign.

and I think this was one of the discussions that we had earlier on was that, so, some of the services are working with men... are offering services to women and to men, do you know what I mean.

Grainne and Aoife, who are both trainers and educators on domestic violence as well as frontline service providers, talked about their experiences as co-facilitators with personnel in state agencies who provide training for public service staff. While both women seek to increase participants' knowledge about the gendered nature of domestic abuse, their co-facilitators promote a gender neutral analysis.

Grainne: ... there's scenarios about men and scenarios about women and as if it was all the same.

Both Aoife and Grainne talked about some of the materials and information used by trainers in state agencies in which they used statistics from one piece of research about *"men coming out of a GP, 98% of them said they were in a controlling relationship"* (Aoife). Both women have queried the use of a statistic that implies that men are *more* likely than women to experience domestic abuse, but to their knowledge, this statistic continued to be referenced by their co-trainers. Despite their concerns, Aoife and Grainne continue to co-facilitate with state employed trainers.

Aoife: ... if you don't stay involved you've got somebody going out there giving a total slant on this training, you know. As much as I find it frustrating to be doing it.

Group members identified the influence of the state as one factor in the adoption of gender-neutral responses to domestic abuse. Other factors identified by group members were that in general, they experience a resistance to the analysis of domestic violence as a gendered phenomenon from most people that they interact with outside of their organisations. For Maureen, holding a feminist analysis is central to her work.

... in the day to day work that I can't have that position because I'll alienate everyone that I need to help me. Does that make sense? ... It's not a popular position to have, at all. It's not accepted, it's not popular and that's why it's so difficult to drive home that it's him, it's him, it's him, and then what about

the other way around when the man is abused because if it's just the person. But that person doesn't exist in a vacuum, they exist in a cultural context that gives him power. Like that's a hard sell. And for training I think it going to be hard to. There'll be a lot of resistance I think.

Holding a gendered analysis of domestic violence is for some group members synonymous with feminism and they believe that antagonism towards feminism contributes towards a resistance to seeing the gender dimensions to intimate partner violence. Aoife spoke of how workshops were organised within her organisation some years ago to explore a feminist analysis of domestic abuse, but the while her colleagues were comfortable about claiming a gendered analysis of domestic abuse, did not want to use the word feminism. More recent recruits to the organisation however, identify neither with feminism nor with gender as an underpinning conceptual framework for their work:

Aoife: ... they don't see domestic violence in my experience as a political issue. It's like, you know... feminism is a word they steer away from. So, it's kind of like, how would you describe it, it's more like it's unfortunate that the woman found herself in that situation

Maureen: It's more like a dysfunctional family dynamic kind of thing?

Aoife: Yes, yes. And we're all equal and sometime the men are just as, you know, that kind of attitude.

Maureen reflected Aoife's concern that younger women perceive that gender equality has been achieved and therefore struggle to find explanations when unequal power dynamics manifest in intimate relationships.

... young women, that I've experienced, they feel like well we're not in the 80s or 90's anymore we're all, you know, everybody's equal and free. And then you know, it's a shock when personal relationships, when that patriarchy, gender dynamic, do you see what I'm saying? There's kind of a denial that's still happening.

Jane: I think that a part of that can then be the woman blaming herself because things are equal and free, and who's fault is that? So, it goes back to that self-blame.

Group members identified how an ostensible equality agenda that drives gender-neutral responses to domestic abuse underpins individualised explanations for domestic violence that pathologise both victims and abusers and ultimately blame women for the abuse they are subjected to. How the practice of individual workers as they relate to and interact with women may be impacted by the influence of gender-neutral understandings of domestic abuse came into clearer focus as we inquired into our own practice. These impacts are further illustrated in the next chapter, which focuses on the distinctive nature of feminist domestic violence practice.

Conclusion

This chapter presents data that illustrates how our group deepened our understanding of domestic violence as a profoundly gendered phenomenon and why this knowledge is core to safe and effective responses to women experiencing intimate partner violence. Our shared standpoint on the gendered nature of domestic abuse contrasted with our experiences within the wider sector in which we perceived a lack of coherence in how organisations responded to domestic abuse. Identifying the factors that created this fracture in meaning frameworks, the group identified as a significant factor the equation of equality with a gender neutral perspective. The predominance of this perspective on domestic abuse in wider society and particularly within those state agencies on whom we depend for funding was identified as the primary driver for fragmented responses within the wider sector.

The group identified how the lack of collective and collaborative learning opportunities increase the likelihood that organisations will succumb to pressures to adopt gender neutral approaches to domestic violence. Whilst we recognised the importance of holding a gendered analysis for our work, participants were also able to acknowledge the different perspectives in the group in relation to some aspects of the three critical issues that we inquired into. There was full agreement however, that each of these three issues required further critical inquiry at a sectoral level and that knowledge and evidence about what worked in maximising women and

children's safety in relation to these critical issues must be included in education and learning for workers.

Reflexive considerations

Accepting the inevitable limitations and partiality of these research findings, I continued to experience a sense of disquiet when reading back on the first draft of this chapter. I felt that rather than open up such conversations, these findings may serve rather to close down dialogue and contribute to the continued disconnect and isolation of workers that group members identified as impacting on their work. Our colleagues in the sector, who we perceived as employing responses that are potentially detrimental to women and children, were not in the dialogic space with us and therefore, as stated above, we relied only on our experience and our knowledge to come to the best assessment we could on the implications of the employment of men in services, organisations' engagement with perpetrator programmes, and the expansion of women's services to include services for men experiencing domestic abuse.

As a co-subject in the group, I shared with other group members many of the concerns and worries about disparate approaches to domestic violence. I position myself as a practitioner researcher who makes a strong argument for the importance of grounding domestic violence responses in an analysis of gender inequality. My disquiet lies in realising that it was this subject position that drove my participation in dialogue about these critical issues. As a co-subject, my voice mattered, as a facilitator, it was important that I stepped back from my subject position and facilitate the group to examine alternative perspectives to those which came to the fore in our inquiry.

Questions that now come to mind would have been more usefully responded to within the group inquiry. For example, is it possible that those organisations who have chosen to employ men and/or provide a service to men who experience domestic abuse made these decisions with full reference to a gendered analysis on domestic violence? Is it possible that they may have developed ways of working that in no way compromise the safety of women and children and continue to model

female empowerment and solidarity within a mixed gender setting? In addition, there is a much empirical evidence and theoretical arguments in literature on domestic violence responses that call for moving beyond a reliance on accountability mechanisms within the criminal justice system to seeking accountability and justice through community based restorative justice measures which include behavioural change programmes for abusers. In my role as facilitator, and with the privilege I have had as a PhD student of engaging with this literature, I could have provided an opportunity for group members to set aside for a while, our primary subjective experience, and to consider these alternative perspectives. This would have enabled a deeper engagement with some of the nuances and complexities that are attendant to this important issue and possibly to a recognition of the potential benefits of re-examining some of our long held assumptions about our work. As a facilitator of a collaborative learning process, my absorption in my subject position within the group diverted me from enabling a deeper inquiry into this and other aspects of our inquiry that surfaced difficult or disorientating dilemmas.

This critique on our process of collaborative research in no way implies that the knowledge generated by our inquiry is not useful or that group members' subjective experiences should be suppressed or devalued. The real-life impacts of these developments on the women and children for whom we work as understood and perceived by group members are too important and critical to ignore. We can only offer our experience and the knowledge that we generated within this inquiry as a contribution to ongoing dialogue and collaboration within the domestic violence movement. At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that collaborative inquiry as a research methodology has its limits, requiring group sizes to be small enough to provide the best possible conditions for group dialogue. As a group of 10 women we could not possibly be said to even approach a representation of the array of views and experiences that exist within the domestic violence sector. Even if some of our colleagues have shared our experiences, they may interpret these differently and draw alternative meanings if they were to similarly engage in a group inquiry. The findings in this chapter draw attention to the need for collaborative and dialogic learning opportunities for all involved in domestic violence work.

Chapter 8. Building the framework 1: The distinctive nature of domestic violence practice

Introduction

Continuing in our joint endeavour to describe and agree a shared understanding of effective learning responses to domestic abuse, the inquiry focus shifted to the role and practice of the domestic violence worker. The chapter starts with findings that illustrate how the group differentiated domestic violence practice as distinct from other practice models which, in our experience, were often erroneously ascribed to our work. By defining what we are not, the group were able to agree a clear understanding of the purpose of domestic violence work. The chapter continues with a presentation of data focusing on the building of a group definition on this first dimension of our practice, empowerment support. This section includes findings on group members' descriptions of the active nature of our support work and our primary focus on the safety of women and their children. Findings in the second section focus on the groups' understanding of the role and practice of domestic violence workers as rights based advocate and social change actors. This is followed by a presentation of findings that address a somewhat problematic aspect of our work and our inquiry, that is, our differences in relation to and struggles in defining an intersectional approach to domestic violence work. Following the conclusions, the chapter ends with a reflexive consideration on the challenges of facilitating and maintaining reflexivity in this research project.

Recognising the distinctive nature of domestic violence work

The need to recognise the distinctive nature of domestic violence work was identified as a shared concern in the launching phase of this inquiry. The findings in this section illustrate participants' understanding of the goals and purposes of domestic violence work and the very particular knowledge and skills that workers must have to be effective practitioners. Group members identified that there was little in the way of learning supports specific to the diversity, complexity and distinctiveness of domestic violence work. This resulted in domestic violence work being misconstrued

as social care work or counselling practice. Group members were keen to make clear distinctions between domestic violence work and other professions.

What we are not

Group members recognised how a bespoke education and learning programme could provide a recognised and distinctive profile for domestic violence work. Providing for such a programme was identified as essential to *“avoid dilution in social care or in social work”* (Grainne) and to facilitate *“moving from just being an add on to something”* (Claire). The following reflection illustrates how a misunderstanding of one’s role can result in a missed opportunity to make visible to the courts the impact of an abuser’s behaviour on children.

Aoife: I had a, and I really don’t mean this in a bad way, but one of the childcare workers had to write a report for court and I had a look at it and I said, look, you are not naming the domestic abuse here, you are not naming him. You’re leaving him out, because these kids were really distressed after access. And I was, you really need to name this here because it was a central issue. But she was focused on the development of the children, you know, because that was her training. You know?

Aoife understood that her colleague’s capacity to maximise the safety well being of the children in this case was not a failure of the individual, but because they came to the work with a qualification that was created to respond to child development issues outside of the context of domestic violence. This childcare worker had not received an education specific to their role as a childcare worker in a domestic violence refuge.

The necessity to ensure that education and training for domestic violence workers equipped them to respond to women’s and children’s experience of coercive control was further emphasised when group members focused on the knowledge and skills underpinning good practice. Grainne named motivational interviewing and brief intervention as useful skills for a domestic violence worker to have. This perspective was challenged by other group members who assessed these skills as inappropriate to domestic violence work. Speaking about motivational interviewing, Aoife said:

We’ve done quite a lot in our organisation and some of the staff absolutely love it ... I have a huge issue with it because it’s, there’s a focus on the woman

making the change. It's very much used in addiction and it's very successful in addiction, but I would have queries. Like some of the skills are useful because you are doing all that stuff around listening and mirroring, like kind of counselling skills, but the nub of it is she needs to change.

Claire saw the use of brief intervention theory in domestic violence work as inappropriate.

... we'll do this brief intervention kind of thing. So that can be used a lot in counselling, primary care service. So, they'll see people for maybe 6 to 8 weeks, and they'll use a short-term solution focused approach. It really doesn't fit in with domestic violence.

Both Claire and Aoife pinpointed how the goals and assumptions underpinning such models worked against the goals of domestic violence practice by focusing on behavioral change of the woman and expecting concrete outcomes in a short period of time. The employment of such practices provide an example of how approaches that are not domestic violence informed can lead to practitioners inadvertently laying responsibility for change with the woman being abused. Aoife recognised how the turn to these practice models was because:

... to be fair to where we were coming from and where, do you know, at the time my manager, it's kind of like trying to find any training that fits us, do you know what I mean?

Group members' reflections suggest that inappropriate practice models fill a vacuum created by the lack of a foundational qualification or an educational pathway into domestic violence work and the limited availability of ongoing education and learning opportunities specific to domestic violence practice.

Seeking new workers, organisations look for qualifications in alternative disciplines, most particularly in social care. Aoife, who is herself a social care graduate, reflected that newer recruits coming into her organisation with social care degrees do not come in with an understanding of the gendered nature and roots of domestic violence and consequently they view it as *"unfortunate that the woman found herself in that situation"*. The growing reliance on qualified social care staff to fill vacant positions in domestic violence services was seen as problematic by group members,

not because they perceived social care as an unimportant or lesser field of practice, but because they understood the goals of social care and the orientation of social care practice to be different to that of domestic violence work.

Charley: I think in the sector you must be adversarial, to be an advocate, an effective advocate. And if you've done a social care degree, you must care, they're very caring people, that's why they go into it. They're not, well some of them I'm sure not all of them, they're not as adversarial as you need to be to be an advocate. So, as well as that gender analysis not being there, they haven't got that sort of spark to fight for justice and social change because it's not part of the remit, for social change. Whereas, you do need to be a fighter. To fight for your woman, to fight for yourself, to fight for everybody so what we do, we firefight, that's part of the job.

While recognising that in our interactions with women "*we are empathetic and caring*", I challenged the use of terms such as care plans in the context of domestic violence work.

Care plans? For people who are being victimised, do you know what I mean? And let down by the system. This isn't about care, it's about justice and safety and protection. And that is social care. That's social care language coming in there, you know?

Group members' understanding was that domestic violence work centred mainly around the need for domestic violence workers to focus on facilitating women's empowerment while simultaneously working to secure protection and justice for women and children and to support their access to essential social and economic supports. Our perception was that this was not the focus of social care work. By focusing on the differences between social care work and domestic violence work, our role as rights based advocates came to the fore as a key dimension of our work.

Distinguishing emotional support from counselling

As the group continued to collaboratively build a shared understanding of the nature of domestic violence work, Aoife referred to the ubiquity of the term, emotional support, a common term employed by workers.

Aoife: ... providing emotional support... what does this mean? Because we say we do it all the time, but what does it mean?

Beginning to articulate what emotional support meant to her, Aoife said:

It means doing a bit of everything. I think what we do is very close to counselling although we are not trained counsellors. Some people are I know that, but I think that it's something that the sector doesn't talk about enough. ... But I think the actual, from my own experience anyway, it was a learn as you go kind of thing. And I think it would be great to see a focused part of training on emotional support.

Aoife's reflections indicate that despite being a primary role for domestic violence workers, a lack of learning opportunities on providing emotional support results in this core aspect of work remaining somewhat undefined. Picking up on Aoife's reference to counselling, Claire reflected on some of the boundaries between counselling and providing emotional support.

I think it can be hard because it's the boundary between, as you say, you're not counselling but you are nearly falling into that when you are in the room, one to one. That environment of being one to one with a woman, when she is expressing her feelings and you are sitting there listening, like that's the foundational piece of counselling. But then the problem is where stuff gets really opened and if you are not trained or qualified to go somewhere with that, it's difficult for the worker and difficult for the woman. So, you know, I think it's risky.

Group members agreed that what a domestic violence worker does is not counselling and yet they need to have basic counselling skills and a capacity to respond to whatever might get "*opened up*" for a woman as we interact with her. The group continued to try and distinguish the difference between providing emotional support in the context of our work and counselling.

Me: Do you have different goals when you are in those two different spaces Claire, you know? Is your focus different for your work with the woman or your goals for your work with the woman?

Claire: It sort of is like the way it is when we have discussions whereby the woman is moving from, we call it support, into counselling, we talk about how far they've been brought, that sounds very simplistic and we really assess very much if the woman is ready to go into counselling. We make it very clear to her that it's looking at deeper issues.

Me: Yeah, it can be more about her, can't it, in a sense that...

Claire: It can be.

Me: My understanding of it is, I've been in therapy myself and my understanding was that it was about my personal change, in a way. Do you know? But that when we are working with woman at risk, yeah, it's not that we don't wish change for her but whether she changes or not is irrelevant, we are really focusing on her safety.

Rachel: Yeah, it's the immediate.

Me: Obviously for her to gain more insight, for her to regain her power, of course we want those changes for her, but I'm not concerned about her childhood or, I'm focusing on her safety and then counselling might be about deeper stuff is that right? I don't know if that's...

Claire: It is. It can be, I suppose you end up going into their childhood, their family of origin, the dynamics that played out there. It can be their own personal identity and self of self. Now there's times where, depending on what's going on you must come back out of that stuff but for the most part, when they are ready to go into counselling we talk to them about those kinds of possibilities and they are usually the kind of things that come up.

Group members identified that the key distinguishing feature of providing emotional support as compared to counselling is that the domestic violence worker is focused on a woman's safety, and while they see that changes in how a woman makes sense of her situation can contribute to that, the worker is not focused on personal change as a precursor to safety.

Group members felt it was important to be specific about the goals of our practice because women experiencing domestic violence often come to domestic violence services with the expectation that they will receive counselling.

Maureen: Yeah, and somebody has told them go to Women's Link and get some counselling

Me: And they've been told that they're the problem, yeah? So, it's like, I've come to be fixed, do you know what I mean. It can be an adjustment for women I've found, to invite them to, this is not about fixing you, you are not the problem.

Distinguishing domestic violence practice as different from counselling highlighted the need to avoid problematising the woman by focusing on her behaviour change

as the solution to ending the violence and abuse she experienced. Charley also felt it was important to avoid counselling language.

... when I am doing emotional support, I'm always very conscious that I am not a counsellor ... I use my own experiences to help de-programme the brain washing that's gone on by the perpetrator. ... I'll try to just keep highlighting that all the time and then, so that she'll see what it really is all about rather than believing everything that she's been told all the time. So that's kind of how I see it, as emotional support. Because it is supporting her emotionally, just to try and get more clarity.

Charley's description of her practice reflects Tessa's account of how she and her colleagues communicate clear messages about the culpability and intentionality of the abuser so that women can come to recognise "*you didn't fall into this, you were chosen, you were groomed*". Thus, facilitating a perspective shift in women's understanding of their situation is identified as a goal in providing emotional support to women experiencing domestic violence. Charley and Tessa's accounts emphasise that knowledge about coercive control and the resultant entrapment of women is key if domestic violence workers are to share knowledge and information that enables women to gain insight into the intentions and tactics of their abuser. This educative role was referred to by other group members as being integrated into their provision of emotional support to women and findings in relation to this aspect of practice are presented at a later stage in this chapter.

Whilst emphasising the difference between counselling and emotional support and the necessity to be clear about the purpose and goals of providing this response, group members identified how many of the skills that a domestic violence worker employs are those that are included in a basic counselling course. An ability to create a level of emotional safety for women when they interact with domestic violence workers is one area in which skills that are core to counselling and in providing emotional support intersect.

Creating emotional safety

Rachel identified how the domestic violence worker must be able to create a level of emotional safety in all interactions between a woman accessing a domestic violence service and the worker. She believed that a foundational level of education in counselling skills would benefit workers.

Because it is about the listening, it's important that you can hold that, hear the trauma, the experience, and I'm sure we all do that in the room anyway, we hear women's accounts of their experience, you know? Horrific accounts. So, I think we must be aware ourselves, you know, that it is a holding space, maybe not long term. One to one, because we'll resume this next session but it's how to hold that woman for that time and keep it safe for her, even ending that conversation. How can she keep that safe for herself when she walks out the room and do you know, I think it's important that we have those skills and I suppose an understanding of them?

Creating safety includes not just doing this within the interaction between a worker and a woman experiencing domestic abuse is also about being cognisant of the risk's women face when they leave a support session or end a helpline call.

Charley reflected on the fact that domestic violence workers respond to women who are traumatised by their experience of violence and abuse and how as workers they need to be able to both understand and respond to trauma as well as manage their own reactions in their interactions with women.

I think a basic understanding of trauma and PTSD and all those strands off it is essential to provide effective emotional support because when you're working with trauma and a woman's there and she's really traumatised, it's very hard, its challenging as a worker to just hold it because you know, advocacy, there's nothing you can do. You are basically just sitting there and holding her in that moment and going like, well yeah, shit, you know, there's nothing you can do. And it's very hard not to take that on board as a worker and to feel guilty because you couldn't help her practically, because we are all doers and it can be very challenging to just sit there and go, well this is it. You know and I (inaudible) working with trauma as well and I think out of any sector, we're the ones that work with women in trauma the most, so I think an educational piece is important for any educational framework around a module on trauma and how do you work effectively with it

Our capacity to, as Charley and Rachel described it, hold a safe space for ourselves and the woman when we are faced with the reality that we may not be able to do much more than listen to a woman who is experiencing abuse, is core to creating emotional safety. Charley defined the skills needed to hold this safe space as being able to:

... remain calm, centred and empathic to woman whilst remaining detached enough to be a strong and effective support to respond to woman's needs; i.e. not allowing yourself to become caught up emotionally in the extremity of her story or situation and then displaying this externally to the woman and other professionals.

Charley's, description of the skills needed by a domestic violence worker in creating emotional safety emphasise self-awareness and a capacity to manage our emotions and reactions. Lacking an awareness of our own reactions can, as Maureen recognised, lead a worker to "*jump into the practical*" rather than giving a woman time to talk about her experiences and the impacts of the violence and abuse on her.

I've noticed that when I do that because I'm uncomfortable, or she's just coming in to talk like you are saying, because you want to use your tools. But I think that can put women off because you're saying, you need to do something, you know? You need to do this order, or you need to consider housing or whatever and, you know, she's getting that from everybody. That can be a real danger if you're not aware.

Moving too quickly to suggest options for actions inadvertently mirrors women blaming responses.

Me: Effectively what you are saying is, you are in this because you are not doing something, yeah.

In this respect, whilst our goals as domestic violence workers may be different from counsellors, basic knowledge and skills about self-awareness that are included in foundational education for counsellors were assessed by group members as essential for the domestic violence worker. Whilst acknowledging the importance of trauma informed practice, most group members expressed concerns about the lack of

education about trauma and what constituted effective trauma informed responses for domestic violence workers.

Recognising the importance of trauma informed practice

Charley's statement that *"out of any sector, we're the ones that work with women in trauma the most"* reflects the reality that almost all women accessing domestic violence services will be traumatised by their experience of domestic abuse (Wilson et al, 2015).

Being trauma informed was identified as integral to providing emotional support to women experiencing domestic abuse and yet it was an area of practice in which most group members had received no education. As a complex aspect of domestic violence knowledge, group members felt that foundational education on trauma and how to respond to it was essential for the domestic violence worker.

Maureen: Oh yeah, I know when I think about trauma, I didn't know anything about trauma and I could have used a more formal sort of, this is what trauma looks like, this is what it is, because I was looking at trauma and I didn't necessarily know that, do you know what I'm saying? I didn't come from a counselling background so; I think things like that are important to tease out.

Aoife identified that not understanding trauma can result in staff problematising women's behaviour in a residential setting when conflict arises, when in her experience, many women may end up conflict with others because of the trauma they have experienced.

I think it's so important to refuge work, that's where I see it, you know? It's like, women clashing with each other and then staff getting into that them and us thing and "her behaviour is not acceptable" and forgetting, you know, moving away from, it's because of trauma.

A further aspect of trauma informed practice is understanding how we as workers experience vicarious trauma because of listening to and encountering women and children who have been violated and abused. Rachel felt that as a sector we had not fully embedded an understanding of vicarious trauma nor fostered the skills for effective self-care.

I think vicarious trauma is something that we need to be talking about daily and you know, you might not connect with the impact of that on yourself but it's usually other people that might spot it in you if you are traumatised, you know? You're not identifying it yourself. It's your colleagues who'll say, she's not really herself, you'll spot something, that's that little flag.

Group members recognise the importance of being trauma informed and yet their reflections suggest it is an aspect of their practice in which they feel less assured and knowledgeable. Maureen talked about how she and her colleagues were “*constantly looking for training for trauma*” indicating the priority that she placed on increasing knowledge and skills in this area. Aoife and Claire reflected that in the absence of access to education and learning opportunities about trauma informed practice, it is left to the individual worker to identify learning resources such as books and articles.

Aoife: You know, we don't do any training around trauma I don't think. It's up to individual workers reading. Judith Herman³² is one that I've, but I know that not all staff have read that, by any means.

Claire: I think absolutely the work needs to be trauma informed but what do we mean by that? And do people read up on certain writers about trauma, depending on maybe what organisation you're in, you know? When you went in first you know, sometimes you might have whoever is over you are really taken with an author or piece of education or whatever and you end up taking that on yourself and sometimes forget about the rest of the information and knowledge that's out there.

Group members highlighted the importance of education that is specific to presence of trauma in the lives of women who have experienced domestic abuse. The situation as these workers experienced it was that they had to be self-directed in their learning and as Claire noted, this meant that they may access knowledge that does not address how women entrapped by coercive controllers' experience trauma. Participants accounts suggest that this learning would be foundational to effective domestic violence practice, given that, as Charley said, domestic violence workers are the practitioners who are most likely to be working with traumatised individuals.

³² Author of seminal text *Trauma and Recovery*. See bibliography for full reference.

An educative role

When describing their practice in providing emotional support to women who have experienced domestic abuse, some group members referred to their 'psychoeducation' role. Clarifying what this meant for her, Rachel said:

And I think from my perspective at that time we looked at making space with women around the power and control wheel³³ and understanding the behaviours, you know, so that she can identify them themselves. That it's not about her behaviour, it's about the perpetrator.

Rachel described how she used knowledge and information tools developed by and for women experiencing domestic abuse as a way of enabling women to experience this perspective shift.

... you know, women when you go through that power and control wheel, you don't need to tell them, I'm telling you this. This is a huge piece of research that was done and often, when you sit with women with that piece of information in that format it's oh my god, that's me. Yeah, that is me. I can't believe, I thought I was on my own with all these experiences. They could identify with all these experiences but it's not you or I am telling them, it's this piece. And somehow or other, it's like an awakening moment for women.

Experiencing this awakening moment women can experience a change in perspective where the responsibility for the violence and abuse shifts to the abuser. Facilitating women to reject the internalisation of self-blame by understanding the causes of domestic violence as being outside of their control was seen as an important role for domestic violence workers.

Jane: I think there is something about externalising the causes as well, you know. So that she is not seeing herself as the cause, that it's external to her. I think that's part of the emotional support.

A role for the domestic violence worker was described as not only sharing this information with a woman but as clearly stating our disagreement with the

³³ A tool created collaboratively by The Duluth Domestic Violence Project and women who had experienced domestic abuse in Duluth Minnesota that aids women to identify and name the multiple behaviours an abusive partner employs

justifications employed by an abusive man to shift the blame of their violence and abuse on to their partner.

Me: Because what he's done, and what society has done, is constantly conceal his intentions, his motives and his strategies and is presenting it as, ... what he has a right to expect as a man and oh, if only she didn't and if only she would. So that's all in her head and we're just not buying in to it, you know? We're not in any way, the minute she comes in the door she meets someone who says, we're not buying it, you know.

Other group members described what women themselves said about this aspect of our practice as coming into a domestic violence service for their *"reality check"* (Aoife) or coming in to be *"de-programmed"* (Charley). By sharing our knowledge of the tactics about coercive controllers and providing a counter narrative that challenges cultural justifications for men's use of violence and abuse, our aim is to enable the women to experience a transformation in how she understands her experience of domestic abuse.

Describing the constituent elements of providing emotional support highlighted the immediacy of domestic violence work and a focus on maximising safety as differentiating domestic violence work from counselling. As our inquiry progressed, the group described a further aspect of our practice that clearly distinguished what we termed as the provision of emotional support from the provision of counselling. This feature of our practice is characterised by a direct and honest communication with the woman as we work with her to maximise her safety and welfare, and if she is a mother, the safety and welfare of her children.

Focusing on safety

In seeking to describe what group members defined as the 'active' nature of our provision of support to women, our dialogue centred on the role we play in risk assessment and in safety planning with women. We came to focus on these issues as we sought to distinguish between being directive, which group members agreed was antithetical to empowerment practice, from being direct and honest with women, which group members agreed was essential if we were to maximise women's and children's safety.

Tessa: Well, I think in emotional support it needs to be non-judgemental emotional support. Because that's a huge part of the work. That's where a lot of people who enter the sector find it difficult to step away from and say, oh I don't know if I, whatever! It doesn't matter if you agree with or not. So, I think in emotional support, it needs to be, I think non-judgemental and client led. Because emotional support, we know what it means but for somebody who is picking this up they won't know what it means.

Tessa's statement, "*we know what it means*" assumes a shared understanding of the meaning of being non-judgemental and client led. Claire responded to Tessa.

I think, I'm sure we've spoken about it at some point, but, you know, often in emotional support, non-judgement, all of that, I think sometimes we can assume it should be non-directive and I think in this work it needs to be directive at times.

Providing an example of a situation in which she would be directive Claire said:

Well, you know, in a situation where a woman is coming to you and they're just very, really have no idea what direction to take and there's chaos and there's children, you need to be somewhat directive to get the person off the starting block. I think you can be client led as well and continuing from there but sometimes to be able to get the woman to a point where she can function. Do you know what I mean?

Other group members did not identify with the word "*directive*" but agreed that when providing emotional support to women experiencing domestic abuse, that the worker would be direct about sharing their assessment of risk and their fears for a woman's and her children's safety. The group sought to articulate this more active and interventionist role when responding to a woman.

Aoife: Safety planning. If a woman is minimising her own safety, I would be, I don't know directive is the word, but I would just say, I am very concerned for your safety. I would really. I would feel that it's very important that we do a safety plan. Let's think about this and let's, you know, that's quite, that's quite directive, isn't it?

Jane: Being realistic. ... Because in my experience, they don't want to go there, they don't want to think, this is what is happening. So, you say, like what you were saying, I see this as a dangerous situation

Rebecca: Yeah, you've got it. It's about reflective listening isn't it?

Jane: So, I wouldn't say that's being directive, it's being very blunt in a way, you know. Very clear. And I think that that's very important. Emotional support can come across as very wishy washy, you say oh, there, there. That's not what we do.

Charley: I think what we do is we are continually risk assessing. Every time we meet the woman, every time we're talking to the woman, we are continually assessing the risk that she's under or that her family is under. Quite often, women who have other people in the family or Guards, who tell her, oh, go get a barring order, it's a classic example. And they go, OK, I want to talk to you about this to get a clearer picture of what's going on, and then we'll do a risk assessment as to whether that's the safest thing for her to do or not and yeah, we'll be quite brutal and honest with people. That's not the safest thing to do, if you do that, then this is likely to happen. This is what we see happening again and again. Yeah, we're client led to a degree but only within the confines of a risk assessment, I think. Sometimes what a woman wants to do may not be the safest thing for her and that comes into advocacy as well.

Me: But ultimately at the end of the day, if a woman is clear she is going to do something, it's her choice... we're not advising

Aoife: It's showing her the consequences.

Tessa: It's informing rather than directing.

Rachel: From your experience, yeah (general chatter).

Jane: I have women say, you've predicted everything he was going to do, you know. So, in a way it's offering her the knowledge and experience that I have from the work.

Rachel: And that she has herself.

Jane: And that we all have. Women don't come to us because they think everything is fine. Somewhere inside they know that things are bad, and they are scared, so then you are just saying, yeah, you're right to be scared.

Charley: But you're very honest with women, you must be honest with women. It's a very dangerous situation you are in and you can't sugar coat that. They would not be with us otherwise.

Rachel: I think, I suppose, I would be very much in touch with a woman's own sense of danger that she's in, is when you do carry out a risk assessment and if it's a scoring risk assessment that she can see, you know, she wouldn't have been able to form that assessment herself because she's been living in it, you know, and she does minimise, we know that. But that's really been to enable her to cope on some level, in the home and balance things out if she needs to, particularly if there's kids there.

The need to be direct, honest and realistic with women is emphasised by group members. Whilst continuing to maintain the principle of being woman led, that is, respecting the choice and agency of the women for whom we work, group members were also clear that they wouldn't 'sugar-coat' the risks that women may face should they choose particular options. As well as directly expressing fears for the safety of a woman, group members talked of using tools such as the 'Power and Control Wheel' so that women could identify with this information and come to their own assessment of the risk that they faced. Risk assessment as described by group members is not confined to specific stages of service delivery or particular services but is, as Charley defined it, bringing an awareness of risk into all interactions with women who access the support of domestic violence services.

Jane and Aoife identify that women sometimes minimise risk and find it difficult to acknowledge the reality of what is happening to them. However, group members' reflections illustrate a more complex picture of women's understanding and knowledge of the risks that face them. Rachel recognises that on the one hand, women do minimise as a coping strategy, while on the other hand, she feels it is important to be "*very much in touch with the woman's own sense of danger*" because "*she's been living it*". Jane also recognises that alongside finding it difficult to acknowledge some of the realities of their situation, women come to domestic violence services because of the fear they are experiencing. The role of the domestic violence worker therefore is to affirm the validity of that fear as useful information for the woman in her own assessment of the risk she faces.

The importance of continually focusing on safety is further emphasised by Charley when she reflects that women she has worked with have often been encouraged by others to take a particular path without an awareness nor assessment of the risks involved. As practitioners who have seen again and again, as Charley says, how risky pursuing certain options can be for women, we must share this information with the woman so that she can make informed choices. This includes sharing information and knowledge about the risks to children. This approach to risk assessment is in contrast to that employed in the UK within multi agency risk management structures that

expect women to make the “right” choices once specific risk has been “made known” to her by the professional (Coy and Kelly, 2019). Participants saw risk assessment as enabling a woman to connect to her own knowledge of the risks she and her children faced, to provide a space for her to consider what options would be safest for her to pursue and to ensure choice and agency always remained with the woman. At the same time, there was reference to the limits of non-directive practice by some participants who positioned themselves as expert risk assessors. Whilst sharing knowledge was seen as necessary to counteract assurances from other professionals that taking certain measures would maximise women and children’s safety, by focusing primarily on risk we could inadvertently stray into directive practice. Thus, while we do not in Ireland have a state led multi agency mechanism for managing risk as in the UK, problematic elements of risk discourse can be discerned in our dialogue. The challenges of remaining non-directive were addressed again when our inquiry focused on how group members work with women to maximise the safety and welfare of their children.

Focusing on children’s safety and welfare

While almost half of the organisations that the group members worked for provided services for children, none of us, other than Charley, worked directly with children in our current or recently held positions. However, group members shared an understanding that their goal as domestic violence workers is to maximise women *and* children’s safety and welfare. Group members identified that their role was to support and empower women as protective parents. Rachel described how she and her colleagues integrate a focus on child protection and welfare into their interactions with women.

... how we talk to the women is about her disclosure, her concerns about her children in what maybe she’s expressed in how she’s been trying to protect the children. So, we always, when we’re having a conversation around child protection, is to say, look, you are acting like the protective parent, you’re the non-abusive parent ... Because that’s what it is about, it’s actioning, or demonstrating how she is being a protective parent, so you reflect that back.

Utilising her knowledge of women's safety strategies enables Rachel to validate the woman as a protective parent.

... we do have knowledge about women, how they try and support their children in that relationship, do you know? Like, I know from my own experience that women will absolutely get out of that house when it's no longer safe, the children have intervened somehow or there's a threat that children are being harmed. So, I think there are some things that we can bring when we work with women, how women, how they react, how they respond, I think.

By validating the woman's concerns about her children and also recognising a woman's protective parenting, Rachel believed that we encourage a woman to stay engaged in a process that would lead to greater safety for her and for her children. The affirmation of the woman's strengths as a parent is congruent with what Rachel views as the purpose of her work, which is to facilitate women's empowerment through acknowledging their strengths and capacities. Being non-directive and woman-led was also identified by group members as key to empowering practice with women. However, when considering the best interests of children and meeting child protection obligations,³⁴ group members acknowledged that there can be limits to our women-led practice and confidentiality.

Me: They mightn't have somewhere to live, or they might be going back into an incredibly violent situation, they had kids. And it was such a temptation to say, look, we'll get you into refuge now, ... and you hold back from that but at the same time you work through all those options with her. And you might have to go through them again and again because she's in such a place, but you say, ... what do you think would work best for you? I'm really concerned about you going home, I would be really worried about the children. And there is a point where, you know, the children are at immediate risk, where you do get directive.

Aoife talked about her organisation's approach to this challenge in the outreach programme she worked in. She and her colleagues inform all women accessing the service at the outset what their responsibilities are in relation to child protection and welfare and the limits of their confidentiality. She states that in her experience:

³⁴ Domestic violence workers follow Children First Guidelines and have reporting responsibilities under the Children First Act, 2015.

... what I do find then, you probably do find this after a while, is that after working with a woman if there are serious child protection issues they will come out and she will want to do something about them, you know? But it's how you approach it.

Providing women with information about our reporting responsibilities at the outset gives women time to build a *"trust based relationship"* (Rachel) with domestic violence workers and as Aoife reflects, in time most women will seek interventions to protect their children if they have concerns about their safety and welfare.

Giving women the time to build that trust with their key worker has been impacted on by the recent introduction of mandatory notification to Tusla about children living in refuges. Maureen expressed the view that mandatory notifications or reporting will potentially deter women from accessing refuges. She referenced information from Pavee Point, a Traveller rights centre in Dublin, who talked about the impact of mandatory notification to Tusla of families who access refuges.

... a lot of Traveller women now are afraid, are afraid to go in because... And even if there's no follow up by the social work it's still getting notified.

This presents a challenge to the domestic violence worker who believes, as expressed by Rachel, that encouraging women to stay engaged with a domestic violence service is critical in maximising the safety of women and children. Group members' accounts of their practice illustrate that part of our practice is managing the tensions of facilitating women's empowerment by being non-directive and affirming protective parenting whilst meeting our obligations to maximise children's safety and welfare in ways that may remove choice and agency from women.

A reflection on our role and practice in sharing our knowledge with women and in safety planning resulted in group members questioning the use of the term 'emotional support' to describe what they do in practice. The group decided to identify a term that more accurately represented the goals of domestic violence work.

Renaming our practice

Acknowledging that the term, 'emotional support', was in everyday usage in the domestic violence sector, Tessa, Aoife and Claire all expressed a dissatisfaction with the term

Tessa: There's something there that, emotional support just doesn't seem like the right word for it.

Aoife: It would be nice to have a word other than emotional support

Claire: I think it's just, on its own it doesn't feel very active whereas the work that we do, it is active.

The term emotional support did not fit with the nature of their work with women because it implied, "*that sounds like visiting a friend for a cup of tea. That's not what they're coming for*" (Tessa). Tessa's view reflects that of Charley who at an earlier stage in the inquiry had stated that:

It's not just as simple as just sitting there and giving her tea and sympathy and saying, right off you go.

As we attempted to identify a term that felt more appropriate to our role and purpose as domestic violence workers, we recapped on some of the key aspects of what we had initially termed as emotional support. Whilst emphasising the central importance of listening and validating women's experiences and focusing on the safety of women and children, we also saw our knowledge and information sharing role as "*empowering women*" (Claire) and "*empowering support*" (Rachel). Group members agreed that the term 'empowerment support' was a more accurate naming of our practice. Although the word empowerment was not commonly used by group members to describe practice, ultimately, it was the word that best fit our understanding of our purpose and our practice. The different aspects of this practice elucidated above, provide an illustration of what empowering practice means for this group of domestic violence workers.

Linked to our active role in providing empowerment support, group members described an active engagement with those practitioners and agencies who have the

remit to provide access for women and children to protection, ongoing safety and a range of social and economic rights and supports. Different language was used to name this dimension of our practice. However, in inquiring into the meaning of these phrases for each of us, we concluded that advocacy for the rights of women and children is core to our practice and there was a coherence within the group in terms of how we practiced as advocates.

Rights based advocacy.

Accounts from group members about what motivates them as domestic violence workers include a commitment to redressing the inherent injustice that women are subjected to by abusive partners and in situations where professionals fail to respond in a way that maximises the safety and welfare of women and children. In describing their commitment to domestic violence work in this way, group members positioned themselves as advocates, although not all participants used this term to describe their work. Throughout the inquiry, group members shared experiences of situations in which women were denied their rights and were otherwise failed by inadequate and inappropriate responses from those professionals from whom they seek a response. An analysis of these experiences is outside the scope of this research, however, I include two quotes to illustrate the kind of responses that group members have witnessed and how they responded as advocates in seeking to redress the denial of rights to the women they were supporting.

Grainne: You must be a bit tough now. I'm remembering one incident where a woman came bursting into a community development project where I worked, and she said her partner had taken the two children, just picked them up off the floor when he was visiting and not even dressed, took them off. She didn't know where he had gone, she contacted the Guards and they said, well, 'is he their father' and she said 'yes' and they said, 'well, sure, what can we do?' You know, she wasn't even married to him and legally, he'd no proof or legal right to them. But I went as an intermediary and I got some facts about what I could and couldn't do and I liaised between... And I put pressure on the guards to go out to his house and they were, oh he was giving them a bath and they look very well cared for. But I was, but he doesn't have the mother's permission to take them, you know? I said, if the man up the road took them what would you do? And he stopped then and he started thinking.

Aoife: I had an experience, where the refuge in [name of town] is close to the courthouse and we had a Traveller woman staying there and she went down to the local shop and her husband happened to be hanging around outside the courthouse, saw her walking past and punched her into the face. And she came running into the refuge. And we knew, there's always Guards over because the courts are on. So, I ran over and got a Guard and brought him back. He walked in the door and he looked at her and went, "ah Ann, it's you. Sure, won't you be back with him next week". And I said, excuse me? "Ah well now, you know yourself now, the Travellers". He said it. He said it in front of the woman ... And I just said, you know, I challenged him and said, he has broken the law. He has punched her in the face, you know. Whether she's back with him in an hours' time is irrelevant, you know, I was challenging him.

In these accounts both Grainne and Aoife describe how they actively intervened to directly challenge in-action of individual Gardaí and to remind them of the rights that both of these women had under Irish law. In Grainne's account, she had to emphasize that while the abuser was the children's father, legally he had neither guardianship nor custody and therefore had no legal right to take the children without the mother's permission.³⁵ In Aoife's case, she had to directly challenge racist assumptions about Travellers and demand equal treatment for this woman under the law. Both accounts provide an example of where a domestic violence worker must respond to emergency situations by stepping in to speak up on behalf of a woman experiencing domestic abuse.

Charley queried if advocacy also included:

... supporting a woman to navigate safely through systems based upon professional experience and from previous women's experiences, be they positive or negative? Like going through the courts, like helping them stop having such high expectations about getting justice when they are going to family law sittings and to help them navigate safely, emotionally or practically through the whole court process or Garda interviews.

In this definition, Charley is reflecting much of what was shared by group members when they spoke of how they shared information and knowledge with women to empower them to make informed choices about their situation. Maureen stated that

³⁵ Grainne is referring to the situation as it pertained previous to the enactment of the Children and Families Relationship Act in 2016 that provides automatic guardianship rights to unmarried father who meet certain residency criteria.

her organisation did not use the term advocacy because *“I don’t know if it’s that, like advocacy is doing for the woman”*. She stated that her organisation took a mentoring approach which was about empowering the woman to advocate for herself.

Responding to Maureen, I defined my understanding of advocacy as:

... adding your voice to the voice of the person whose rights are being denied, bringing more power to that person’s voice. It’s not taking over from them, it’s not interpreting for them it’s not speaking for them necessarily. So, it’s like, whatever power I have, or we have as domestic violence advocates, that we offer that to a woman.

Despite the different use of language, there was agreement that domestic violence workers seek to facilitate women’s empowerment through knowledge sharing and to intervene as advocates to vindicate the rights of individual women. Charley identified as an advocate focused on *“getting the best outcomes for women”* and as will be seen in the section on systems change, she actively engages with and builds relationships with practitioners in her community to affect these outcomes. She also felt that it was important to *“be an advocate and encourage the woman to self-advocate as well”*. Agreeing that *“It is important that we don’t do for women what they can do for themselves”* I also stated that:

... often, we must advocate for women because they are ignored, silenced, people don’t understand domestic violence, you know? ... And that’s why you get out there to advocate, you get out there to redress the power imbalance that’s in society.

Women can be dismissed and ignored and in many cases professionals from who they seek a response do not have an understanding of coercive control and the risks posed by the abuser to women and children. As advocates we need to be prepared to step in when the woman’s self-advocacy has not resulted in the outcomes she needs for herself and her children.

Descriptions of our advocacy practice illustrate that domestic violence workers need to be assertive, knowledgeable and skilled and yet, apart from Charley, who gained

a qualification in advocacy at 3rd level³⁶, none of the group had had any specific training or education in this complex and challenging aspect of our work.

I kind of feel like I'm inadequate by default really in that it's very much self-learnt, do you know what I mean? So even having, I know we're getting into the detail, but even having an advocacy module. How do you advocate and what is the, you know even the way we write reports? You're just thrown in, you know? (Aoife)

Education and learning opportunities on advocacy practice were yet another area that group members identified as essential in equipping domestic violence workers in holding the multiple roles that have been described in this findings section. This aspect of practice and learning was understood by most group members to be connected in practice to their role in affecting systems change and in acting as agents for wider social change.

Perspectives on our social change role

Our dialogue revealed that group members held somewhat different positions in relation to a social change paradigm for domestic violence work.

Me: The way I see the work is that this woman is individually experiencing a socially created problem, right? So, the answer overall lies in changing society but there are huge needs at a one to one level that we are also there to respond to. ... so, even when I'm working with her, I'm not talking to her about social change, policy or lobbying, but it does inform what I do say to her, it does inform how I approach my work with her and I see that for every woman who does regain her power and gains insight that this is about his power and his abuse of power and about male power, there's change, you know, accumulating all the time.

Framing domestic violence work in this way engendered a dialogue about whether domestic violence workers are engaged in social change by affirming and supporting individual women's resistance to male power within their intimate relationships. Jane pondered if women's resistance to the abuse of power by their intimate partners was an "*accidental*" form of social change that should not strictly been seen

³⁶ This was a 3rd level degree in advocacy primarily focused on disability advocacy

in the sense that a conscious engagement with social movement work is. In contrast, Grainne's experience affirmed for her that some women accessing our services do themselves become more conscious of the oppression of other women and not only offer support to other women to free themselves from violence and abuse, but act as awareness raisers and educators in their own families and communities about the unacceptability of male violence.

... if you meet a woman and she's bought into the whole societal, oh I'm a woman, he's my husband, I need to look up to him. I need to meet his needs and all of that and if her attitude is changed through the interaction, she may increase her awareness and she may say to her sister and her daughter, you know, this isn't OK, you know? So, it's spreading gradually, very, very slowly.

The majority of group members understood social change as both informing and as a goal of our support and advocacy work with individual women. Rachel also understood that social change included the incremental changes that accumulate over time as a result of individual women resisting male power and taking back control of their lives. She specifically saw her educative role as facilitating the empowerment of a woman so that she could be *"an agent of change, for herself and for her children"*.

Rachel: ... what does that woman go away with after being in a service? So, if we're weaving into this space, how we become educated and how can we educate as well. We're using our skills and our knowledge to be the advocates of change so that woman can go out and be an advocate of change for herself, do you know what I mean?

Aoife made a link between women accessing feminist group work with the potential to empower women who have experienced domestic abuse to act collectively and to become activists and advocates on their own and on other women's behalf.

I believe this anyway, the more your work is informed by feminism or a political structure and when you are working with a woman and she becomes that agent for change as well. What I've noticed in recent years with my work is that we are moving a bit more into group work and it's so empowering to sit with the women themselves. And we recently launched a booklet on parenting after domestic abuse and a couple of women came, you know, a few of our women came along to it and one of them came up to me afterwards and said "we're ready to talk out now, we're ready to start and if

you need any women to come forward” and you know it’s that sense of, we need to harness that and we need to do more of it so it’s not just us saying to [name of state agency], this is what the women want, it’s the women saying, this is what we want.

In these accounts, Rachel and Aoife position women who experience domestic abuse as active agents for change, whether it be on their own and their children’s behalf and/or on the behalf of other women and children who experience domestic abuse. Thus, both one to one work with women and group work can contribute to wider change through facilitating the empowerment of women to regain autonomy in their lives and to become advocates for wider systems and cultural change. For Aoife, being informed by feminism increases the likelihood that women will be empowered to speak out and act collectively to advocate for change.

Not all group members initially articulated a social change perspective in how they viewed their work as domestic violence advocates. Claire identified misogynistic narratives in the wider culture as implicated in the prevalence of gender-based violence. Notwithstanding this understanding, her view on the purpose of an education and learning programme for domestic violence workers was that it should be focused on service provision first and that then it could “*ripple out*” to have an impact on wider social change. She seemed in this instance to see social change work as secondary to and separate from her primary role, which is to provide a service to individual women. In sharing her story of how she got into domestic violence work and what kept her in it however, Claire stated that it was realising how important domestic violence services are to women when they must negotiate the courts that motivated her to stay in the work.

... it wasn’t that I specifically wanted to work in domestic violence so as the time went on, I just thought, oh my god, this organisation is so important. I remember there were days down the courts and I thought what if they didn’t have a court accompaniment worker, how would they manage because D Court is lethal, ... And it’s just, I just saw that the need for it was so great.

Claire in this contribution is positioning herself as an advocate, in court with women to help them negotiate a complex system but also to help redress the power

imbalance that women experience when they seek protection and redress through the legal system. She does not at this point in the inquiry frame this as social change work, whereas for other women in the group, it was in acting as an advocate with and on behalf of women that they saw their social change role enacted as an integral part of their practice. For example, Charley's described how she consciously used ongoing engagement with various practitioners and professionals to get change at a local level for the women and children for whom she works. One example of this is successes she and her colleagues have had in changing the attitudes and practice of their District Court Judge.

I know just from the work that I have done locally, maybe that recognition that social change can happen at a local basis rather than at a national. Particularly around the courts and the way our judge interacts with women now, that's all through the work that we've done with the courts. We've educated him so now he has a better understanding... I help women write their paper work for their order and everything else, so it's not watered down. And I've always encouraged the women ... that it's very hard hitting and don't leave anything out so now ... he's seen it exactly how it is, and it's changed his opinion, the way he works with women, especially using the legal system to protect the women.

For Charley, her advocacy with and on behalf of women was not just about supporting and empowering individual women to access their rights. It was also about using the opportunity provided by engagement with state agencies and practitioners to educate them about the nature of domestic abuse and the risks abusers posed to women and children's safety and wellbeing. This was with the aim that women who would need the support of these state agencies in the future would get a more informed and thereby effective response.

... we've done it with different agencies as well, like the Guards as well. M district, not S, they're very, but M, they're above and beyond. And I've worked very closely with the Sergeant on high risk cases and I think just through the constant educating them, (inaudible) sitting with them in court and just talking to them, talking all the time, they're interested.

In this account Charley talks about using every chance as informal learning opportunities for Gardaí and other practitioners. Her account illustrates the

unbroken thread that runs from individual work with women to systems change work and back again to one to one work.

Another area that some group members were active in when seeking to effect change beyond the level of one to one support and advocacy work was in the area of education and awareness in various settings. Education workshops for young people on healthy relationships, awareness raising workshops in community settings and training delivered to practitioners in other fields are one way in which domestic violence workers attempt to “*change the conversation*” (Grainne) around domestic abuse. The majority of group members had some duties specifically written into their job descriptions that required them to engage in education, training and awareness raising in the community. In our dialogue we noted that while we had been given this specific responsibility, none of us had been trained for this role and most of us did little of this work, being absorbed in the provision of support, advocacy, refuge, helpline and other services to women.

The peripheral and fragmented nature of social change work

There was little evidence that most of us were able to engage with the level of social change activity at the sustained level described by Charley. I identified how the pressures of meeting funder demands occupied much of my time as a manager and “*Filling in another funding application, doing KPI’s³⁷ and outputs and throughputs*” left me with little time to engage in planned and targeted social change work. I talked about the difficulties in engaging in a more conscious and targeted level of systems advocacy and the impossibility of engaging in wider campaigns for transformative change in the political and cultural realms. My involvement in campaigns for “*radical social change, which is about changing how we organise our society*” through participation in campaigns for same sex marriage equality³⁸ and the repeal of the 8th amendment on abortion³⁹ was possible only outside of the context of domestic violence work. Reflecting this experience, Jane identified that opportunities to

³⁷ Key Performance Indicators

³⁸ A campaign for an amendment to the Irish constitution that would allow for marriage between two people without distinction as to their sex.

³⁹ A campaign to repeal the 8th amendment of the Irish constitution that prohibited the provision of abortion services in Ireland.

connect to wider international movements that were challenging cultural norms about male sexual entitlement were not provided for in our work.

Jane: Yeah but the whole MeToo thing was kind of worldwide and I didn't see a lot, now I wasn't particularly looking I have to say, but from the domestic violence sector in this country saying yeah, this is something we need to be paying attention to.

Grainne: We're (inaudible) on Facebook aren't we and we're sharing it on Facebook.

Jane: Yeah as individuals, but as organisations or as a collective we're not really jumping on that bandwagon, which is there for us, you know?

Aoife: That's where the fragmentation comes in.

Jane and Aoife attribute our disconnection from movements such as #MeToo to a lack of collectivity and to fragmentation within the national network of domestic violence organisations in Ireland. Group members identified that a lack of cohesion in the sector meant that we were unable to multiply the impacts of our social change work because actions, achievements and learning stayed at local level. An example of the fragmented and localised nature of social change activity by domestic violence organisations was provided by Charley who said:

... even down to the Legal Aid fee, we assumed that everybody was asking head office for a waiver or a reduced fee for everyone that came in. But it turns out, we got talking to people from other services and they were what? You can do that? And I was, but I thought everyone was doing it, but because we weren't communicating it, it was getting lost.⁴⁰

Tessa, who had also lobbied for this in her area, felt that the achievements of local groups were obscured because of a lack of information sharing amongst domestic violence organisations.

I think we under-utilized our network, ... if we're doing something, we need to tell that we're doing this, circulate.

⁴⁰ Charley referred to the successful lobbying of several domestic violence organisations that resulted in a protocol being put in place in Legal Aid services. This protocol enabled women experiencing domestic violence to be granted a fee waiver when seeking legal representation in the courts.

Jane identified that periods in which she and her colleagues engaged in targeted work aimed at raising awareness of domestic abuse inevitably lead to a demand for services increasing.

... the more you raise awareness, push change, the more the work goes up, so you end up in a situation where you're too busy to do the social change work. So, it can be a bit of a trap.

This leads to a sporadic engagement with social change work that also impacts on our ability to sustain the gains made.

Jane: It's to keep going rather than having to stop and start I think it the key point. Because then we must make up for lost ground. You get so far and then you lose ground because you're not keeping it up, ... For me that's one of the problems that can happen.

Some group members strongly identified as social change actors but their experiences were that these opportunities were limited and frustrated by the practical demands of delivering frontline services and the sporadic and fragmented nature of systems advocacy. Expectations that they could be more engaged as activists alongside holding roles as support workers, advocates, and managers, were not realised in the course of their work. Other group members did not share this expectation and felt that ideally, social change work should be the remit of designated workers in organisations who had the resources to compartmentalise different roles and duties. Both Grainne and Rachel worked in large organisations that had workers whose specific role was to carry out research, lobby for policy change, and to deliver education, training and awareness raising. This was a minority status in the group as most worked for small organisations where, as Tessa noted, we sometimes engaged with social change work because *"we must do it all"*. Regardless of differences of opinion about whose role it was to do social change work within organisations, all agreed with Tessa's statement that:

... every single one of us, even if we're not doing it ourselves, our organisations are. So how can we separate social change from somebody we are trying to train in domestic violence. So how can we separate it? I don't think we can.

Our dialogues brought some clarity and a growing consensus about the social change remit of organisations and the integrated nature of this work into our support and advocacy work with women. We were able to build this agreement while also noting that there were areas in which we held some varying perspectives, particularly in relation to who specifically within domestic violence organisations held this role. Another area in which there were more complicated and somewhat contradictory views was in relation to how we identified to those external to the sector. Our dialogue about our social change role included a focus on whether we identify as members of a social change movement or as members of a social service sector. The response of group members to this question illustrates some of the factors that influence group members' stance in relation to this issue.

Group members' views on a social movement identity

Those group members who were aware of the movements origins and history shared this knowledge during the inquiry when explaining why they identified with the social change paradigm of domestic violence work. Aoife talked about her awareness of how domestic violence work originated in second wave feminism.

... this is where it started, you know? It was women sitting around, grassroots, talking about violence against women, you know, and it was contained, and it was held, and... it was a safe place, it was a learning as you go consciousness raising movement, you know, and it responded to the needs of women. It believed in change and its goal was to transform society. It wasn't just to help an individual woman. It was about, you know, commenting on the power structures in society. It was grassroots.

Maureen, who subscribed to feminist values in her work, but who had not been unaware of this history, reflected that learning about the origins and legacy of the domestic violence movement helped to "*provide the context of our work*". Knowing this helped her make more sense of what our role and purpose was. While she acknowledged that one of the implications of being located within a social change movement was that workers avoided individualised solutions and would look for solutions in wider social change, she was worried about the risks of identifying as a social change movement.

And what are the implications for funding, do you know what I mean? I don't think a lot of funders would fund a movement, but they might fund the sector, you know?

Group members were clear that core funders would not fund anything other than service provision and some members felt that to take a stance that was critical of the state could result in funding being withdrawn.

Rebecca: But I think everybody is afraid, there's a huge fear out there in relation to funding, you know, don't say anything or you'll get your funding cut, don't get up against them, they'll cut your funding and that's out there let's be honest about that. It is a huge fear. You are dependent on these people to fund you to provide the service and if you step too much outside the box, you are gone, or they'll push you aside.

Persistent levels of fear within the domestic violence sector were attributed to the impact of the recession that saw successive cuts year on year to domestic violence organisations. This resulted in organisations feeling less able to resist funder demands, including pressures to adopt a gender neutral approach in their work.

Maureen: It feels like we're coming, the sector is coming out of a real fearful time, you know the recession and then this constant sort of underlying backlash against feminism and you must be equal, give equal time to male victims, you know. And it feels like a lot of the sector has reacted in fear. Which I completely understand, trying to survive.

Pragmatic concerns about funding and public perceptions of domestic violence organisations were paramount in the mind of group members during this dialogue. People felt torn between not wanting to allow the social change mission of domestic violence organisations to be obfuscated and eroded but they also felt that it was too risky to identify as a social change movement.

Besides concerns about funder perceptions and power, there were other factors that influenced participants' identification with a social change movement. Jane celebrated the many achievements of the feminist movement, including the domestic violence movement, that made positive differences to women's and children's lives. She was reluctant to publicly identify the sector as a social change movement however, because of her concern to:

... be as inclusive as possible of the different perspectives held by domestic violence workers and organisations.

She feared that using the term social change movement would exclude many in the wider sector. Charley, as a consciously engaged advocate for systems change, at the same time felt that the perception of social change movements was that they were not professional and were *“more of a phase, a passing thing”*. She was concerned that identifying as a social change movement would weaken the sector and that *“we would not be taken seriously”* nor afforded the level of value and respect that she believed we both deserved and needed to be able to do our work well. Paradoxically, her concerns lay alongside a desire to include the history of the domestic violence movement as a social change movement in education for domestic violence workers.

... part of the educational framework - the history of the sector would be valuable, because it gives a context as to the reasons why, ... it gives perspective on the work.

The ambiguity about claiming a social movement was primarily about domestic violence organisations' dependent and unequal power relations with state funders who *“have clearly said, they will not fund a movement ... They've been clear about that”* (Researcher). This ambiguity is further complicated by group members' recognition of the history and legacy of the domestic violence movement as a rationale for the maintenance of a feminist perspective in our work. This complicated situation is one that we agreed could provide a focus for future inquiry within the wider network of domestic violence organisations in Ireland.

Another aspect of our practice about which we were unable to gain a sense of clarity and coherence was in our attempts to describe an intersectional approach to our work. In the following section, I present data that illustrates the struggles that we experienced as we attempted to build a shared understanding of intersectional practice.

Struggling to define an intersectional approach to domestic violence work

In the vast majority of our reflections and group dialogue, group members referred to women experiencing domestic violence without a recognition of difference and the intersection of domestic abuse and other forms of oppression in women's lives. Apart from a few exceptions, a focus on responding to women who are differentially situated in society was contained within the inquiry when this issue was intentionally placed on the agenda by the facilitator. In these contained discussions, group members shared an awareness of some of the impacts on women who experience additional barriers because of racism, class discrimination, poverty, homelessness, insecure immigration status, discrimination against people with disabilities, heterosexism, and other forms of discrimination. An example of this was included in the section on rights based advocacy where Aoife talked about witnessing a Garda dismiss and minimise an assault on a woman because of her Traveller ethnicity. Another example was provided by Tessa who spoke of being at a child welfare case conference and witnessing a discriminatory response from experienced professionals to a lesbian woman who previously had a child when in a relationship with an abusive man. Tessa stated that she believed that professionals from children and family services problematised the woman because they could not understand how she could be lesbian if she had previously been in a relationship with a man. She stated that professionals from children and family services *"made such poor decisions about that woman's life because they could not grapple with what was happening"*.

Examples such as these illustrate how gender oppression and other forms of oppression intersect and compound the harms experienced by women. Group members discussed our responsibility as advocates in responding to incidences of discriminatory practice.

Charley: I know if I have a middle-class Irish woman from a good family and I must go to social welfare, I must do all the rights and entitlements stuff with housing, she's going to get a completely different response. If I must go with a Nigerian lady, God forbid a Traveller woman, you get a completely different response.

Rachel: But Charley, do you think there is, you know, a woman going on her own, you can see it, you're there, you're bringing many different women but...

Charley: Women have said to me, God, if you weren't here, I wouldn't have got this.

Tessa: But I've had that with Irish white women too and I go to the Garda station and they're like, god, that person was so rude to me last week, and now he's talking to me. And this is a middle class, white Irish woman. The responses that the services have are not our responsibility.

Aoife: I think we must challenge them though.

Group members could agree that their role was to address discriminatory practice from other professionals. Tessa however, stated her belief that a denial of access to rights and protection could just as easily be experienced by a white middle class Irish woman as by a woman of colour. Group members agreed that any woman, regardless of her identity or social positioning, could experience unprofessional and dismissive responses. Aoife's and Tessa's examples however, illustrate the additional harms to women when discriminatory attitudes based on identity or status in an unequal society intersect with women's experience of domestic abuse.

Tessa also spoke of witnessing a response to a woman who came to live in Ireland from another country that was, contrary to a minimisation of a woman's experience of abuse and violence, a disproportionate response where professionals took control of a woman's situation.

I have never seen so many services working with somebody constantly. She could not, she could not leave her house. She didn't have a day or a morning or an afternoon when a service was not calling to her because they just didn't want to miss anything, and they were overwhelming her. Because I was oh my god, what is going on.

Tessa believed that this disproportionate response that removed choice and agency from the woman was based on the anxiety of professionals that they would "*miss something*" if they did not intensely monitor this situation, and also because of assumptions that other cultures where domestic violence is tolerated or condoned.

There is no culture on earth where it's supported, it is tolerated. So, the idea that somebody comes from a place where it's that, it's OK or she has a greater tolerance, it's not OK. It's false(Tessa).

For Tessa, mainstreaming of responses to minority ethnic women was essential.

... her experience of domestic abuse is no different, none. There is no difference at all in her experience or in how we should treat her as a client or her needs are no different, at all.

She asserted that rejecting false assumptions about minority cultures means that we respond to all women in the same way. Aoife acknowledged the commonality of experiences of domestic abuse across different groups of women, but drawing from her many years of experience of responding to Traveller women who experience domestic violence she was also aware that:

... they're telling us that their needs are different. Do you know what I mean? So it's kind of like, I think it's something that the sector hasn't, we haven't, maybe that's why the conversation didn't continue, we haven't thrashed it out.

She also felt that if we were being women led, that we needed to be cognisant of the fact that:

... woman also ask, if you think about Southall Black Sisters⁴¹, women do sometimes ask for separate services, for culturally specific services.

Whilst agreeing with Tessa about the "othering" of women and how this obscures the cultural tolerance for domestic violence in the white majority population in Ireland "*where one in three women have experienced domestic abuse*", I nevertheless expressed discomfort with the idea of treating all woman the same way.

... we are a predominantly white, Irish sector who are saying, well, we'll just work with women in the same way.

Jane: But it's a white, Irish, settled way.

⁴¹ An organisation in the UK established to respond to the needs of Black (Asian and African-Caribbean) women who experience gender-based violence.

For Tessa, responding to this challenge was about remaining women centred and about asking each woman to identify what her needs were and her fears for her safety, *“you just ask, and you ask the next one”*. Jane also stressed the importance of finding out from women what their specific needs and expectations were but also emphasised the need for domestic violence workers to check in on our own assumptions about what options might be available to or feasible for a woman to pursue.

I would have experienced with Eastern European women, particularly with their responses around the legal issues, it's quite different because it's a different set of expectations from the law and even, British women, it's like, it's trying to find out from her and what her experience is and what she expects rather than going, right, this, this and this, do you know what I'm saying? It is that being, as far as possible, keeping a check on your own assumptions. Or checking in on your assumptions.

Principles that underpin our work including being women led and remaining aware of our own assumptions and reactions were thus seen as core to ensuring effective practice with women who experience the intersection of domestic abuse and other forms of oppression and marginalisation. While all group members agree with the principle of women led services, when it comes to how we respond to the intersection of domestic abuse and other forms of oppressions, this had different meanings for group members.

Our dialogue revealed tensions inherent in not othering women by providing a differential response, while at the same time being aware that a one size fits all approach is unlikely to meet the needs of women who come from minority ethnic and other marginalised communities. Group members held somewhat different perspectives on this, and our dialogue did not generate a level of clarity and coherence in relation to this matter.

Reflecting on our struggles to generate useful knowledge about an intersectional response to women, some groups members made the link to our identities as co-inquirers. Aoife believed that the wider domestic violence sector was not representative of the diversity of women in Ireland and she perceived that this lack

of diversity would potentially impact on the quality of education and learning that would be provided for workers.

Well one thing that did come up in it was the lack of diversity among people working in the sector, you know. And that that would be very useful because, you know, in any kind of education thing that we're hearing from a diverse group of women. And I think that that's maybe what's wrong as well and where maybe I feel a little uncomfortable is because it's been the same. It's diverse but it's not diverse, you know.

Jane reflected that who we were as a research group, reflected this wider demographic profile.

Just look around the room, you know. In terms of age profile, we're tending towards slightly older and in terms of race we almost 100% white, yeah, so I think, I think we're not diverse enough.

These statements indicate that there was an awareness within the group of how identity and positionality as researchers impacted on the quality of our knowledge generation endeavours.

Conclusions

A goal of our group inquiry was to identify an approach to education and learning that would provide learning supports for the unique and critical role of domestic violence workers. To achieve this goal it was necessary for the group to first of all define the distinctive nature of domestic violence practice, thereby identifying content for a future education and learning framework. By articulating our tacit knowing and making this available for critical reflection in the dialogic process that is at the core of collaborative inquiry, we were able to deepen our own understanding of and to build a group standpoint on the core elements of effective domestic violence practice. This achievement can be measured against the situation as it pertained at the beginning of the inquiry, when group members were unsure if there was a shared understanding of the nature of domestic violence and the purpose of domestic violence work.

The group succeeded in providing an illustration of the distinctive nature of domestic violence work as multi-faceted and complex. Two key dimensions of practice came to the fore in our inquiry. The first of these is what we termed as the provision of empowerment support, as workers interact with women in various service settings. The second dimension of practice is rights based advocacy, where workers engage with others, most usually state agencies and professionals, with or on behalf of women experiencing domestic abuse. For some group members, being an advocate for individual women was inextricably linked to advocacy for wider systems' change. Integrated throughout the sections of dialogue are accounts and descriptions of the various tensions and balances that domestic violence workers have to negotiate and manage on a day to day basis. Group members' reflections illustrate the critical role that domestic violence workers hold in disrupting discriminatory practice from professionals and in demanding equal treatment for all women. The purpose and practice of the domestic violence worker as described in our inquiry and analysed in this chapter is thus multi-faceted, complex and challenging. Despite the importance of their role and the breadth and complexity of their work, group members' accounts illustrate that they have had little and in some cases no education or training about key aspects of their practice. In addition, participants spoke of the lack of non-formal learning opportunities in the sector where workers could gather to share and deepen their knowledge about their work.

The achievement of the group in producing a body of knowledge about domestic violence work as a complex and multi-faceted field of activity that requires the worker to attain knowledge and skills in numerous areas enabled the group to shift our inquiry focus onto compatible approaches to learning and education. Findings in relation to this subject are presented in the following chapter.

Reflexive considerations

The knowledge that we co-generated through our process of collaborative inquiry provides a rich description of a domain that has previously been little studied in Ireland. I would argue that the usefulness of this knowledge arises from the fact that the knowledge generated comes from the insideness of the researchers'

understanding of domestic violence work (Bray et al, 2000; Heron, 1996). The quality of knowledge generated because of the “insiderness” of group members’ experiences as domestic violence workers contrasts, I believe, with the quality of knowledge generated by the group about the need for an intersectional approach to domestic violence work. While we acknowledged that our identity as co-inquirers impacted on our inquiry in this respect, we struggled to identify the impacts of this on women who experience the intersection of domestic violence and other forms of oppression. A greater level of collective reflexivity was needed to enable us as co-inquirers to interrogate how our own relationships with white, class and other forms of privilege had real life impacts for women that we work with and other women who experience domestic abuse, but who may not perceive our organisations as places of welcome, belonging or understanding (The European-American Collaborative Challenging Whiteness, 2005; The Group for Collaborative Inquiry, 1993).

Reflecting on why this level of group reflexivity was not achieved, I have identified three factors. The first two of these have been discussed in previous reflexive sections in this thesis, Firstly, I acknowledge challenges in facilitating the level of reflexivity needed. I know, in a propositional sense, what good facilitation looks like in this instance, but that is different from knowing in the practical sense how to do this (Mackewn, 2008). Secondly, an avoidance of discomfort and possible conflict within the group resulted in a missed opportunity to support a greater level of reflexivity (Douglas, 2002; Mc Ardle, 2008). Thirdly, being reflexive as researchers is difficult, particularly as a group of novice researchers who, as these findings illustrate, are engaged in “*doing all of the time*” (Rachel) and have little access to the kind of learning spaces that foster reflexivity and critical thinking. It was perhaps naïve of me to think that we could step out of our busy and pressured roles as domestic violence workers into an unfamiliar role as researchers where we would exercise reflexive skills. Our struggles to remain reflexively aware at points in the research when this was needed further illustrate the importance of learning opportunities that enable domestic violence workers to develop these skills.

I came to understand more about our struggles as a group to generate useful knowledge about an intersectional approach to domestic abuse when I discussed this matter with my supervisor, Michael. Michael observed that theory, to be really useful, had to be organically generated from the lived experience of the participants. It was this insight that enabled me to see how there simply was not an adequate resource of experiential or even propositional knowledge on intersectional issues within the group that we could draw on. As an issue, our understanding of and response to the intersection of gender based violence and other forms of oppression did not rise organically as other aspects of our knowledge and practice did, indicating this as an aspect of our work that remained at the margins of our discourse and practice. These limitations point to some of the shortcomings of a collaborative inquiry that depends only on insider knowledge without an engagement with knowledge and theory outside of the inquiry group. The findings of this research illustrate that such an engagement is necessary if we are to avoid inbound and reproductive learning that fails to interrogate and upend relationships of power (De Palma, 2009; Wenger, 1998).

Chapter 9. Building the framework 2: An approach to education and learning for domestic violence workers

Introduction

The latter half of the group inquiry focused on an education and learning framework that would be congruent with the goals, values and practices of effective domestic violence work. The findings in this chapter provide a description of participants' views of how and where education and learning could be best provided and the kind of approach to education and learning that group members assessed as compatible with domestic violence work.

I begin the chapter with a focus on participants' views that the multiple forms of knowledge and skills required for effective domestic violence work meant that workers must engage with multiple forms of learning. A shared understanding was shaped that a future model of education and learning was one in which situated learning was supported in parallel to the provision of bespoke education opportunities. I continue the chapter with a focus on the approach to learning that group members assessed as compatible with the values and goals of domestic violence work. Finally, I focus on group members' perspectives on the merits and risks of attaching formal recognition to the education and learning of domestic violence workers.

Hybrid approaches to learning

Gaining clarity about the nature and challenges of domestic violence work enabled group members to identify why various approaches to learning must be provided for and what forms of learning were appropriate to the role of the domestic violence work.

Tessa: ... the work itself requires a huge breadth of knowledge and depending on where you are in the organisation the breadth of that varies. You could be, there's a huge diversity in what you need to know if you are working in the area.

Ensuring that the worker can engage with different modes of learning was deemed as essential because group members identified that the multi-faceted and complex nature of domestic violence work required the worker to attain various forms of knowledge and skills. and therefore, they needed access to various modes of learning.

Me: One of the things that really struck me was that when I went back to the transcript was that what people need to know and what people need to be able to do is huge, and really varied and very complex and quite nuanced and that... There are just a thousand things you need to be able to do, as well as know, and to me that has huge implications for an education and learning programme. That's kind of the core of it I think like, these different kinds of knowledge that people must have means that there must be all these different kinds learning. That's what's coming up for me big time.

Reflecting on experiences as domestic violence workers and learners, the group identified and described different approaches to learning that needed to be included in an education and learning framework. These were learning through experience and reflective practice, and participation in formal education where workers would engage with foundational knowledge and theory and develop their critical thinking capacities. There was strong support for an approach to learning in which domestic violence workers learn through a parallel and intersecting process of learning in practice and learning through participation in formal education. This section begins with group members' focus on learning through experience, which group members identified as the most important mode of learning for domestic violence workers.

The primacy of experiential learning

Learning "*on the job*" (Maureen) and "*as we went along*" (Aoife) was the primary context in which group members learnt how to be domestic violence workers. Experiential learning was seen to be indispensable because the nature of domestic violence work required the worker to learn through experience, the lived reality of responding to domestic abuse. For example, Rachel spoke of how she came to understand the danger women faced when responding to women in high risk situations.

I learnt through the process and very raw learning, you know, in a very, sometimes volatile environment, do you know what I mean? That really kind of heightens your awareness, your, I suppose your sense of danger, safety, lack of safety, do you know.

Group members spoke of the knowledge they had gained from their interaction with women and *"Listening to women's stories, listening to their experience"* (Rebecca). Jane talked about how it was women who *"brought us on a journey with them"* when describing how domestic violence workers gained the knowledge they needed to do their jobs well. I reflected that it was from *"encountering women, being in their presence"* that I learnt so much about the nature and impacts of coercive control and violence within intimate relationships.

Group members acknowledged that it was impossible to learn about the impacts of vicarious trauma and the need for self-care in any way other than through experience. Maureen shared a story about how a critical incident led to her gaining an awareness of the impacts of not prioritising her self-care as a worker.

And, I think the learning of, I'll never forget the first real call, ... where the woman, who was a nice woman (inaudible) I helped her into refuge..., and I gave out my private number at the time. I know (inaudible) (laughter). Anyway, she normally called me on the work phone, and I was in the gym on Friday at 6.00, so I'd just gotten off work, and she texted me, just a one sentence text. E her husband, E has hung himself... and I was like OK, I'm getting back on the Stairmaster, I'll be fine, and I was like, I think I called [name of colleague] but that was it. I didn't de-brief or talk to anybody about it even though [name of manager] told me, something like that happens you need to just call or whatever. But I thought I was grand but the whole weekend I just kept driving in to [name of town] where he was from and going by where the funeral was, because I couldn't settle, do you know. That I had to learn that. Because I thought I'd be fine, I can handle that, because it's nothing to do with me. I didn't contribute or anything. And all of that I knew but it was still. And what I should have done was never have given her the private number and when I got that message, well, we're lucky where we can ring our external supervisor with something like that and set up an emergency session, if for whatever reasons.

Maureen's experience of how this tragic situation intruded into her personal time and space was a critical learning incident for her and she came to understand the

importance of maintaining boundaries. She also learned about the importance of self-care through observing the coping strategies of her manager, an experienced domestic violence worker.

My boss used to make decisions I didn't understand till I did the job for a long time and they were all about her boundaries. And we had a woman come this week, and she wasn't DV and she had a lot of problems and she didn't belong in [name of town] and you know, but that instinct to want to help her and do everything, you know. But I had learnt then the hard way that boundaries are as important, as learning what you're learning, do you know what I mean? But you never get, you could have told me boundaries up and down the walls when I first started but I just thought, well that's not me because I am going help everybody who comes to my door, in every possible way.

I shared with Maureen an experience that learning about the impacts of domestic violence work was something that:

I just find you can't learn that conceptually. You must experience it bodily almost, don't you? You must feel it.

Feeling what it is like to transgress boundaries therefore becomes a way of knowing that we are vulnerable to the negative impacts that can result from working in domestic violence services, something that Maureen said she did not fully understand when she first started domestic violence work. Other group members appreciated the valuable learning that was to be had when mistakes were made.

Rebecca: ... it's about upskilling all the time and sharing on that and learning by mistakes. When mistakes happen, talk about it.

Jane: Especially other people's (laughter).

Observing and being mentored by more experienced workers was acknowledged by other group members as an important aspect of learning in domestic violence organisations.

Rebecca: We were saying mentoring, mentoring and shadowing is a huge thing. I was saying, I started when Jane was on her way out of the refuge, but you were there for a couple of months, so I just observed a bit, discreetly not telling her (laughter)... So, what you pick up when you are observing and watching somebody, huge, a huge thing. And another thing

was, hands on and I meant thrown in at the deep end but... that's a lot of it I think, we learned loads back then, just thrown in.

Jane: ... most people who went into the work didn't have training in domestic violence work, so they had to learn by making mistakes or learning from other people, to remind people of that. It was, it was other people who worked in it that helped you to find your feet.

Group members recognised that experiential learning was key to enabling domestic violence workers to acquire the knowledge and skills they needed, but they were also aware that assuming that workers will learn what they need to know solely through informal learning is not good enough.

Me: I learnt everything through experience, but I could have learnt it a lot quicker and a lot better if I could have had more structure, guidance, a framework, a pathway, context, something. ... that there was something in place around it that made it more, I don't know, tangible. I didn't know what I knew or didn't know for a long time, you know?

While participants highly valued the knowledge and skills they had acquired through experiential learning, they were aware that workers needed access to specific learning opportunities that would have enabled them to reflect on and make meaning of their experiences. One such opportunity is provided when organisations develop structures and processes that support ongoing reflective practice.

Reflective practice

Reflective practice was identified by group members as an essential dimension of experiential learning. Individual member's reflections on the need for reflective practice mostly related to times when a worker felt challenged or unsettled by events or situations that they struggled to understand and respond to.

Rachel: ... the reflective practice as well, it's just dealing with our own and our colleagues' reactions and confusion and challenges when working with individual women e.g. a worker feeling judgemental about a woman because of the choices she's going to make.

Rachel understood reflective practice as being about managing our reactions when feeling confused or noticing that we are feeling and thinking judgementally about a

woman's choices. This, she stated, was necessary so that women get clear messages about the unconditional nature of domestic violence workers' support.

Tessa described a situation in which a team member she supervised expressed frustration at what she perceived as choices made by a woman that the worker felt were not in her or her children's best interests.

OK, for instance, you have a lady who comes to you, she's had one relationship and she's had a child, it was abusive. And then she comes back to you three years later with another guy, she's had another child and it's abusive. And then she has another relationship, she has another child and it's abusive. So, one of my colleagues was, she really, couldn't understand why there was a child being brought into each of these relationships and for her, there was no judgement on why she did but for the worker it was, why, why? Why is she bringing the child into this relationship before she knows? Like. It's completely politically incorrect, she's every right to have a child, with whoever she wants, but that was a problem.

Maureen reflected that challenges such as this often arise because of our own life biography and how we identify with, or not, the situation of a woman that we work with.

Yeah, I think that's important what you say because like... it's challenging that because almost everybody has a relationship with a partner and a lot of people have children of their own, so it's very personal. It's hard not for it to be very personal. For each worker who comes from a different perspective. We certainly have the gamut in our group, do you know? I'm the only married person, in an active relationship. We often sound out how it's different. So, I think it's important to like, even though that's politically incorrect to think that there's a problem there, it's also hard to deny a sense of, well there should be personal responsibility.

Maureen refers to the fact that workers may react to situations because they resonate with their personal lives. Her statement infers that being a parent makes it difficult not to question whether a woman who chooses to have a child in successive relationships in which she experiences domestic abuse should not take personal responsibility for the implications of her choices. The worker struggles to manage such a reaction with an awareness that it's "*politically incorrect*" to judge a woman for her choices.

Claire agreed with Maureen that much of the struggles that workers experienced were to do with who we are, and what we bring to the work, including unconscious bias that manifests in our reactions.

It's all our own. I know we've talked about this before but our own biases. I think when you are in a training situation, sometimes you can sit and think, oh yeah, I think, I would have thought differently, you know, you are being very objective about it. But it's not always easy to remember to do that when you are sitting, doing the work, you know? Because you are dealing with a live situation, the information is coming, the situation is there. And your own biases can play out before you even realise it. And I think that takes, I think that's ongoing work. ... It can colour the work, sometimes in good way, if people have lots of life experience, they can bring it to the work. But sometimes it can colour it in not so good a way. Where we are closing situations, opportunities out for, because we are making assumptions.

Tessa felt it was important to acknowledge that *"when you're a worker, you will encounter scenarios that you're not comfortable with"* and she believed that goal of providing ongoing learning opportunities for workers was to enable them to reflect on *"how do you respond to them and what is appropriate?"*. Responding to Tessa's statement, Claire highlighted the importance of supervision as an organisational structure that facilitates the worker to engage in reflective practice with a manager or mentor.

... the importance of really good supervision and I think that's where that kind of stuff needs to be talked out because sometimes, it's great if you have a creative space for the people who work with you to be able to talk about that but quite often in organisations, you're thinking, oh I'm going to be judged and you hold back but often you are still holding on to whatever that dilemma is and it ends up then, you go into transference and all of that sort of thing with the client and you're thinking, why isn't the client coming back in or engaging? Because they've picked up all that unconscious stuff as well so.

Me: Absolutely, absolutely, because like we communicate so much by our face, with our eyes, how we are sitting, the slightest movement, the tone of voice. We're not even aware half the time, you know?

Rachel: Women do pick up on those sort of things.

Group member's reflections illustrate their awareness of the importance of support structures for learning, such as supervision, which provide the worker with an

opportunity to be open about and inquire into the dilemmas that trouble them in their work. Providing such learning opportunities helps to minimise the chance that unconscious bias will manifest in judgemental or other forms of negative reactions to women, which may not necessarily be verbal, but could be communicated through body language and facial expressions. Jane pointed out however, that reflection on experience on its own is not adequate to ensure that workers maintain effective practice.

It's critical analysis of (inaudible) because you know, you can have loads of life experiences that can completely turn you against feminist principles, you know? You could so, I think that's important, the critical bit.

Jane infers in this statement that critical analysis needs to be done with reference to feminist principles that underpin domestic violence work. Reflecting Jane's view, Aoife referred to the need to ensure that learning experiences are provided within a context in which workers are supported and expected to engage with theory and knowledge about the issue of domestic violence.

Aoife: I was saying about reading, that I, you know, something that I noticed about the, I feel like a real owl, what's wrong with young ones now a day, they just don't read (laughter). That, that, I couldn't get enough of the theory and in terms of all the stuff that's coming from the States that was way ahead of us, you know. And I don't see that happening now, you know. We were saying maybe other mediums would be the way young people learn. Like I think there should be some compulsory feminist reading on this course, that we design.

Responding to Aoife, Maureen stated:

Can I just say, I think that's an important point you made about the reading and making assignments because, what worries me sometimes is, I don't know if this makes sense but you know, an opinion isn't the same as a critical thought and like discussion can, I think now, worse than ever, because the whole media what's it and whatever, that people are, they're used to giving their opinions on things and that's enough. Whereas, if you're in... a structured reading where you must argue a point where you must argue the opposite point to what people believe, to kind of get those sorts of critical faculties thinking. So, we were talking about at work, when we used it at work,

it helped us to be self-critical and challenge our own selves at times. Does that make sense?

Maureen's statement that *"an opinion isn't the same as a critical thought"* reflects Jane's belief that relying on reflection on experience only is not adequate to enable a worker to develop a critical analysis of violence against women informed by feminism. While, experiential learning was perceived as being of paramount importance, participants acknowledged the necessity of foundational education for all new domestic violence workers so that they could engage with theory and knowledge about the nature and causes of domestic abuse. Jane referred to this foundational knowledge as what:

.... we need to carry around in our head the whole time, what you do need to carry around in your head is why domestic violence happens and what it is.

Thus, our dialogue brought into focus the need for educational opportunities for workers to learn about feminist and other perspectives on violence against women.

The importance of foundational and ongoing education

Group members believed that the purpose of education was to support workers and organisations to consistently maintain high standards of practice. In the following segment, Charley talks about the benefits of such a programme.

There would be a standard service delivery, a basic level. So, everyone would get the get the same, or would expect the same level of service no matter where she went in the country. And even if the structure was to start ... with the foundation on domestic violence and abuse and then you have added ons. Expert training level modules, up to that. Depending on what your role is, in the organisation. Then at least everyone has that basic standard.

Regardless of the position or role of a worker in a domestic violence organisation, participants felt that foundational knowledge needed to be understood by all workers because all will at some level interact with women and an empowering and empathetic response needs to be consistently experienced by all women accessing domestic violence services.

Aoife: ... because the woman is not going to distinguish, you know? Because I, we have a new admin person and I was saying to our new manager that I think she should go on the training because the women love talking to her because she's just got this lovely personality, it's really warm and open and I walked in one day and there was a woman disclosing all sorts of stuff to her and she sat there, she was able for it, but no training.

Grainne stated that access to foundational education either before a worker started work in an organisation or in parallel to their first weeks was important.

Because for new people coming in I think the theory and all that should come first and the experiential exercises in a group and watching a DVD where you might start to feel the fear, and that kind of thing and then they go in on the job, so they've some background, they're not going in raw.

Grainne's position reflects Rebecca's concerns about workers being "*thrown in at the deep end*" and the implications that this has both for women experiencing domestic abuse and for the worker. As well as a grounding in feminist intersectional theory, participants identified a number of areas in which workers need to be knowledgeable and skilled.

Knowledge and skills

The fundamental importance of knowledge about the gendered nature of coercive control was emphasised throughout the inquiry. There were numerous other areas of knowledge that group members saw as essential for the domestic violence worker including knowledge about trauma informed practice, an awareness of risk and knowledge of safety planning, knowledge about the impacts of domestic abuse on children, knowledge of relevant law and policy, as well as knowledge about the local landscape that women must traverse in order to access their rights and social and economic supports. The necessity to remain women centred and women led implies that it is not only knowledge that matters. An orientation to the work that values women as knowers of their own lives and as capable and active agents in directing their lives and protecting and caring for their children was identified as fundamental to feminist practice.

Group members described how they applied knowledge in the utilisation of a range of skills needed to respond effectively to women experiencing intimate partner violence. Basic counselling skills, good communication skills, advocacy skills and an ability to remain self-aware and manage reactions were emphasised. Accounts of incidents in which group members had to advocate for women illustrated how important it was for those workers to be knowledgeable about women's legal rights when challenging inadequate responses from the Gardaí. Knowledge of the law is a key area in which workers need to be knowledgeable and skilled.

Tessa: And there's a mountain of factual learning as well around laws and accesses as well, you know? All those things, you know. So, there's that piece as well and you say, how far do you go with that? ... Particularly the applicability, so somebody comes in and you say OK, you've got that, that, that, oh yeah, I think you can, you know the basics of, well I think you'd be eligible for a protection order, that's the basics of it. So, you now, you don't have a child in common, you haven't lived together, stuff like that, basic facts of the job.

Jane distinguished between knowledge about the ways in which abusers continue to pose a threat to women post separation as the kind of *"knowledge that you need to carry around in your head"* as opposed to holding detail about legislation and policy which is hard to retain unless used on a frequent basis.

... so particularly things like laws, you learn them and then you don't use them, so then you don't remember them... if you don't use a piece of knowledge regularly you don't remember it but you can always find it, you know so, once you know how to find it and where to find it.

Group members identified education was primarily about providing domestic violence workers with an opportunity to become knowledgeable in all of these areas. They asserted that this knowledge is only useful to workers if they can also enhance their knowledge through experience, reflective practice and collaborative learning opportunities in domestic violence services. This is where the worker is enabled to bridge the gap between theory and the reality of women's experience when they seek the protection and support of the state.

Role specific and tiered modules

Group members felt that while all workers had to receive foundational education on core concepts and principles of good practice, that there needed to be what was described as “*à la carte modules*” (Charley) for workers who had specific roles and responsibilities in organisations, or who worked in particular settings.

Aoife: ... wouldn't it be nice to see, well, I'd like to see something like, so, you'd have specific modules? And then there's some like, you were saying, everyone must do the foundation, but then, depending on what your role is, you pick modules appropriate to your role. There might be various specifically like, would we want to see a specific module for managers, you know?

Participants talked about providing education in a “*tiered approach*” (Charley) over a period that provided choices to workers as their roles and positions changed within organisations. Providing access to formal education opportunities on an ongoing basis was also assessed as essential for workers because of the continuing changes in the environment in which women experience domestic abuse and because of the breadth of knowledge and skills workers needed in order to effectively respond.

Charley: ... so it (education) could always be updated. So, anyone who was going through the education... would be completely up to date with what's happening, and the here and now.

Grainne: Yeah, I think that's important now because I find that people are provided with a core foundational training regardless of whether they're the cleaner... or the support worker, they're all getting the same one-day training. And then people are gone 15 years without any further training at all, you know so.

Group members believed that providing a bespoke education programme was essential if organisations were to attain a level of coherence in how workers framed the issue of and responded to domestic abuse. However, by reflecting on their own experience of learning, they concluded that the most effective approach to learning was that in which workers learnt through a parallel process of participating in formal education and practice within frontline organisations.

Support for a parallel process of situated learning and participation in education

Participants were clear that while the provision of formal education was important, that it could not replace nor be seen as separate to the experiential learning gained through domestic violence work. Group members shared a belief that learning opportunities should be provided for within both contexts and in ways in which the learning in each context was interrelated and complementary. Some group members described this approach as an apprenticeship model. Others, while not using the term 'apprenticeship', shared an appreciation for the benefits accruing from employing a model of situated learning for domestic violence work.

An approach to learning that was based on the idea of an apprenticeship was proposed by Aoife and Jane in the launching stage of the inquiry because they believed that situating learning within domestic violence services would prevent a further slide into the kind of professionalisation that undermined the principle and practice of solidarity between workers and women. As our inquiry progressed, the importance of supporting situated learning, whilst also providing for access to foundational and ongoing education in more formal settings, came increasingly to the fore. Charley spoke of her positive experience of a well-supported induction process in the organisation she works for which, she felt, was *"almost like an apprenticeship"* and she advocated for a similar model to be applied to a future education and learning framework for domestic violence workers.

I think that apprenticeship approach and then you add on modules. Because, when you start training on the job, well, we never had any official training, we were just trained in, on the job. But we had a six-month probationary period and there was shadowing and there was a very standardised, ... the way people were trained in, and it was almost like an apprenticeship, you learnt on the job. And I found that the most useful because you need... that apprenticeship style but also be doing the qualification, the foundation qualification at the same time, so that you get the practice experience and you can sort of relate back to what you are learning and then as you go on just sort of go on to modules and just keep adding on and adding on. That's the way I see it being most effective. I don't know if anyone else agrees.

Aoife, who had gained a social care qualification through an in-service course shared Charley's appreciation for the value of combining practice experience with foundational education as a way of learning and attaining a qualification.

... when I was doing social studies and it was applied social studies so in first year, it was one day on placement and the rest of it in college. Second year, it was two days on placement, and it was a great way of learning. You would have taken all that, you know, the theory made sense when you were going out into the field, you know? It really did. And then writing up case studies and all that, there was great learning in that.

Claire shared Aoife's and Charley's perspective and she spoke of her decision to interrupt her participation in a degree course in counselling and therapy so that she could progress her learning through practice.

I took some time out and started to build up my experience because I needed to be able to apply all this knowledge to the work and understand it in the context of the actual work and then I went back then. So, I could have done it quicker but for me it worked. It worked much better that way because when I went back to do the final year, so much, it just made more sense to me. Because I was able to apply what I did, the experiential piece.

Another reason that foundational education combined with in-practice learning needs to be provided at the preliminary or probationary stage of a person's employment was so that the worker could, as Charley described it, *"get a feel for the work and it's a way of weeding people out too"*. Rebecca also felt that access to practice experience alongside foundational education was essential.

... if you've a love for it and you go in on placement and you'll try to get back into it. ... there are loads of people out there but they're not getting the opportunity, like an apprenticeship, I think it was you Jane, you said it at the start of this. And it's that, I think, that ignites the passion if it's in you, you know.

Jane: And that's a good point because if you want to do this work, the only way to get any training is to do the job, to get the job first. It's backwards.

Rebecca: Absolutely, absolutely, totally agree.

Jane: So, you go in and you're stuck, this is a job so then you have unsuitable people going in because, I need a job, you know?

Rachel felt that this early experience was essential because of the challenges of domestic violence work. She stated that potential and new workers needed an opportunity to find out if they had *“the stomach for it”*.

Group members acknowledged that experiential learning for potential or new workers can be provided alongside formal education through short term placements in services. However, we came to share an understanding that there could be greater value in providing access to foundational education integrated with participation as a worker or an apprentice in a domestic violence organisations.

Charley: And I think that comes down to a concern that having a qualification for what we do is professionalisation and then people go in there and do the degree or whatever and they come out with no practical experience at all, about how to relate what they've just learnt on the ground to the job because it's not always as smooth sailing as $A+B=C$, do you know? So, it just disconnects people if they come into it that way, so I think. So, within that on the job learning is, I found it useful. And it's a good way of changing your value systems as well, when you're being challenged constantly.

The necessity for worker education to be integrated with in-service learning was that new and inexperienced workers would be able to bridge the gap between theory and practice, a competency that group members felt could not be attained in participating in education that was situated outside of the worker's participation in the life of their organisation.

Bridging the gap between theory and practice

In the following segment, Tessa identifies an aspect of practice that is difficult to *“teach”* about in the abstract. Her articulation of this dilemma led to a subsequent dialogue in which group members identified how learning in practice and participation in formal education could support the worker to bridge the gap between theory and practice.

Tessa: There's something that's come up for me and thinking, in the context of, working with domestic violence, working in the domestic violence sector but then collaborating with other services, because, courts? I don't know how I would even begin to teach that to somebody. This is what the court system says it's going to do but this is what it does. And secondly, interaction with

social work and child protection. Because that's changing, it's now. You know, ... you can even go into a CPC⁴² or a family support meeting and suddenly things are different. You start off and find they do a danger statement... Well nobody's expecting that, you know. So, it's just keep moving and changing in other departments and their view of domestic violence and how do you work with it and how do you try to understand where they're coming from but to help them understand what the woman is going through. So, I think there's a, that's a, I don't know, I think that's a big part of what we do when we are advocating for a service user. ... You're trying to talk to the social worker, talk to the court, talk to the lawyers basically, talk to different people and how are we ever going to do that if we don't understand. ... It's not even just the, sorry maybe it's not even just the, when you learn, Ok, you read a manual and say the social workers are going to do this, read the guidelines, but the reality is so different and I think that that what's got to be imparted in this is probably going to be a bit of on the job work. But there is so much in practice that is so different than it is supposed to be, with the Gardaí, with the Courts, with social work, that that I think, must be, put out there. I don't know how you would do it.

Tessa refers to the gap between what legislation and policy state should happen when women access state run services and the courts, as opposed to what may happen when women engage with these systems. She says, *"I don't know how I would even begin to teach that to somebody"*. In response to Tessa, group members identify that bridging the gap between theory and practice is supported through experiential learning gained through practice, through learning opportunities provide for within organisations and through participation in formal education.

Grainne: Part of the work experience thing that you pick up, a lot of that as you're going along.

Claire: Sorry, you could do a module on that. Because I am just thinking back to my own psychotherapy training. I can't think what it was called, professional something, but it gave that opportunity to say, OK, we've learnt, this, this, this and this now, let's now actually talk about this in real terms and what is happening out there. And it was so beneficial because it was that bridge between the theory and the classroom to the outside world and actual what the work is going to look like and what happens. And those, exactly how you are describing it Tessa, this is how it's supposed to be, but this is how it really is. And I just remember everybody around the module thought it was so beneficial. And again, the knowledge that was there, people were so willing to share it just, it prepared you, so you weren't going out all, you know.

Jane: Dewey eyed.

Maureen: And then you go to court and she'll get protection order and the Guards come if you call them.

Tessa: Yeah, and that's what you'd expect almost if you were to read it (inaudible) surprised when someone comes in "but we went and she got the order why is everything not OK", you know?

Charley: That brings to my mind that that would be like a peer support group for people, for students, who were doing the apprenticeship, the job and then, because external supervision is going to be important for the students who are doing on the work as well as us in services. But that could be an easy way of then getting it, if they were doing group support work, do you know what I mean? As part of the course.

Me: Discussing the reality of going to court?

Charley: Yeah, sharing experiences and getting support.

The group's consideration of this dilemma illustrated that while learning about relevant legislation and policy is important, the most valuable learning for workers is coming to understand the reality for women when they attempt to utilise these instruments. While group members do not use the term, situated learning, it is learning in this context that they identify as being most responsive to the continuous learning needs of workers in domestic violence organisations. It is through participation in the life of the organisation, learning as they practice, collaborative learning in peer support settings, being mentored in supervision sessions, and having an opportunity to reflect on this experience with colleagues in formal education settings, that the worker can gain the kind of knowledge that they need to become responsive to the needs of the women for whom they work.

Embedding feminist values in learning approaches

Our reflections on our motivations to be in domestic violence work revealed that all of us came to and stayed in the work because the values of domestic violence work resonated with our own. Ensuring that a future education and learning framework was underpinned by the same values that informed our practice was an important consideration for group members. Values of inclusion, equality, and accountability to survivors were identified in the launching stage of the inquiry as core to a future framework. Concerns that education should be fully inclusive of women who were

educationally disadvantaged and that the approach chosen would value and acknowledge the expertise of women working in the sector, regardless of their previous educational attainment, was also emphasised. Some group members were concerned with issues in relation to where education and learning would be provided and who would provide it. For these women, a goal of education and learning was to restore the grassroots activism from which the anti-domestic violence movement grew and they had doubts about education being based in 3rd level institutions which, they believed, could contribute towards perceptions of workers as 'expert helpers' and women experiencing domestic violence as receivers of social care services.

Group members were aware that some workers come to domestic violence work for solely pragmatic reasons without identifying with the ethos of feminist domestic violence work. Grainne spoke of colleagues who took up employment with domestic violence services because they were placed in these organisations on Community Employment schemes or were attracted to the offer of part time positions that enabled them to combine caring roles with paid employment. She wondered how coherence around values and a feminist perspective could be achieved through education and learning when:

... some people come in their 40's, 50's and they're entrenched in their attitudes. So, how do you work on that as well?

Maureen was also aware of challenges of expecting workers to examine their values and beliefs.

Like beliefs are different than skills, do you know? ... It's much harder to tell somebody what their beliefs should be to do their job as opposed to your skill set or what you need to know to do your job, do you know what I mean?

Reflecting on how she came to develop a feminist consciousness around her work, Aoife credited her own experience of feminist consciousness raising within a social care degree course as a critical learning experience.

Well, I think for me anyway, what was key for me in my learning was consciousness raising. I can clearly remember doing social studies in [name of college] and I very clearly remember having an obviously feminist lecturer who did this whole thing on gender with us and it just blew my mind and I was like, oh, so that's what it's all about, you know. Now it didn't have that same effect on everybody in the class, you know, but it really did on me. It really did on me and I started the first ever women's group in [name of college].

She suggested that approaches to learning developed within the adult and community education sector would have much to offer in providing an approach that facilitates learners to critically reflect on beliefs and values.

But you think about adult education and group work and community development. How learning was done in that process, it was very collaborative, it was very participative and that's the way my vision of it would be.

Other participants emphasised that collaborative and participative learning spaces provided an opportunity for learners to draw on a personal life experience. In these spaces people could be facilitated in gaining a greater awareness of their values and make connections to the values and principles that underpin domestic violence work.

Jane: ... that comes back to your own personal experience as well for everybody would have had, you know, there's, there's probably a way of relating a big concept such as human rights back then as an individual, some place where they've experienced injustice or discrimination, you know? I think that it's, that might be part of the experiential part of it.

Me: ... the values training is around consciousness raising, isn't it? It's starting with the person's own experience because that's what people, that's, well my experience is that how you make sense of values. You only make sense of them in relation to your own life.

Maureen: That's how you connect to the value. You say, that's me, I know that and then you connect to it. It's tough though.

Concerns about the type and quality of learning that should be provided for domestic violence workers was a key focus for this inquiry. Connected to these interests was a shared concern that the experience and knowledge gained through years of practice and engagement with learning and education should carry with it some form of formal recognition in the form of accreditation and/or qualifications. The following

section focuses on the benefits of attaching education and learning for domestic violence workers to a formal recognition framework.

Attaching formal recognition to learning and experience

Attaching formal recognition in the form of qualifications was perceived as necessary to resist the co-optation into other fields of practice such as social work or social care. Explaining why she felt it was important that education and learning carried some form of formal recognition, Charley said:

Well that the sector has something that's their own. Because there's such a trend now to go towards social care degrees, and they're not really that relevant to the work that we do. Strands of it are, but not completely. So that seems to be a trend, that everyone is advertising for social care or three years equivalent in the social care sector whereas, I think, that's why a qualification structure needs to be just set for the domestic violence sector.

Aoife stated that asserting the importance of domestic violence work by attaching qualifications to education and learning would benefit women.

It puts a boundary and a definition to the work, you know, so instead of having, you know, that's kind of clear for that woman. She knows what your title is and knows what you do, you know, as well as sweeping the back yard also, you know, putting out the bins. It gives some status and credibility to the work, so for the woman that gives her more confidence. You, know, I just have this image of a woman saying, well this is my domestic violence advocate, you know, there is some title, or specialist or whatever, there's title. So that then is clear to the woman exactly what we do.

Aoife spoke of this need as not only providing information to the woman but also as about providing a status and credibility for domestic violence work and for workers. It was this priority in particular that came to the fore when group members spoke of why they wanted education and learning to carry some form of formal recognition.

Charley: I think it's multi-faceted. By having a qualification, it gives status, it gives us recognition, it gives us respect with other professionals because we're qualified at something. Where now, we're not really qualified in their eyes and a lot of professionals are looking at, well, you don't have the same qualifications as me so therefore, you're just a care worker, or they'll diminish us. So, it gives us the same professional standing.

Group members believed that formal recognition would situate domestic violence workers in a more powerful position in the community so that they could maximise the achievement of positive outcomes for women and children as a result of their advocacy. Gaining a level of professional standing that was equitable with other professions would assert the importance of domestic violence as an issue and the distinctive and valuable contribution that domestic violence workers and organisations make to community efforts to tackle the problem.

Maureen: ... it gives values, recognition to domestic violence. It must be important if it needs accreditation. And that's to domestic violence as a topic and to the organisations themselves. It is good for awareness raising. Seeing what we do, what the qualification contains and what domestic violence is. So, if you look at what you're learning about it also helps to raise awareness. Helps the respect for the organisations, something that needs accreditation must be important, serious.

The specific contribution that domestic violence organisations and workers make to community efforts to tackle domestic abuse was described.

Me: ... our expertise is in being able to see what the abuser is doing, that's putting the women and children at risk. That's harming them and to make that visible. That's our expertise and that's the unique role that domestic violence services play that other services don't have. And it's all about that, making it visible, having it taken seriously, having it have value, for others so that people go, oh yeah, do you know what, we need a domestic violence advocate to work here so, so we can get a clear idea of what is going on in this situation.

Claire believed that establishing domestic violence workers as professionals on a par with other professionals in the community would have the impact of increasing workers' confidence when engaging with practitioners and agencies.

Because then ultimately, we're on a more confident footing when we are dealing with other agencies, but then other agencies will have more confidence in us. They should, but they don't. But they would.

Increasing workers' confidence and competence through recognised education and learning was seen as important to empower workers to respond to questions or

challenges from professionals outside of the sector. Grainne noted how attaching formal recognition could help workers to better articulate what they know because undertaking an assessment would help workers to:

... articulate back, you know, if you do a course and there's no accreditation, you don't have to prove that you've been listening, I suppose, really. Yeah, just to give it back and be assessed on what you've absorbed from the training and all of that. So, to be able to articulate it was the benefit.

Jane: Yeah, and it empowers the workers, the worker, for pretty much the same reason.

Group members' references to knowledge as power reflects experiences where they felt that their contribution to community efforts to tackle domestic abuse were undervalued. Being able to speak with authority about the issue of domestic violence is thus perceived as empowering workers as critical actors in community responses to domestic abuse.

For Jane, confidence in oneself as a practitioner is also connected to the value that is placed on domestic violence work, as reflected in pay and conditions, and the currency that such a qualification provides to a worker seeking to progress to other kinds of work.

Value for the work and that a pay rise would also, just a sense of to being valued more broadly, than just within the sector. That is monetary but it's also on another level as well. It gives a qualification that can be taken into other areas. Because if you, if people need to move on, leave, they have a qualification that can say, that can recognise what's involved, OK? So that all the areas that we do, will be visible and valued. Because most of us would be great workers and advocates...

The issue of pay and conditions and individual career progression was a marginal issue in group members' discussions on the benefits for workers of formally recognised education and learning for workers. While these issues were referred to, they were not named as critical in the need for a recognised education pathway into domestic violence work. Jane was the only group member to bring up the issue of improved pay levels as one potential outcome of providing such a framework. She identified that a qualification could potentially address the inconsistency in pay and

conditions for workers in the sector and address misconceptions about domestic violence work being a voluntary area of activity.

Well, there's probably an inconsistency in what we're all paid. So that there would be a standard. Now, we'd have to be careful that it didn't bring us down. But yeah, that is a thing, you're all volunteers. People all the time say, oh you're a volunteer. No, I'm paid for this and it's like, what? Well yeah, why shouldn't I be? ... Maureen, you look dubious.

Maureen: No, no, a pay rise? (Laughter).

Me: You're probably right to be dubious about that.

Jane's statement and responses to this indicate a level of cynicism about the possibility of improvements in pay for domestic violence workers. It is notable that apart from this short interaction and one other occasion early on in the inquiry when Jane raised the issue of workers' pay and conditions, this issue did not arise as a concern or priority for group members. The primary focus when identifying benefits for individual workers was on how they could be empowered to be more effective in their role.

Using qualifications to strengthen the sector's social change capacity.

Group members felt that providing anti-domestic violence work as a career option for people could increase an understanding of the work as an important field of practice.

Maureen: When DV is listed as an option with other subjects a new cohort of people may become interested in a career. Even if it's not a career it may start a conversation, so you know, you see it listed with social work and social care. It shows that it's an option, that's it's an important option. It raises awareness, it's not a private family issue. It helps with respect for domestic violence as an issue which is good for society.

They believed however, that without a qualification attached to education courses on domestic violence, that potential domestic violence workers would not be incentivised to choose such an education pathway.

Aoife recognised how providing a clear and recognised pathway into domestic violence work could help strengthen the social change capacity of the domestic violence sector because this would “*attract the people who actually want to do the work*”. She referred to a recent turn in society where “*there’s a whole new wave of feminism happening again, there really is*” and she felt that domestic violence organisations could benefit from the

... the idea of being agents of social change appealing to some young people who tend not to do social care, by the way.

The potential of a recognised education and learning pathway to attract new workers who are orientated towards a social justice paradigm is linked to group members’ concerns about the increasing encroachment of models of work, such as counselling and social care, into the work of domestic violence organisations. The impact of providing accredited education was seen to have potential beyond strengthening the sectors’ response and to have the possibility of generating a greater understanding of feminist perspectives on domestic abuse at a wider level.

Jane: I think we’re keeping the feminist perspective; it brings that back into discussion in wider society. And maybe because it’s a dirty word like, it maybe will take some of that away from it.

Charley: Yeah, definitely if you keep the gender analysis there as being quite paramount it (inaudible) yeah, I think it would be useful.

Me: It could be like, if we were to establish this for ourselves, it could then be opened to other professionals to do certain modules which would help maybe bring about change in practitioners, agencies, maybe, you know, as well, yeah.

Jane: Yeah, because say social workers, rather than do a module like a day in social work, they come and do one with us.

Me: An accredited module on domestic violence and child protection, that has the feminist perspective and gender analysis. Could be great, yeah.

Jane: Could make huge changes.

In this short segment Jane, Charley and myself speculate that providing education and learning that centred a gendered analysis could help with de-stigmatising a

feminist perspective on domestic violence work and promote changes in practice in important sectors such as social work. Thus, providing feminist informed and accredited education for practitioners outside of the domestic violence sector could itself be a social change strategy.

Some potential risks of credentialing our learning and knowledge

Alongside a unanimous position on the need for a qualification's framework, there were also concerns and anxieties about the unintended consequences that could arise if such a framework were to be established. Findings in previous chapters illustrate that there was a shared anxiety about a "dilution" of feminist knowledge and the subsequent de-gendering of the issue, if an education programme was to be located outside of the control of the domestic violence sector. Group members felt that a future framework had to be owned by the sector. At the same time, in our launching research focus we sought an approach to education and learning that was open, dynamic, and collaborative, and participants recognised the importance of collaborations with others, particularly in the education field. Those group members who identified with a feminist social change paradigm for anti-domestic violence work, while supportive of a qualification's framework, were concerned that a future approach to credentialing workers' knowledge and experience would be inclusive of the diversity of women in Ireland and that it should not exclude women who may be alienated by traditional approaches to assessment and qualifications.

It is beyond the parameters of this research to inquire into approaches to accreditation that would be compatible with domestic violence work. As a group, we were aware of many of the risks of attaching accreditation to worker education and learning, while also agreeing unanimously that some form of formal recognition of the learning and expertise of domestic violence workers was needed. As practitioners in frontline domestic violence work rather than educators, our knowledge of the QQI framework and other forms of accreditation was limited. A brief examination of accreditation options and approaches in Ireland was conducted by the group and as a result we gained an awareness of An Cosan and Longford Women's Link as two organisations who sought to maximise the inclusion of marginalised women in

education through providing accessible community based programmes. While there was no outright rejection of education being based in 3rd level institutions in the research group, there was support for basing education primarily in the community. The group concluded that partnerships with community and higher education allies would be essential in guiding the domestic violence sector through a complex system and saw the issue of accreditation and qualifications as an area for future inquiry and development.

Conclusion

The shared understanding that the group developed about an appropriate approach to education and learning for domestic violence workers was a wider and more holistic vision for learning than was first articulated by the majority of group members in the launching phase of the inquiry. At this stage, only two members spoke of their belief that education and learning should be provide for in a situated learning context, whilst most other group members spoke of education and learning primarily in terms of providing formal learning within 3rd level institutions separate from employment as domestic violence workers. A recognition for the complex and multi dimensional nature of domestic violence work and the many tensions and challenges to be negotiated in practice grew as our inquiry progressed. This led to the group developing a shared appreciation for the additional benefits of an education and learning framework that provided supports for learning in practice and opportunities for participation in feminist education spaces.

A group standpoint was formed over the period of the collaborative inquiry in which experiential learning was recognised and supported as the primary mode of learning. Alongside the high value placed on experiential learning, group members were strongly supportive of an education programme through which every worker would have access to a curriculum that covered the breadth and depth of knowledge and information needed for effective anti-domestic violence work. There was unanimous support for a paralell process of learning in practice and participation in education. Participants wanted to see learning and education delivered within a participatory,

collaborative and dialogic space in which workers would be supported to reflect on experience whilst engaging with feminist theory and practice knowledge.

The group identified, as a development priority for the anti-domestic violence movement in Ireland, the establishment of an education programme that would clearly define the nature of anti-domestic violence work as distinguished from other practices. The programme would delineate the boundaries of the work, and that would support the consistent attainment of standards in practice. A shared standpoint was formed that this education programme had to be mapped to the national qualification framework [QQI]. They saw a qualifications framework for worker education as being key in empowering workers as critical actors in community efforts to address domestic abuse and in shifting negative and dismissive attitudes about domestic violence work in the external environment.

Reflexive consideration

In this reflexive consideration, I focus an aspect of our collaborative inquiry in enabling participants to identify solutions to a shared problem. In attempting to define compatible learning and education approaches, we knew something about what would be appropriate, but I suggest that our lack of experience as educational practitioners limited our capacity to generate knowledge in this respect. We were stepping out of what group member Rebecca described as the “*flow*” of inquiry to a different level of meaning making by trying to theorise in a conceptual way, our vision of a future education and learning framework (Gustafson, 2000). This was a difficult task for the group. Whereas before there was a high level of contribution from all group members, in this session there were a lot of silences and some group members who contributed little. Group energy was low, and people began to seem somewhat disengaged from the process. This experience reflects that of a collaborative inquiry group initiated by Gustafson (2000), who also intended to facilitate collective theorising in her inquiry with nurses but found group participation declined dramatically during this phase.

In the previous chapter, I acknowledged the achievements of the inquiry group in generating a rich description of practice and the many tensions and challenges

negotiated on a daily basis. Achieving this outcome was an important step in enabling the group to move on to a focus on learning and education. Whereas the richness and depth of knowledge generated in describing our practice came, as I have argued, from the insiderness of our experience as domestic violence workers, our inquiry faltered somewhat when seeking to describe with any depth, approaches to education and learning that we assessed as compatible with anti-domestic violence work. Thus, the quality of our knowledge production on approaches to learning compare less favourably with the quality of our knowledge generation about domestic violence work. This finding illustrates the limits of collaborative inquiry as a research approach if it is primarily focused on reflection on experience without reference to relevant theory and scholarship. The group had simply reached the limits of our knowledge (Douglas, 2002). As an exercise in collaborative learning and collective knowledge production, our group inquiry would have been enriched by a conscious engagement with theory from within the fields of feminist pedagogies. Whilst elevating experience and feeling as knowledge, feminist pedagogies emphasise that it is the interplay of reflection on experience with the practice of critical thinking and a conscious engagement with theory that are critical in the production of really useful knowledge (Connolly, 1997, 2018; English and Irving, 2015; hooks, 1994; Manicom, 1992; Tisdell, 1998).

Chapter 10. Group members experience of our collaborative inquiry: Learning, connection and empowerment.

Introduction

In this findings chapter, I present data generated as we reflected on our participation in this collaborative inquiry. In this session we asked ourselves: what has changed for me and what have I learnt as a result of my participation as a co-subject and a co-inquirer? Each of us shared our reflections with the group, three group members reading their written reflections and six presenting a visual representation of their thoughts and feelings.⁴² Our reflections illustrate that for each member of the group, this inquiry was an experience of collaborative learning. I present the data by focusing on each group members' individual reflection in turn. This is followed by a section in which I identify some of the common themes, experiences and differences in experience portrayed in these reflections and I provide further elucidation of these themes by including data generated as we continued to dialogue about our experience of the inquiry.

Individual reflections on the experience of collaborative inquiry

Claire

Claire shared her written reflection on her experience of participation in the inquiry with the group. The following extract focuses on learning and the importance of critical learning spaces.

... the first thing is, getting to know how other organisations operate. How they're different or like my own. So that was a big thing because you don't know, do you, until you start talking, you know? This is, helped me to realize that there's other possibilities for how we can work, other ways. I mean, again, a real sense of the grassroots. Hearing from people who have been in the work for a long time and all the changes that they have experienced over the years, so that was interesting. Because I'm only in it six years and you don't know about it. You hear about it but it's not until those 7 days. And 9 days now, that you're hearing all those stories interspersed and what our agenda is you go, god, this has been going a long time and you think, well, for

⁴² One group member was unable to participate in the final session

me, it made me think more about where it all came from and I suppose that has heightened my own awareness about the social change part of the work as opposed to just going in and firefighting, you know, doing the work and just client after client after client. There's a bigger picture so that's kind of focused me better on that. I've been encouraged to open my mind to different views, challenge my own views and biases and those of my organisation. Both good and bad. So, that's something that I think started from the first day where I found myself, oh, I didn't know if I agree with that and then maybe, I think having the time in between to reflect on it, that was great. Reminded me of the importance of having a student mind, always open, learning and reflecting. So again, getting back to the first day here. Coming from what I knew so far and not really questioning that that much until this kind of space here gave us the opportunity to do it. Because then usually when you're meeting with other organisations there's not a forum for that. You don't get a chance to. Or sometimes you're afraid to as well, there's a risk, isn't there. So as well, it's reaffirming and it's encouraging to hear all the great work that's being done because all too often there's a lot of focus on the negative and what's not working. But when you hear about the fabulous work that's being done you go back and think about the women who are benefitting from that and the children and there's wonderful stuff happening... So, you know, there's all that vibrant stuff already happening

Tessa

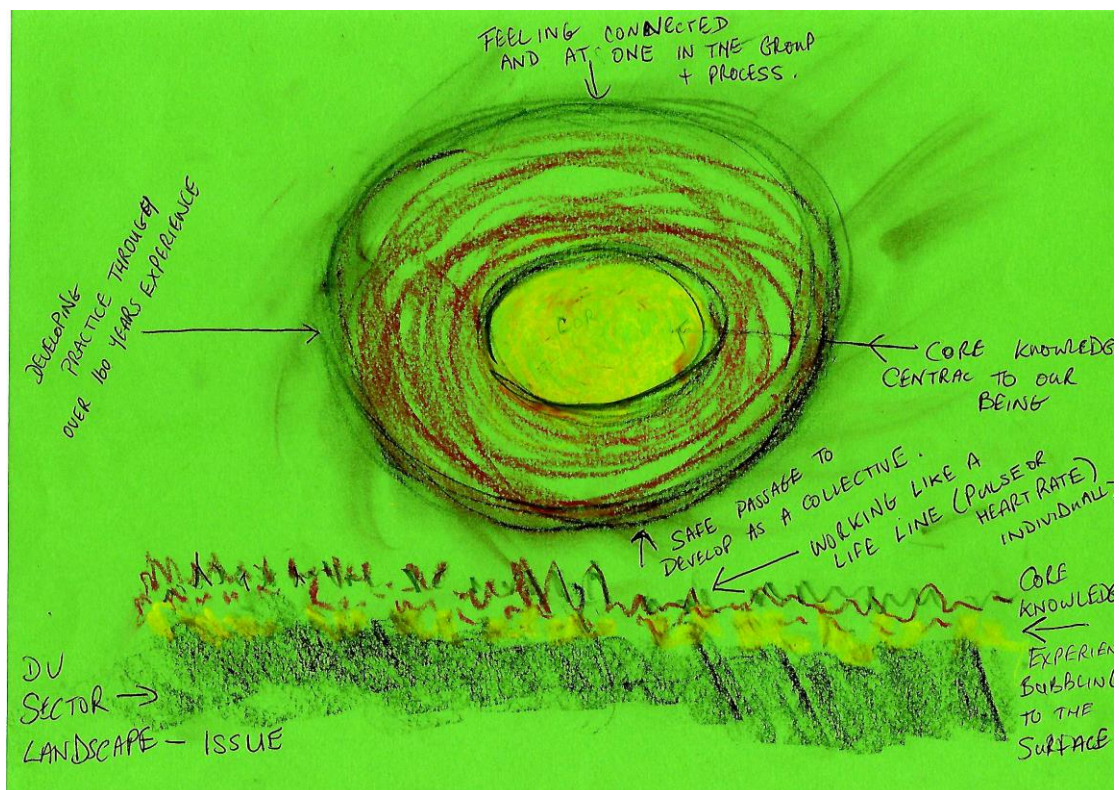
Tessa's description of her learning in the collaborative inquiry group is primarily about coming to a realisation that the social change paradigm that informs her work as a domestic violence worker is essentially a feminist approach.

So, what I've put in the middle is violence, in black. And I have women and children. And what I learned was that all of us have the same experiences of working with women, you know? Whatever, wherever we are or whatever role we have within our organisation, the experiences are the same. So that was, yeah, that was very interesting. Because, like the, was it yourself, (indicating Grainne) you go to meetings, oh it was you (indicating Claire) you go to meetings, but you don't really talk about these things, right? You talk about whatever the agenda is, and you don't, I know they say mingle and network and all that but that doesn't really happen because you don't really mingle and network, but anyway... Yeah, but what I really put at the end is that it's never ending. The violence is never ending. The experiences are never ending, and you have men in one corner, women in another and then I put feminism in the middle, at the bottom because that was my surprise. You know what you were saying about the history and I suppose I had but I hadn't thought if it as being part of feminism, does that make sense, of feminism. It was always more social justice for me. I think I would have said that at the beginning as well. So, I suppose to come around to that and see it in the

framework and say yeah, no, it is, it is a feminist framework and social justice is part of it or it's about social justice or whatever. So that's my learning, to be able to, to see it in a different light.

Rachel

Rachel's visual reflection depicts a yellow sphere at its heart which for her represents the shared knowledge and experience of group members that we reflected on, articulated and interrogated to generate a group standpoint in this inquiry.



Rachel explained her visual presentation of her experience of the collaborative inquiry in the following way.

.... here we have the DV sector and the dark is the issue I'm afraid, it is. It's very dark. It's a very dark issue that we deal with. And I think using the colour I use here, is where I would have seen myself before I started this project with you guys. So, the knowledge and the experience is bubbling above the actual issue and its alive so I really felt, when I looked at the peaks and the lows and the highs that I have here, it's the core knowledge and experience bubbling to the surface. Now, I realised, why did I draw this egg up here. I missed two weeks so visually, I felt a bit of a disconnect but also, you know, there was

something already forming then, through the process. So, I have the yoke, it's the core knowledge at the centre of my being and I have the developing practice through over, over 160⁴³ years, I did, I did, and you see, that's the dark ring on the outside so that's holding us together, that 160 years. And then the feeling connected and at one in the group and the process. So, I think that, it's a bit messy but it makes sense to me. I don't think it's an attractive picture, but I don't think attractive is the issue to be honest. But I think, I felt for me, and maybe on eye level because I've been in the sector for a long time and experienced so many highs and lows as we all have, and some of us have shared them, and I think there's a core connection with all of the ups and downs that we've experienced so but I do feel, for the first time, most definitely, that I feel very connected with a group in the sector since I left the refuge. And leaving the refuge was traumatic. So, I feel like I've been sheltered somewhat in [name of organisation], now I love the work, but I feel now that there's little branches that I can connect into and that's just, for me, it's been absolutely a brilliant experience

Aoife



Aoife's explanation of her drawing reflects much of what Rachel expressed.

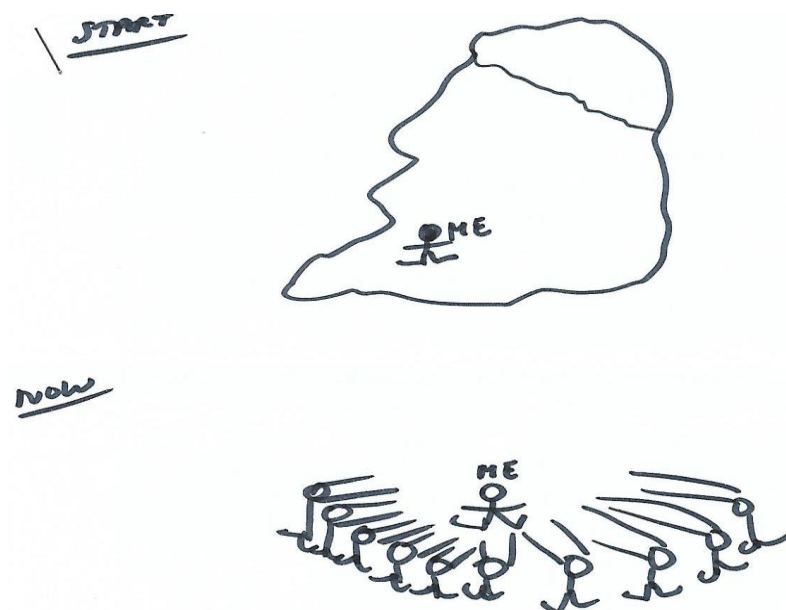
All on my own thinking, all dressed in black, well I do wear black a lot anyway (laughter) But it's kind of like, feeling isolated, de-motivated in the work, you know. Not feeling, just feeling that that gender-neutral thing is coming in

⁴³ Group members calculated that our combined years of service as domestic violence workers was 160

more and more. And then there's me, heading off to Dublin. And my heart is beginning to open a little bit and I'm coming up the path. And then there's, we're all in there in little circles. And underneath, so I've used the word solidarity, collaborative and inquiry because they just meant so much to me throughout this process. But it's also coming from, these are all the women that we work with, and like you I have the yellow and the red. So, this is the fire that lights us, you know? And sometimes it's not nice but it is what makes us, what fires us in the work, and we give voice, I'd like to think that we gave voice to the women. The women were coming through us. And that's all at the heart of the work. So, there's a kind of that sense from being closed and isolated to this open, you know.

Grainne

Grainne's visual portrayal of her reflection depicted a change from an experience of isolation to being held and supported by her colleagues in the group.

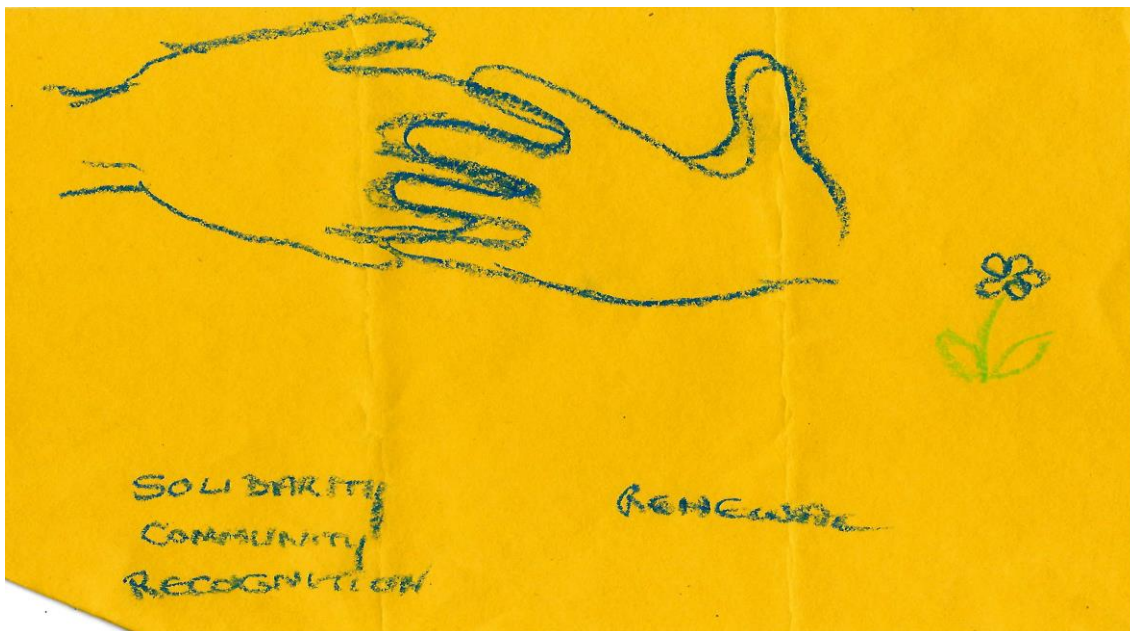


... that's then and this is now with everybody around me and I feel like the hands supporting and we're altogether on that... Yeah, I was amazed now, because I was conscious before I came here that there was a need for a deeper level of training and you know, preparation and I had this dissatisfaction with what was going on. And I felt isolated when I would speak about that. Nobody was listening, and no one seemed to want to take it any further. So, I was excited when I had the opportunity to come here and then to sit with people who are willing to explore it as well. And to look at the pros

and the cons and to just argue it a little bit and in a friendly explorative way if you like. And then to hear people articulate and to echo my own thoughts too, I found that very supportive and motivating going forward because, one of the things I saidwas that I was hoping to get renewed motivation. So, that has happened as well. I think it's amazing.... So, yeah, we've all faced similar challenges and we have an understanding. So, it was good to feel that. It's a feeling thing as well too as a knowledge thing so, thank you to everybody.

Jane

Jane's reflection mirrors much of what Grainne shared about her experience of participation in the collaborative inquiry group.

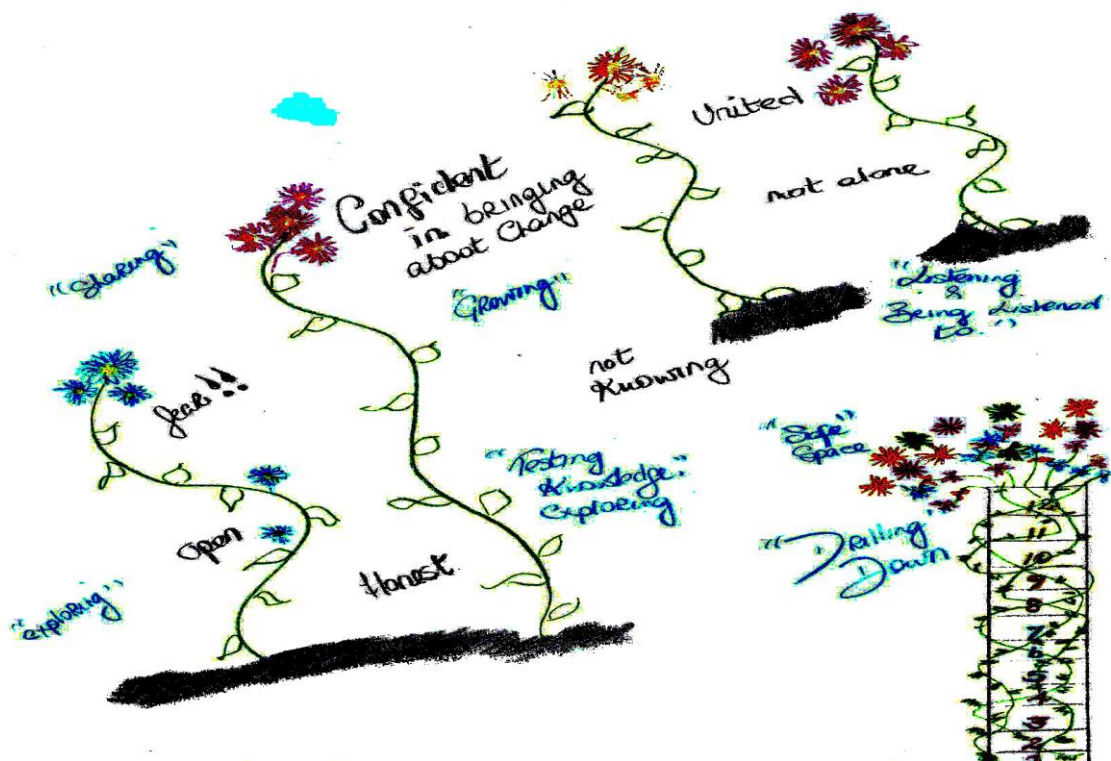


... it's two hands joined, it's two hands joined. I'd planned to do more hands but. And there's flowers (inaudible) women. OK, women and flowers. This is us together. So, what I've said is solidarity, got from it a sense of solidarity, of community. There's a community of us in fact. A renewal about my own feelings about the work and a recognition that other people feel the same, wo! No, because I do mean, last year was a bit bad. I was beginning to feel very, like highly isolated so it was great to know that other people are feeling the same. And so how it changed for me was, what I had been finding was, there's kind of this stereotyping that happens. People expect you to say certain things and you start saying certain things and they get there before you're finished. I do that, so I know other people do. So, they're kind of anticipating what you're going to say. So, you don't get the chance to develop the thought. So, you start out saying something and you're feeling your way towards something and you mightn't say it initially the way you intend or where your aiming for, which is

exactly what I'm doing right now (laughter). But that space was given. That you could think your way through a process and that's so important. It really is. That people don't jump in and finish it for you or assume what you're saying. Does that make sense? I don't know if people have had that experience (yeahs, nods). Fun and laughter. We had lots of fun and laughter and again I've noticed, it's something that had gone out of my place, it was like taboo. If you were laughing you were, you know, it was not done, you know. And mutual respect and time to hear each other, giving time to each other. And to learn from, because I learnt so much as well. And no person had control, it was flat in that sense, I felt. Niamh obviously had a different set of criteria in some ways, but not really so nobody was controlling it. It's ours, you know, so it really felt to me like, this is us. And if we can do this, other people can do this. So, so, hope they will.

Rebecca

This feeling of renewed hope was also expressed by Rebecca, who, in earlier stages of the inquiry, had spoken about her sense that the sector had lost its power and capacity to effect change and was subject to the control of more powerful state entities. Her visual reflection portrays this renewed hope.



So, I just started writing down words and the first thing I wrote was, confidence in bringing about change. Because, you know, I think at the start

of this I was, Oh, where are we going, you know. It took us a while to get our heads round, I feel confident in doing it, now I feel we can achieve anything. And then, just different words that I have wrote down, sharing, fear, because I was so fearful coming into it, and so fearful going forward but it's not enough to stop me, but, we're not alone. I feel we're not alone, and you know, being united. You know everybody always says there's no "I" in team. And it's kind of feels like that type of a feeling. So, like you, this is our grey area, or our black area. The soil, the foundation. And this is us progressing up and blooming and I've put a ladder in. There are thorns coming out of the ground and they're all the obstacles and the challenges that we will meet along our journey and then hopefully we will bloom into this.... Yeah, it's been a safe space and we've drilled down a lot and we're growing and just, I suppose, listening and being listened to and not having somebody judging you on what you're saying, because we've all been there and done that, wore the T-shirt so, you're not trying to explain all the time why we do what we do, because we all know. Yeah, that's me.

Me

I also spoke of my participation in the research group as being an experience of connection and belonging. I portrayed my experience in visual form before sharing my reflection with the group.



... like everybody else, a deeper sense of connection to the work, to each other. And that sense of community being so important. And (inaudible) we've asked ourselves, are we a social services sector, are we a social change movement and we don't need to label ourselves as one or the other because I think we have a really strong community of practice that we share and we can define that how we want and that can include social change and the work with women and kids. So it's for me, I was a bit hung up on that question at the beginning of the research and now what's changed for me is that it doesn't matter as much what we call ourselves as that we are clear about why we are here and what our purpose is and I think that there is real clarity around that so that's great. So, just that, obviously, I stepped out of the frontline work so obviously I was on my own and was isolated but even you're saying, yourself Charley, that even if you work in a very good team often you feel isolated if you're not connected to the rest of the organisations and your colleagues. It is isolating and just being in this group it's not there. It's just such a sense of connection and belonging. It's wonderful. I just feel a deep sense of gratitude to everyone here and feel very empowered just by being part of this group. My image, it's just, the ten of us coming individually and then just sharing our knowledge and our beliefs and our thoughts and our energies and our feelings and giving so much to each other in the group and then creating a whole. But there were still individuals in it but it's a whole, and these are little strands off it because there are still differences and that's good and that's OK. It's not about conformity, do you know?

Charley

Charley wrote about rather than depicted her reflection in a visual format. She shared her reflections with the group and was struck by the similarity in experiences of the collaborative inquiry process.

I'm struck that it's very similar. The themes, to what I wrote down. I put down that at the beginning I felt I was coming from quite an isolated place. Even though I'm part of the team, I don't get an opportunity to go to [name of organisation] meetings or anything like that. So, it's quite an isolated place as far as the sector connecting goes. I'm haven't felt connected to the sector apart from the odd bit of training or the thing that you go to. So, I did, regarding that point about the fragmentation of the sector, I thought it was just me that feels that way. So, I think the whole process, so the collaborative inquiry was great because it did open my eyes to think, alright, I'm not alone in this at all. Everyone's feeling the same way, this is great. And it did open all that up for me and give me a stronger sense of unity within the sector compared to what I felt before... So, the whole process has been, it's been a really great experience for me anyway and it's really renewed my sense of faith in the sector. It's not quite as fragmented as I thought it was and it's

given me the sort of inspiration really, the fire in the belly to go right, yeah, right, we can do this now. And this is important (indicating framework) and education is a big thing for me anyway, so.

Experiences of change and learning

Moving from isolation to connection, from despondency to hope

The reflections and images of seven of the nine group members are markedly similar in nature. Experiences of working within a fragmented sector were replaced by feelings of connection, solidarity, and a shared sense of purpose. Some group members, who came to the research feeling that they were alone in experiencing fear, frustration and marginalisation as domestic violence workers, realised that other group members shared these same experiences and fears. This helped break a sense of isolation. It was not alone in identifying that we shared these concerns but by affirming, and for some group members re-affirming our commitment to feminist principles and practice that we began to regain a sense of hope and belief that together as a movement we could strengthen practice and affect social change. Jane's reference to "*a community of us*", implies that the connections that had been made in the group could last beyond the timeframe of the research itself.

The visual representation of group member's reflections on their participation in this collaborative inquiry expressed something about the essence of their experiences. Some depicted a merging of individual experiences to create a shared knowledge that group members believed could make a difference to the work of the domestic violence sector. Rachel referred to this knowledge as "*like a lifeline or a heartbeat*" that continues to sustain us through all the ups and downs of domestic violence work. This shared commitment and belief in the importance of our knowledge is a counterpoint to the "*darkness*" (Rachel) and "*sadness*" (Aoife) of domestic violence work. For group members, it was important to have a space to be with others who shared the experience of confronting the darkness of domestic violence and of sustaining a commitment to keep the fire or the heartbeat of hope and resilience alive for women both individually and collectively. Realising that we shared similar concerns for the future of the domestic violence sector and thus, for the lives of

women and children in Ireland, created a sense of belonging and community with our colleagues.

Shifting perspectives

Neither Claire nor Tessa talked of experiences and feelings of reconnection and belonging to community, but their account of their experience included reflections on the changes they had experienced as a result of their participation in the inquiry group. They spoke of how their participation resulted in a reframing in how they understood domestic violence work. Claire came to understand that domestic violence work was about effecting social change as well as about responding to individual women's experience of male violence. Tessa reframed a social justice paradigm for domestic violence work as a feminist framework.

Claire identifies that her participation in collaborative inquiry provided her with a space in which to be critically reflective of previously held assumptions. This enabled her to learn from the experience of others who had been in domestic violence work for a long time and who saw their work as being rooted in the values and goals of the grassroots anti-domestic violence movement. Learning about this history enabled Claire to experience a perspective shift from viewing domestic violence work to be primarily about providing a service to individual women to understand that part of our *"agenda"* or purpose is to work for social change.

Tessa did not expand on what seeing domestic violence work *"in a different light"* means for her. In previous chapters, findings illustrate that her analysis of violence against women was informed by theory and knowledge on the gendered nature of coercive control and her primary motivation for engaging with domestic violence work was because of her commitment to social justice. Her reflection implies that the inquiry enabled her to re-define her approach to domestic abuse as feminist, centring the specific gendered dimensions of this form of violence and abuse. Like Claire, she talks about how learning about the history of the anti-domestic violence movement was key in enabling this perspective shift.

Claire also reflected on how her perception of the domestic violence sector as fragmented became tempered by an appreciation for many strengths of the sector, evidenced in the accounts of positive approaches to domestic abuse that benefitted both women and children. Her account reflects an earlier statement in which she reflected on some of her learning at a mid-way point in the inquiry.

... we did talk about being fragmented but we started that point with, over the last few sessions realising just how much good work is being done and then we got into there's a load of group work being done already that's up and running and people have a lot of experience in this and just a real genuineness to it all. So, that was refreshing. I suppose that was the point we were talking about, just how much that strengthens our work. It's just nice to know it's going on and so much of it is positive.

Claire's primary concern when she joined the research group was about fragmentation within the domestic violence sector, leading to a "*diversity of perspectives*" that she believed could be either beneficial or harmful to women and children. Hearing from her co-inquirers about the various ways in which they and their organisations responded to domestic abuse and acknowledging how these initiatives benefitted women and children resulted in Claire developing an appreciation for the strengths of the domestic violence sector. She felt encouraged when she learnt about the "*wonderful*" and "*vibrant*" responses being delivered by the sector and appreciated the opportunity to focus on the positive contribution of the domestic violence sector as opposed to a more usual "*focus on the negative and what's not working*".

Tessa also came to the research with concerns about fragmentation within the sector. Her participation in the group resulted in a recognition that this group of 10 domestic violence workers shared much in terms of our experiences and perspectives. She made a link between the discovery of this commonality of perspective and having the time to dialogue with colleagues. Both Claire and Tessa refer to a lack of opportunities for domestic violence workers to engage in the kind of collaborative learning process that this inquiry afforded to them. This experience was spoken about by other group members. The apparent ease with which we developed a shared understanding of the principles and practice of domestic violence

work suggests that perhaps it is the lack of opportunity for domestic violence workers to meet, reflect, share, listen and dialogue that creates a sense of disconnection and fragmentation, rather than there being critical differences in how workers and organisations approach the issue of domestic abuse. Tessa, however, was circumspect about drawing such conclusions, posing questions about the representativeness of our group and how this impacted on our collaborative knowledge production endeavour.

Representativeness, voice and validity

Tessa questioned the representativeness of the viewpoints and experiences of group members and whether our conclusions would resonate with other domestic violence workers.

I wonder, are we a representative group. Because if we have so much information gaps between the nine of us and all these people around us, then how are they going to accept that we're representative?

Claire also addressed the issue of representation and standpoint.

I wonder if there was 10 different people, what conversations would be had. If we had some very fiery people for instance, and there were more arguments and were more disagreements, you know, someone storms out, what, would at the end of the day would there be, would it be very different to what we've come to the end to, at this point. Maybe the process would have been different at different points, but we would have got here more or less? You never know, but it's, I guess you can wonder about that with anything in life. If you choose one thing, you're not choosing something else so.

Claire and Tessa's reflexivity drew attention to the issue of identity and inclusion, who was in the room and who was not, and how this impacted on the quality of our knowledge production endeavours. Both of these participants, whilst sharing much with other group members in terms of values, perspectives and knowledge nevertheless continued to question and to remind the group of the partial nature of the knowledge that we had generated in our inquiry. Responding to Claire, Aoife acknowledged that a different group may experience the inquiry differently, but she

believed that given the time and space that many of the same themes would be generated by group dialogue.

But I think there's something in that space as well, like that came up in the report as I was reading back, like, there's themes, you know, about people feeling isolated in the work, people feeling that they're on their own, even though I'm part of a good team as well. But just that the work itself can be quite isolating and that there isn't that space. But once given that space, the themes were so common. So I do think that even if you had a bigger group and there was different people with maybe different personalities, more fiery, you might have a bit more arguments or a bit more, but I'd like to think that we'd come to a very similar, maybe not the same, but I do think the themes are common when we do begin to talk about the work. I think the themes are so common.

Reflecting on why and how the inquiry group had been able to build such a level of agreement about domestic violence work, I talked about my perception prior to the research starting, that there might be a lot of dissension and differences of perspective in the group that could be irreconcilable. Surprised to find that this was not the case, I expressed my belief that a shared standpoint about the importance of centering women as knowledge creators was a key factor in the establishment of cohesion in the group.

... but people were fundamentally grounded in women's experiences and that's the truth that came through. I think that's what happened. That each person here is not coming in here with that expert view, I know better than women. That your knowledge comes, our knowledge comes from the women and that really came through so strongly for me. And that's why the cohesion was so easy to attain because there is truth in women's experience that cannot be denied, and you listen to that, and you honor it and you value it.

This statement reflects Aoife's hope that through participating in this collaborative inquiry that we had given voice to women who experienced domestic abuse. For her, as for other members of the group, giving voice to women is "*at the heart of the work*" (Aoife). Jane agreed and expressed her view:

... that centering of women's experience, even if it wasn't explicit it is implicit in all our work.

The acknowledgement and valuing of women survivors as knowledge creators was reiterated as a shared value throughout the inquiry. Group member's commitment to this value was identified by some as providing validity to our findings. However, as we acknowledged our achievement in shaping a proposed framework for education and learning for domestic violence workers, we were again reminded that it was women who experienced domestic abuse who were best positioned to validate the inquiry findings.

Tessa: I don't know if the process could have been any better or different, the only thing that is occurring to me now is, the conversation we had today, or was it yesterday, about bringing it to people. We could have had those people here. Like, we could have had a service user here. Because, who knows better than them.

Findings in Chapter 6 illustrate that group members wanted to see an approach to education and learning that was inclusive of and accountable to women. Reflecting on and making assessments about the validity of our findings re-emphasized the importance of this commitment. Issues of voice and being heard were also highlighted in group members' assessment of how the inquiry process that we co-created facilitated their participation.

An experience of practical knowing: The importance of collaborative, open and democratic learning spaces

The importance of providing workers with time and space to engage in dialogic processes in which they can engage in collaborative knowledge production and learning was emphasised in group members' reflections. Group members appreciated that in contrast to our everyday experience, we had time to engage in reflection and dialogue. The fact that this group had nine full days together to engage in such a process was acknowledged by all members as a key factor contributing to their positive experiences of their participation and to the achievements of the group. Other aspects of the group process that were assessed as important in contributing to the success of the inquiry were also identified in this final session.

Group members reflections illustrate that it was a group commitment to democratic relationships, an openness to difference and to collaboration that contributed to their positive experiences of participation in the inquiry. In her reflection, Jane recognised how the open and inquiring nature of the group provided her with space and time to articulate her thoughts. This openness to questioning was also appreciated by Grainne who spoke of her excitement at having an opportunity to explore with others critical issues in her work.

Jane referred to the group contract agreed on the first day of the inquiry and the fact that in her view, people worked at being open and respectful of each other's views.

But I do think the ground rules were set quite early on, that was a part of it and I know people say, there were no fiery people, but we worked at, because I wouldn't say there are no fiery people in the group (laughter) but I do think we did commit to being open and, I can't remember the word or the phrase, but not jumping down each other's throats and I think that was really part of it. And I think we kept that, and it was comfortable to do that rather than be defensive all the time.

In her reflection on the process, Jane referred to the warmth and good humour that characterised relationships in the group and the mutual respect and democratic process that enabled group members to speak openly and honestly about our experiences and our perspectives. The nature of relationships in which group members experienced mutual respect and acceptance of difference was identified by other group members as a key factor in creating an atmosphere of trust and openness and in enabling them to speak.

Rebecca: Yeah, it's been a safe space and we've drilled down a lot and we're growing and just, I suppose, listening and being listened to and not having somebody judging you on what you're saying,

Charley: ... there was a sense of mutual respect with everybody. There was none of this, hidden agendas or competing or oh, I can't say that because they're going to nick your idea. All of that was out the window which is what normally happens at a meeting. It's all about keeping your own corner and there was none of that. Yeah, people were just automatically given the space to speak and it was just such a natural process.

Charley spoke about the lack of hidden agendas or competitiveness within the group. The openness that group members appreciated was also an openness in terms of agenda setting, something that was done collaboratively as the group progressed through the inquiry. Jane contrasted her experience of agenda setting in the group with experiences in other settings where the agenda is often predetermined by others.

It was always a kind of agenda, so it wasn't open to see where it went, which is I think an interesting way of working because, you know, if you have an agenda you have an end in mind, you know? And I know we kind of did but one of the things I really liked was you kept saying, we'll go where we go, and we'll end up where we'll end up.

Rachel shared Charley's appreciation for the collaborative nature of the group process

I think, fundamentally I think what's enabled me to enjoy the process is we all came in here exactly as we are. We didn't talk about our roles or, you know, we did a bit at the beginning just to give each other a sense of our backgrounds, but we did not assume a role, we kind of, we just came as we are, yeah exactly. With our knowledge and our experience and hoped to be able to fit into that process rather than be competitive with our knowledge or our wisdom or our experience.

The commitment to non-hierarchical relationships resonated with Aoife's commitment to feminism.

I just think the how for me is very much around, and I just love the term, I'd never come across it before, the whole collaborative inquiry. It really felt, and it felt, it sits well with feminism. It sits well with that nonhierarchical way of looking at things, just exploring and it's what women do well actually, you know. So that was the how for me, was how collaborative it felt.

As we identified how the process had facilitated our participation in the inquiry, the group experienced a collective "*ah ha*" moment (Bray et al, 2000). We realised that what we envisioned for domestic violence workers in terms of the kind and quality of learning they would have access to in the future was what we had experienced in this collaborative inquiry.

Jane talked about her hope that other domestic violence workers could have access to the kind of learning experience that we had created together. She felt that as a group, we needed to find ways to bring our knowledge about the value of this kind of collaborative, open and democratic learning process out to our colleagues in the domestic violence sector.

... one thing I'd take from it is we do need to be doing more of this in the services. Rather than ask everybody to come into this we need to find a way to bring this out

Charley: I agree with what Jane said, it showed how much there is a need for this style of communication is needed in the sector... If we had that space for everyone it's just like, phew, get rid of the crap we must put up with every day. Just to have a safe space where everyone is on the same level.

Claire's final statement in our closing round encapsulated something quintessential about what we had as a group come to understand through our participation in this inquiry.

... there's something very and it just came to me there as we were doing the guided meditation there, but there's something very poignant in talking about our needs and the work we do and trying to, you know, using the word empower, empower women and how to build their capacity. But this has allowed us to do that for ourselves. It's empowering for us, we're building our capacity, we're advocating for ourselves and we're making ourselves, if you think about the rights based, trying to get rights, all those things we talk about, that's how you work with women. That's what we're doing for ourselves... It's totally reflective of how we want to work with women, for ourselves here.

What Claire expressed in her final statement reflects the change that had occurred over the 13 months of the inquiry. This research project started off as an initiative of one ex domestic violence worker and PHD student, however, the knowledge we co-generated came to be collectively owned by the 10 women who participated in the inquiry. The value for group members lay not merely in recognising ourselves as knowledge creators, but in recognising the usefulness of the knowledge we had coproduced in effecting positive change in practice and in social change efforts. The group came to refer to "we" rather than an "I" when talking about the future and their role in contributing to change. Much of the final two sessions were spent

discussing how we would action our findings and a timeframe for action was agreed. While the experience of this collaborative learning experience was ultimately one of empowerment, it was in the collective rather than in the individual that group members perceived that power to effect change would reside.

Conclusion

The core themes articulated by group members during this final session speak to the heart of this thesis, that is the importance of creating collective, open and emancipatory learning spaces on an ongoing basis for those involved in confronting abusive men's use of violence, abuse and control to dominate their female partners. Group members came to know through experience the importance of this approach to education and learning. Claire's insight that how we work with women is how we want to provide learning for workers brought the research in a sense, full circle, back to the launching stage of the inquiry when group members expressed the hope that a future education and learning framework would help to restore the grassroots principles and practices that characterised the early domestic violence movement. As women, who struggle alongside those women who seek our support to have our voices heard and our work and our knowledge valued, we came to know in a practical sense why the principles and practice of solidarity and collectivity must be core to a future learning and education framework.

Beliefs about the fragmentation of the sector began to shift as group members realised that given the space and time to engage in dialogue, it was possible to shape a shared understanding about domestic violence, domestic violence work, and many of the critical issues and challenges that workers and organisations encounter. This realisation in turn led to a change in how the majority of group members felt about their participation as workers within the domestic violence sector. Feelings of isolation and disconnection were replaced with feelings of connection and belonging. These shifts in perception and in feeling in turn led to group members expressing a renewed sense of possibility and hope that collective action could affect social change and the kind of changes needed within the sector. Even though a number of group members acknowledged that they worked in a supportive team environment,

connecting to colleagues outside of their organisations emerged as a significant factor in this renewal of hope. These findings suggest that membership of a community of practice, or a movement for social change, that is bigger than the individual organisation, is essential in sustaining the individual worker as they confront the darkness that is at the heart of domestic abuse. In this way we remain engaged, hopeful and effective as advocates and social change agents.

Reflexive considerations

Group members' reflections indicate that from a group standpoint, this inquiry was successful as a collaborative knowledge building endeavour in which participants experienced democratic and mutually beneficial relationships. The process employed and the relationships that developed in the group not only aided our knowledge building but resulted in group members experiencing positive outcomes that we had not initially identified as research objectives. Collectively, we celebrated our achievements in producing a draft framework for education and learning for domestic violence workers. We also recognised and appreciated our participation in this research as an experience of praxis, in which we each became the "changer and the changed" (Williamson, 1991, cited in Reid, 2014), coming to know in a practical sense, the importance of emancipatory approaches to education and learning. As a co- subject and co-inquirer in the group, I shared in this sense of achievement and celebration and I expressed then, and still feel a deep appreciation for, what we had co-created and experienced. I can do this while also holding a space in which I continue to be critically reflective about the process and outcomes of the inquiry and in which I continue to ask myself, was this inquiry *good enough*?

I am not sure that I am ever going to be able to answer that question. I will never be able to, nor do I want to, suppress my subjective experience of the inquiry as an experience of praxis that continues to motivate and empower the inquiry group to act as a collective for the establishment of a learning framework for domestic violence work. While acknowledging the imperfect and "*maculate*" (Heron, 1996) nature of this research, I also contend that our inquiry was characterised by significant dimensions of good enough collaborative inquiry as described by Reason

(1988) and Heron (1996). Firstly, that the knowing that we centred and valued was not fragmented nor theoretical knowing but that which was generated from the wholeness of our experience, feeling and knowledge. Secondly, that group members engaged as autonomous participants and that this increased the generation of knowledge that was more likely to respond to our shared concerns rather than research arising from questions identified outside of the group (Bray et al, 2000). Thirdly, that we made serious attempts to remain critically subjective and reflexive throughout the inquiry. Lastly, our sight was always trained on how we could use the knowledge that we generated to effect change that would benefit women and children for whom we work and the wider domestic violence sector.⁴⁴ I do not expect the reader to take my word as to the quality of our findings, although I have attempted to make visible the process by which we came to these conclusions. The following quote from Peter Reason (1988) expresses how I hope the reader will assess the usefulness of our inquiry.

There are no procedures that will guarantee valid knowing, accuracy, or truth. There are simply human beings in a certain place and time, working away more or less honestly, more or less systematically, more or less collaboratively, more or less self-awarely, to seize the opportunities of their lives, solve the problems which beset them, and to understand the things that intrigue them. It is on the basis of this that they should be judged. (pg. 231)

Reason advises that we *“hold the ideas of cooperative inquiry firmly but lightly* and he describes collaborative inquiry as *“a continual invention of response to the possibilities offered by the situation”* (1998, 231). The findings chapters illustrate both the process and the outcomes of our collaborative inquiry, in which I argue, this group of ten domestic violence workers seized the opportunity offered by participation to generate really useful knowledge as a contribution towards the ongoing struggle for women’s empowerment and social change.

⁴⁴ It is outside the scope of this PhD thesis to report on the ongoing action research project that continued after the nine day collaborative inquiry ended. The sense of shared ownership about our co-produced knowledge and the sense of empowerment and hope generated as a result of participation in this research continue to motivate this group of domestic violence workers to act collectively for change within the domestic violence sector. Seven of the original group of ten are currently collaborating with colleagues in the sector in actioning the findings of this research and in extending this inquiry though driving and leading an action research project.

Chapter 11: Discussion

Introduction

In this chapter I discuss the findings of this research with reference to literature on feminist anti-domestic violence work, feminist pedagogy, social movement learning and learning within a community of practice. I draw out the implications for the development of a pedagogic approach that I argue responds to the learning and education needs of anti-domestic violence workers as practitioners. I argue that this group of workers are in a pivotal position to contribute to the wider feminist project of movement building towards the eradication of all forms of gender based violence and gender oppression in Ireland.

I begin the chapter with a discussion about domestic violence work as social change work. Recognising the differences in how domestic violence workers position themselves in relation to a feminist social change paradigm, I discuss how locating workers as part of a wider social change movement strengthens their work as practitioners and social change actors. I further discuss the specific role of workers in contributing to the social change goals of the feminist anti-domestic violence movement in Ireland and the implications of so positioning workers in relation to the provision of education and learning.

In the second part of this chapter, I consider the learning and education needs of frontline domestic violence workers. Acknowledging that feminist anti domestic violence work is necessarily connected to a wider social change movement, I nevertheless focus on the organisational context as the primary locus for practice and learning for workers (Wenger, 1998). Drawing on theories of situated learning in communities of practice, I consider how the informal learning that happens within communities of practice can be optimised to serve the logic of feminist practice (Wenger 1996). I continue this section with a discussion on the role of education as a structuring support to learning in practice.

Building on the work of the collaborative inquiry group and drawing from the theoretical framework constructed for this thesis, I propose a feminist pedagogy for domestic violence work. I outline three interconnected principles that I argue must

underpin future approaches to education and learning for domestic violence work. The chapter continues with a focus on how a feminist pedagogical approach responds to workers' learning needs. I argue for a model in which learning through participation in a feminist community of practice, within the wider anti-domestic violence movements and through participation in feminist education is coordinated and supported through an ongoing and active interplay between all three levels (Wenger, 1998). I describe an architecture that I propose will support such a model of learning at movement and organisational level.

Finally, I return to the methodology employed in this research to foreground aspects of collaborative inquiry that I assess as particularly suitable when considering how learning that serves the logic of feminist domestic violence work can be provided (Heron, 1998; Reason, 1998). Recognising the challenges that pressured and under-resourced domestic violence organisations would face if they were to embrace the vision of change as articulated in this thesis, I propose that collaborative inquiry provides the possibility for organisations and workers to work from where they are at, whilst moving ever towards a vision of transformative feminist practice and social change.

Domestic violence work as social change work

Staking a claim: Domestic violence work is social change work

The documented histories of anti-domestic violence movements illustrate the central role that women's anti-violence movements have played in the changes that have transformed the institutional landscape in relation to domestic abuse (Connolly, 2002; Connolly and O'Toole, 2005; Dobash and Dobash, 1992; Galligan, 1998; Nash, 2002; Schechter, 1988; Stark, 2007). Alongside a recognition of these achievements, it is essential to acknowledge that the ultimate purpose of these movements, that of reducing and eventually eradicating violence against women, remains as a far off goal. Consequently, anti-domestic violence movements must continue to be essential drivers of change.

A core assumption underpinning this research is that anti-domestic violence work, at every level with which one engages, is primarily concerned with progressing a transformative vision for social change centered on a belief that an alternative world is possible. Failing to articulate such a vision results in short term, individualised responses to domestic violence, that not only do not serve individual women's best interests but imply the inevitability of male violence against women (Dobash and Dobash, 1992). The social change agenda of anti-violence movements has been predominated by a focus on institutional change (Connolly, 2002; Connolly and O'Toole, 2005; Dobash and Dobash, 1992, Galligan, 1998; Htun and Weldon, 2012; Schechter, 1982; Stark, 2007). It is important to acknowledge and address the limitations of reform orientated approaches to social change and to redress the resultant harms to some women and communities because of the unintended consequences of such reforms (Crenshaw, 1991; Hanman James, 2018; Incite! Critical resistance, 2006; Mc Phial et al, 2007; Ritchie, 2000, 2006; Sokoloff and Dupont, 2006, Stanley and Humphreys, 2014; Stark, 2007; Sudbury, 2006; Wilson, 2013). I argue that alongside this acknowledgement and need for accountability, it is necessary to continue to work for institutional reform. This work needs to be carried out from a radical place, in which we understand that such changes are not the ultimate goal of women's anti-violence movements. They are merely objectives reached on the journey towards the longer term goal of a transformation of the structural and cultural underpinnings of male violence against women (Mc Mahon and Pence, 2003; Shepard and Pence, 1999). As witnesses to the egregious harms that women and their children suffer at the hands of violent, abusive and controlling men, and as workers and organisations who assert that we have a central and critical role in addressing violence against women in our communities, I argue that we have an ethical responsibility to include on our agenda actions towards the eradication of all forms of violence against women.

Domestic violence workers, on a daily basis, bear witness and respond to women who are abused and violated, and they have accumulated a breadth and depth of knowledge about this complex and multi-faceted social problem. This study has highlighted that it is imperative to find a way in which workers can meaningfully

contribute to the wider social change work of the movement in Ireland through utilising their knowledge and experience. My concern as a practitioner researcher was to find out more about what approaches to education and learning could respond to this need. Before considering this question however, it is necessary to examine in more detail the identification of frontline workers with a feminist social change paradigm for their work.

Identifying with a social change movement: Ambiguity and contradictions

Reflecting studies with domestic violence workers in other countries, findings in this research illustrate that a feminist social change paradigm makes a significant difference to how workers respond to women on an individual basis (Allen et al, 2013; Hughes, 2017; Kelly and Humphreys, 2001; Kelly et al, 2014; Kulkarni et al, 2012; Nicholls, 2013; Zweig and Burt, 2007, Safe Ireland, 2015a; Sullivan and Bybee 1999). Participants identification with a feminist social change paradigm prevents them from focusing solely on what a woman can do to change her situation. It directs their focus towards seeking community accountability for how the state and its institutions protect women and afford them access to their rights (Shepard and Pence, 1999; Sullivan and Goodman, 2019). Ultimately, as feminist practitioners they understood that the solutions to domestic abuse lie in social change and not in changing the individual (Lehrner and Allen, 2008).

While participants in this study saw domestic violence work as social change work, their identification with a social change role was disrupted and complicated by their absorption in service delivery work and by pressures coming from the external environment. Group members held ambiguous and in some cases contradictory views on whether we should collectively identify as being part of a social change movement. Most group members expressed fear and a reluctance to publicly identify as a social change movement. This included those who valued the achievements of the women's anti-violence movement and who were actively involved in wider systems' advocacy and other forms of social change work. The vehemence of the backlash against feminism and the anti-domestic violence movement in particular, while perhaps not characterised by the kind of offensive language and rhetoric

employed by backlash leaders during the 1990s (O'Connor, 2008), was clearly still a factor in why some group members were reluctant to identify as feminist anti-domestic violence workers and as belonging to a feminist movement. Further, the findings suggest that an identification with a social justice paradigm for domestic violence work may not be shared at a sectoral level, calling into question whether the constellation of women's organisations responding to domestic abuse is in fact a social change movement (Wainwright, 2013). Recognising that a feminist social change paradigm for domestic violence work may be contested within the wider network of organisations responding to this issue in Ireland, I continue to assert that frontline organisations and workers play a pivotal role in the ongoing struggle against the prevalence of male violence against women in our society.

Before considering a pedagogy for domestic violence workers as social change actors and members of a wider social change movement, I focus on two issues that require further examination. Firstly, if workers are to be given learning opportunities to develop their capacity as social change actors and this in turn leads to an increasing identification with a social change movement, how can they be positioned as actors in relation to a movement for transformational change and secondly, what exactly is the role of frontline workers in contributing to social change?

Repositioning anti-domestic violence workers as actors for transformative social change

Ending violence against women requires profound changes at all levels of society in political, social, economic and cultural realms. As such, the long term social change goal of anti-domestic violence movements are expansive, open and visionary in imagining an alternative to the existing social order (Dobash and Dobash, 1992, Schechter, 1982, Stark, 2007). To imagine that a movement that is comprised of anti-domestic violence organisations could alone take on this task is to set this movement up for failure from the very beginning. I agree with those feminist thinkers who argue that anti-domestic violence organisations must sustain this emancipatory vision in their work (Bunch, 1992; Mc Kinnon, 1993; Ritchie, 2006; Stark, 2007). At the same time, they must assert that it is possible to maintain this radical vision and

simultaneously to work for necessary political and institutional reforms that bring more immediate benefits to women and children experiencing domestic abuse (Kelly, 1999; Shepard and Pence, 1999).

Findings in this research illustrate the critical nature of domestic violence work and the reasons why a focus on systems' change predominates whatever time workers have to give to social change work. Group members were aware that institutional change was not going to radically alter misogynistic meaning frameworks or practices within the larger context. However, they did not see how they could contribute to tackling those constructs as part of their work. I suggest that the 'overwhelm' that domestic violence workers sometimes feel when they consider the social change task ahead of them can be alleviated when they understand that they are focusing on one part of a wider and radical social change agenda. This positions domestic violence workers as part of a wider network of organisations and individuals seeking change in other arenas. I argue that understanding this helps give definition to the social change role of frontline domestic violence workers, which is often obscured by individualised and therapeutic narratives as descriptive of anti-domestic abuse work (Dewey and St Germain, 2014; Hammonds, 2004; Kendrick, 2002; Lehrner and Allen, 2008, 2009, Nicholls, 2013). In addition, while I agree that domestic violence movements may not have realised their transformative potential, scholars and practitioners critiquing the movement have not written to any great degree about the role of workers nor the reality of frontline work. It is these workers after all, who are the active agents in those organisations who constitute a central position in anti-domestic violence movements. If domestic violence organisations are to be drivers of change, what is the role of frontline workers as social change actors? Given that almost the entirety of a worker's day is occupied by working at an individual level with women who experience intimate partner violence, how does the worker contribute to social change in this role?

Inquiry group members recognised systems' change as a primary goal of frontline work. Some participants also argued that the incremental changes that individual women made, when they resisted the power and control of their partners,

accumulated to have a wider impact on society. These workers believed that they continually contributed to social change by supporting women's resistance. This view reflects a perspective on social change as articulated by Mann (1997).

Women are beginning to demand a redistribution of the dimensions of agency in everyday situations and are attempting to renegotiate the terms of agency within many concrete social relationships, be that private sexual relationships or public workplace relationships" (Mann, 1997, 225 quoted in Nash, 2002).

Viewing the way in which individual women act and exercise agency as they resist male privilege and dominance in personal life can be understood as a form of "*micropolitics*" (Nash, 2002, 314) in an ongoing social revolution for women's emancipation from all forms of gender oppression. However, while valuing the role of domestic violence workers in contributing to social change at this level, I agree with Nash who questions whether such activities can add up to a social change movement (Nash, 2002). The kind of collective action needed to build a force for change will not be created nor sustained if domestic violence workers focus only on responding to women at an individual level. Nor will transformative change be achieved by piecemeal reforms that are dependent on relationships established at local level. At the same time, I argue that providing "*space for action*" (Kelly et al, 2014), for those women entrapped by the coercive control of their abusers, and through institutional reform at community level, contributes to creating the conditions in which, as Pence and Shepard state, women can go about their real business; "*the work of transforming the culture that violates every part of their being and spirit*" (1990, 296)

In this statement can be seen a way to position anti-domestic violence workers as critical actors in wider social change movements. Re-framing frontline domestic violence work as social change work, while at the same time ensuring that a feminist vision of transformative change continues to drive and inform the activities of organisations and workers, means that we do not stop at institutional change. Rather we see this as a step towards creating that space for action at community levels, in which women and men can work together to "*create a more sane society*" (Pence

and Shepard, 1990, 296). This reframing and repositioning of anti-domestic violence workers within a wider and diverse constellation of actors for social change will, I have argued, bring greater definition to the social change role of those employed in frontline services. Further, I argue that as frontline workers meet and build trusting relationships with women on an ongoing basis, they play a pivotal role in linking women to collective spaces in which women can experience further healing and empowerment. Therefore, the contribution of domestic violence workers to wider social change activity could be strengthened when we widen our lens to see this work as contributing to movement building through nurturing collectivity.

Contributing to movement building: A role for domestic violence workers

Support groups are seen as part of the framework of services provided by women's organisations (Safe Ireland, 2015), however, not all of the organisations that collaborative inquiry members worked for provided such programmes. Where these programmes are being provided, group members spoke about them primarily as spaces in which women could accelerate their healing and recovery from domestic abuse. This was aided by sharing experiences and experiencing mutual support from other women who had been subjected to coercive control. Some group members expressed the hope that participation in these groups would lead to women themselves becoming involved in the social change efforts of their organisations. An example of this is when Aoife described how feminist group work in her organisation resulted in survivors coming to identify as people who could and who would act collectively to challenge the status quo as it pertained to current policies affecting children and women experiencing domestic abuse. However, the literature suggests that in the main, these groups are primarily focused on increasing women's self-esteem, empowerment and self-determination and there is little to suggest that they are intentionally set up as spaces in which women are empowered to act collectively for social change (Sullivan, 2012).

I suggest that frontline anti-domestic violence work could be expanded to include an intention to contribute towards movement building by providing spaces and processes in which women can come to identify as actors for social change and that

it is within such groups that this work can be progressed.⁴⁵ The goal is not to supply activists for individual organisations, although this may be an outcome, but to enable women to claim an identity in which they see themselves as “*critical and creative citizens*” (Murray, 2013, 25) and as capable of participating with others in creating alternative futures for themselves, their children and their communities (Foley, 1999; Murray, 2013; Tisdell, 1998). In effect, I am arguing for feminist group work to be included as a core component of frontline anti-domestic violence work.

Elevating feminist group work as an essential component of frontline practice

In arguing for the elevation of feminist group work as a core role for frontline domestic abuse services, I recognise that resistance to such a proposal may come from those who feel that it is not the job of frontline organisations to nurture women’s capacity as social change actors. My proposal is supported by feminist scholars and practitioners who argue that healing and recovery from trauma and the facilitation of women’s empowerment is accelerated when women realize their power to act with others for social change (Coker, 2016; Elliot et al, 2005; Herman, 1992; Hollander, 2005; Kulkarni, 2019; Meier, 2016; Wilson et al, 2015). Therefore, providing opportunities for women to make connections with others, to build community and to participate in collective action for social change can be seen as a legitimate role for frontline workers. As Aoife’s statement illustrates, this kind of work is already happening within the sector, suggesting that the kind of processes that mobilized the collective power of women in the early days of the anti-violence movement still have much to offer in the contemporary movement. In fact, it was in just such groups in the 1980s, established by Duluth Domestic Violence Project, that the Power and Control wheel, widely used as an awareness raising tool by frontline workers to this day, was created (Pence and Paymar, 1987 referenced in Sharp-Jeffs et al, 2018). The longevity and reach of its use are a testament to the power that is

⁴⁵ I distinguish between support groups and therapeutic groups. The latter are run by therapists and are intended to provide space for deep healing from trauma in the company of others who have experienced similar traumas (Herman, 1992). Support groups in domestic violence services are often run by the same workers that provide one to one support and while there can be therapeutic outcomes, the intention is to continue empowerment work and to support women to build connection with others (Sullivan, 2012). Both kinds of group are provided in Ireland, sometimes in the same organisation. However, they are not core funded and some organisations are unable to provide this form of empowerment support to women.

realised when women are facilitated to value experience and feelings as knowledge and to recognize the socially constructed nature of their oppression (Lorde, 1984; Connolly, 2018).

The descriptions by group members of their work indicate that feminist consciousness raising is already part of what workers do in practice. Rachel spoke of how using the Power and Control wheel as a tool enabled women to recognise their experience in the stories of other women. She witnessed these experiences as “*awakening moments*” when women realised that they were not to blame for the abuse. Shifting women’s perspective from self-blame to recognizing the abuser as responsible for their abuse and violence was named by all group members as key to their work with women. In essence, what domestic violence workers are engaged in is a form of feminist consciousness raising, however, it is not called that and is instead termed as psychoeducation, a term that comes from the field of mental health practice (National Centre for Biotechnology Information, 2021; ScienceDirect.com, 2021). As a term, psychoeducation makes invisible the abuser and de-politicises practice, thus obscuring the socio-political roots of male violence against women. I argue that framing anti-domestic violence work as social change work enables workers to understand that what they are engaged in *is* feminist consciousness raising.

Framing anti-domestic violence work in this way strengthens feminist practice by bringing a social political analysis into individual and group work (Connolly, 1997, Wilkin and Hillock, 2014). This requires that workers themselves develop their critical thinking skills and their knowledge of the socially constructed nature of gender-based violence. In addition, they need to be skilled in facilitating women to, as Jane stated it, “*externalize the causes*” of domestic abuse by making links from their experience to the social conditions underpinning abusive men’s sense of entitlement to dominate their partners. Consciousness raising in the context of domestic violence work includes supporting women to develop an awareness of how male, white, class and other forms of privilege also underpin society’s failure to afford women with access to their full rights. With this knowledge and awareness, women are better

able to resist these now visible structures when they manifest in relationships within the private and public sphere (Wilkin and Hillock, 2014).

Creating space and time for movement learning

If we see frontline anti-domestic violence workers as social change actors and as belonging to a social change movement, then it is essential to create spaces and time for movement learning. The experience of this group of workers was that access to such learning spaces has incrementally reduced to a point where, as Aoife stated: *“where did that discussion happen... it’s like that’s not happening now and we don’t know what each other is doing”*. Group members spoke of having *“no time to think”* (Rachel) and shared experiences of isolation in their work and feeling disconnected from colleagues in other organisations. Our experiences reflect that of workers and movements in other countries where the logic of neo-liberalism has disrupted, and in some cases replaced, feminist processes (English and Irving, 2015, Vachelli et al, 2016). The kind of time and space that used to be available for thinking together has been taken up with responding to increasing demands for services, all within the context of having to demonstrate value for money in an era of austerity in which, in real terms, funding to frontline organisations is ever decreasing (Dewey and St. Germain, 2014; Mc Donald, 2005; Ishkanian, 2017; Murphy et al, 2020; Safe Ireland, 2014; Vachelli et al, 2016). Intersecting the injuries of neo-liberalism with patriarchal assumptions that women’s organisations will fill the gap in social service provision because we are essentially caring and it’s our job *anyway* to provide such care (English and Irving, 2015; Lynch and Lyons, 2006), it is possible to identify the conditions that have almost eradicated spaces in which frontline workers can participate in collaborative learning.

It may be argued that as hybrid organisations, who are responsible for critical interventions in community efforts to address the entrapment of women by abusive men, that anti-domestic violence organisations cannot afford the luxury of taking time to think about how they do their work. The findings of this research illustrate that not taking time for critical reflection and collaborative learning contributes to the erosion of feminist social change work and feminist practice, which, in turn,

undermines efforts that can benefit survivors of men's violence and all women, whose lives are constrained by the threat of gender based violence (Stanko, 1987). I agree with Zibechi (2012) who states that to create space and time for movement learning in itself would be an act of resistance to patriarchal capitalism.

Providing spaces for reflexive learning with others involved in wider struggles against gender based violence and other forms of oppression will provide opportunities for domestic violence workers to address some of the dilemmas that continue to trouble women's anti-violence movements. I focus on three critical issues that have come to the fore in this research and that I argue can be addressed through participation in wider movement learning spaces. These are firstly, how our capacity as social change actors has been eroded by a lack of opportunity to act with others in movement for social change; secondly, how the manifestation of privilege and oppression within our movement leads to a gap between rhetoric and reality; and finally, the marginalisation of survivors within our movement.

Learning to resist

The findings of this research reflect the writing of scholars and activists in other countries who identify the forces that act to disrupt and complicate a social change identity for frontline domestic violence workers (Hammons, 2004; Nicholls, 2014; Kendrick, 2002; Lehrner and Allen, 2008, 2009; Stark, 2007). Spaces created for learning within social movements respond to this dilemma by providing spaces in which participants can bring to their consciousness what their work is about and to identify where erosions of movement achievements and territories are taking place (English and Peters, 2012; Zibechi, 2012). Thinking together about our struggles to protect feminist practice and claim our identity as social change actors, provides an opportunity for anti-domestic violence workers *"to unmask the systems that keep us silent"* and to generate new knowledge that contributes to our collective work to create *"alternatives for a better world"* (Figlan et al, 2009, 39, quoted in Harley, 2012). The more that we can learn about how our meaning frameworks and practices are shaped by dominant ideologies, the more we can learn about how to resist and

to sustain resistance to the internalisation of those adaptive preferences that prevent us from creating these alternatives (Foley, 1999; Steinklammer, 2012).

Participation in formal and non-formal feminist learning environments can be spaces in which the history of feminist anti-domestic violence work as an emancipatory social change movement is re-valourised and where identity as committed, active and engaged social change actors can be affirmed. In these spaces, we can identify where we continue to resist the de-politicisation of our work and identify the need and opportunities for collective action. By bringing a greater consciousness to the ways in which we do and can resist, we can continue to experience shifts in identity and to learn *how* to resist by replacing old forms of action with newer self-affirming actions (Foley, 1999, Steinklammer, 2012; Zibechi, 2012).

Facing up to the contradictions between rhetoric and practice

Considering the findings of this research, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the anti-domestic violence movement in Ireland has failed to respond to the call from Black feminist activists to live up to our feminist principles and to openly acknowledge “*the contradictions between our rhetoric and practice*” (Richie, 2000, 55). It is critical that the learning spaces we create are those in which we confront this failure and ensure that women who have been traditionally excluded from the mainstream of the movement are centered as knowledge producers, activists and leaders. Our research illustrated the inadequacy of relying only on gender as an explanatory concept for domestic abuse. Movement learning spaces can complement the learning done in worker education in forging the kind of collaborative learning we need, led by those women who have suffered from these exclusions.

For our learning to be transformative, we can no longer shy away from the disorientating dilemmas that will arise when the conflict between what we say we believe and what we actually do is exposed (English and Irving, 2015; hooks, 1994; Kishimoto and Mwangi, 2009). Rather than seeking a synthesis of difference by increasing the diversity of workers in anti-domestic violence organisations, I suggest

that we understand our participation in these learning spaces as a participation in what Zibechi calls “rainbow-thinking” (2012, 58) where:

... new movements strive to make intercultural learning an art of understanding and translation, allowing us to fertilize our thoughts with different agendas, arising from different cosmovisions that are not intended to be all embracing, but rather local experiences that are just as important as those considered “central” (2012, 57).

Locating ourselves as participants in a diffuse, wide ranging and diverse constellation of groups and movements provides an opportunity for “*talking between worlds*” (Cox, 2014, 954) where we do not seek a unitary response to social problems. Rather we learn from each other as we find ways in which we can build solidarity across difference and contribute to shared longer-term social change goals. In these spaces we may have to come to accept that some women of colour, Traveller women, LGBTQI+ women and others may not want to become part of our mainstream movement and instead may wish to act against gender-based violence through autonomous organising (Imkaan, 2016, 2017; Larasi, 2016). Participation in these wider movement learning spaces can also facilitate anti-domestic violence workers and organisations to interrogate long-held assumptions about what works in facilitating women’s emancipation from gender-based violence by learning from those women who have not benefitted from the strategies and achievements of our movement. In these learning spaces, we can expand our vision and horizons to include anti-racist and anti-capitalist work, both of which are central to the feminist project (Manicom, 1992; Ritchie, 2000; 2006). We can also confront the consequences of processes of professionalisation that have pushed women survivors of male violence to the margins of our movement.

Restoring the movement’s grassroots base

Movement learning spaces provide the opportunity to redress the marginalisation of women survivors of gender-based violence as leaders and activists (Hanman-James, 2018). As well as provide spaces where as workers, we can share experiences and learn more about our work, I argue that we need spaces where we learn as women and as activists alongside women who share in our struggles but do not work in our

organisations. I follow transformative learning principles that position women who have suffered most from the violations of male violence at the head and the heart of movement knowledge making, decision making and action (Freire, 1972, Harley, 2012). Positioning ourselves as women whose lives are constrained by the prevalence of gender-based violence and sharing learning spaces and political territory with survivors, means that we have to be committed to sharing power and privilege as specialists or experts (Stark, 2007; Zibechi, 2012). Whilst recognising how this might be challenging for frontline workers who struggle with the devaluing of their knowledge in the external environment, I nevertheless assert that there is ample evidence to illustrate the negative consequences for women when we stray from the principles of solidarity and power sharing (Hanman-James, 2018; Mc Mahon and Pence, 2003; Mehroratra et al, 2016).

O'Connor (2008) has critiqued the specialisation of women's organisations responding to gender-based violence as leading to fragmentation and a loss of an analysis that understands the common goals and intentions of abusers and the overlapping nature of different forms of gender-based violence in women's lives. We can create the kind of learning spaces that we need for our work and ensure that these spaces are those in which activists, led by survivors of different forms of gender based violence, collaborate as they continue to build a wider and more diverse movement. Such a collaborative force is better positioned to expose the misogynistic narratives and unequal power relations and structures that underpin male privilege and entitlement.

Recognising the importance of framing domestic violence work as social change work, it is important to acknowledge the reality that workers in feminist anti-domestic violence organisations, whilst being concerned ultimately with effecting social change, are nevertheless not engaged on a daily basis in activism in the public sphere. Instead, they are primarily engaged in providing practical responses to women who are entrapped within relationships with controlling and violent men. As such, their daily work revolves around how they act to facilitate women's empowerment and to seek the redress of women rights for each and every woman

to whom they offer these interventions (Kelly et al, 2014; Kulkarni et al; 2012, O'Connor and Wilson, 2002; Safe Ireland, 2015a, 2015b).

In the following section, I discuss the findings in relation to participants' experience of practice and learning and I draw out the implications when considering what approach to learning would be compatible with the purpose and role of the domestic violence worker.

Practice and learning

Learning in our communities of practice

The experience of participants in this study is that the kind of serious attention that needs to be paid to education and learning for workers is absent. Nevertheless, they strive to sustain empowering feminist practice, in the context of many impediments and barriers, without the supportive or structuring architecture of an education and learning framework. Throughout our inquiry we identified numerous aspects of our practice that could be strengthened through participation in education and improved structures for learning in practice. At the same time as acknowledging some of the knowledge deficits that troubled us, we also came to recognise the depth and breadth of knowledge that we individually and collectively held about the subject of domestic violence and effective anti-domestic violence practice. One of the surprising outcomes of our inquiry was that contrary to initial expectations, there was a coherence in how we both understood and responded to women subjected to male domestic abuse. Given the absence of a shared learning and education framework and the lack of education learning opportunities specific to our roles, how did we learn and where did we learn what we needed to know to do our jobs effectively?

Participants accounts confirm that they learnt most about domestic violence work through experience, as they practiced and engaged with other workers, women who sought their support and others with whom they collaborated. While access to training and education was valued, and some group members particularly valued opportunities to link theory to practice, their experience of learning reflects a study

carried out by Lehrner and Allen. The authors concluded that it was in “*the intimate context*” (2009, 674) of relationships and daily interactions with colleagues, rather than the organisational context or larger movement context, that anti-domestic violence workers primarily constructed meaning. Thus, learning about what it is to become a competent practitioner in responding to women’s experience of intimate partner violence is most likely to happen within communities of practice that develop, either intentionally or without design, within organisations (Wenger, 1998).

Participants had accessed half day or full day CPD courses, only some of which were specific to their work. Whilst recognising the efforts of our organisations and second tier bodies, such as Safe Ireland, to provide relevant education and learning events, group members felt that there was an ad hoc approach to learning and that opportunities were sporadic, infrequent and not universally availed of within the wider sector. A primary concern for inquiry participants was that all workers had access to a comprehensive and continual education and learning programme that sustained the consistent attainment of standards. What emerges from participants’ accounts of their work is not a checklist of knowledge and skills that comprise a set of standards, but rather a description of effective practice as being able to negotiate the tensions and challenges inherent to the work. Learning how to be a competent domestic violence worker as described by group members requires an ability to make decisions on an ongoing basis as to how we utilise knowledge and which mode of action to call upon when working with women. It is very much about holding an awareness of ourselves in the moment and reflecting after an encounter on how emotional responses and cognitive frameworks impact on our capacity to usefully respond to women in their attempts to regain safety and autonomy. How we learnt very much reflects Wenger’s’ concept of learning in a community of practice where learning is:

...not just acquiring skills and information; it is becoming a certain person—a knower in a context where what it means to know is negotiated with respect to the regime of competence of community (2010,2).

What we learn enables us to contribute to the joint enterprise of a community. Communities of practice therefore, provide a resource for organisations that make possible this learning and provide the context in which “*we manifest that learning through participation*” (Wenger, 1998, 71). Some of the problematic features of communities of practice identified in the literature are illustrated in this research when we consider that not everything that is learnt in this context is positive. Instead it can lead to situations where people may “*pick up undesirable forms of practice, wrong values, or strategies that subvert or profoundly limit the collective and its participating individuals*” (Fenwick, 2001, 45). Group members’ experience of responses underpinned by gender-neutral and de-politicised meaning frameworks within the wider network of domestic violence organisations is one such example of where “*undesirable forms of practice*” may have developed over time. Our own grappling with concepts that are integrative of feminist knowledge that expands beyond a unitary focus on gender is another such example. The inclusion of a risk discourse in our inquiry needs to be interrogated with reference to scholarship which illustrates the dangers and harms to women when managing risk replaces survivor led, safety focused and holistic practice (Coy and Kelly, 2019; Hanman-James, 2018; Mehroratra et al, 2016; Wilson, 2015). The potential of the movement and its constituent organisations can be limited without access to learning and education that serves the logic of transformative feminist practice. Organisations therefore, have a critical role in supporting and resourcing *feminist* communities of practice if they want to ensure that the learning that is happening within them is compatible with the values and goals that drives their joint enterprise.

Nurturing feminist communities of practice

Wenger (1996, 1998) was not focusing on emancipatory practice when he described the ways in which organisations can provide supports that optimise organisational learning. Nonetheless, I agree with his argument that as the primary locus of learning is in practice, the role of organisations is to support thriving communities of practice within them. In the context of providing for meaningful learning trajectories that support the logic of feminist practice, this means nurturing feminist communities of practice. In the first instance, this requires that those charged with organising and

design at organisational level understand that *work is learning and learning is work*. Feminist communities of practice therefore are seen as assets, to be nurtured and supported through the provision of time, space, and resources so that workers can engage in critical thinking and consciously practice reflexivity, skills that are core to effective domestic violence work. By space and time, I am not only referring to the provision of such supports as in-house education, teamwork or peer support sessions. It is also about how organisations build into the working day, time for workers to think together and to learn together in informal spaces and to how a feminist lens is brought to all learning moments and spaces.

Accounts from inquiry group members illustrate that as advocates we often encountered a hostility towards feminism and a rejection of movement analysis from those with whom we seek to collaborate. Domestic violence workers must have access to spaces in which to make sense of these experiences in the context of a feminist analysis. Then we can in turn make connections between the gendered, raced, classed and other dimensions of experience and the structural and cultural underpinnings of domestic abuse. By bringing and thus developing a critique when we encounter the perpetuation of oppressive meaning frameworks and practices, workers are provided with an opportunity to resist internalised adaptive preferences to placate or appease when their challenge to power is resisted and denigrated (Steinklammer, 2012). I recognise however, that sustaining such a commitment to developing "*our agency against the might of structural inequality*" (Connolly, 2018, 34) is challenging in the context of high stakes, critical work in under-resourced organisations. Therefore, while learning at community of practice level is critical, there are both pragmatic, political and practice reasons why access for workers to feminist education and movement learning spaces is essential.

A pragmatic concern is that the resources to provide for an ongoing education programme are likely to be found at movement rather than organisational level. Politically, the atomisation caused by the pressure to secure the survival of organisations and the encroachment of neo-liberal priorities into domestic violence work can be better resisted at a wider collective level than at organisational level. As

domestic violence workers and their communities of practice, at whatever level they work, are essentially about contributing to transformative change, their learning has not only to focus on what they are learning as they practice together, but to be about open and outbound learning trajectories (De Palma, 2009). Participation in feminist education provides just such opportunities.

The need for feminist education

Group members valued experiential learning as the primary mode of learning in domestic violence work, but they also asserted that relying on learning through experience as the only teacher was inadequate in serving the goals of women's domestic violence organisations. They believed that there was a critical need for a learning architecture specific to domestic violence work that allowed for different modes of and access to lifelong learning. Group members wanted a framework for education and learning that would include access to formal and non-formal education both inside and outside of their organisations. Participants felt that such was the breadth and depth of knowledge needed to be a competent domestic violence worker, that engagement in education and learning was necessary throughout the workers' career. In this educational learning space, participants wanted to access and engage with knowledge and theory but also to have an opportunity to reflect on and make sense of their experiences. For group members, these educational spaces were not only about learning as an individual practitioner, but about having opportunities for collaborative learning in which they could engage in dialogue with colleagues, from both their own and other domestic violence organisations and thus build agreements about approaches to their work that benefitted women and children. Whilst access to collaborative learning spaces within the wider movement was seen by participants as important, they viewed the provision of education as being primarily about learning opportunities through which all domestic violence workers could ground themselves in what participants described as the foundations of feminist knowledge. Group members wanted to see educational spaces in which feminist educators claimed their authority whilst also facilitating collaborative, democratic and dialogic learning processes and relationships.

Building on the work and the experience of the inquiry group, I have constructed a theoretical pedagogical framework for feminist domestic violence work in Ireland. Feminist pedagogies, being of and for feminist movements, are logically synchronous with feminist anti-violence work. In the following sections I foreground dimensions of feminist pedagogy that respond to the findings of this research. I start with a focus on the purpose of a pedagogy for domestic violence work before discussing the principles underpinning a future education and learning framework.

The purpose of a feminist pedagogy for domestic violence work

Negotiating meaning and identity in feminist learning environments.

One of the primary motivating factors for group members' participation in this collaborative inquiry was a shared concern about what they described as a fragmented domestic violence sector in Ireland. This fragmentation was largely about different ways in which workers and organisations framed the issue of domestic abuse and how this informed how they responded to women experiencing intimate partner violence. Participants wanted to see a bespoke education and learning framework for domestic violence work so that a woman engaging with a domestic violence organisation would receive a coherent response that was underpinned by knowledge and evidence on what works best in supporting women on their journey to safety and autonomy. In addition, participants felt that such a programme was essential to avoid what Claire described as being "*an add on to something*". They identified that an education programme, formally recognised through attachment of a NFQ qualification, would put "*a boundary and a definition*" (Aoife) on a field of practice that they experienced was being increasingly colonised by a social care paradigm. Access to education and learning specific to the role of frontline domestic violence workers was thus seen as primarily about the formation of meaning and identity.

As previously discussed in this chapter, group members learnt primarily about being a domestic violence worker through participation in their communities of practice. This was an experience of learning that we valued whilst simultaneously recognising the weaknesses of relying only on learning through experience. Education and

learning opportunities in which workers engage with feminist meaning frameworks, where they acquired knowledge about the legislative and policy context pertaining to domestic abuse and in which they developed critical thinking skills was seen as an unmet need within the wider domestic violence sector. In addition, there were numerous aspects of practice that we identified would be strengthened through access to further education and time and space for collaborative learning. The need to engage specifically with intersectional feminist concepts and to reflexively consider the implications for our practice emerged as a key learning need.

The negotiation of meaning and identity are lifelong processes (Wenger, 1998). This is why education, rather than being frontloaded at the beginning of a workers' career, needs to be provided throughout that career. Providing access to education on an ongoing basis to domestic violence workers will also provide educational encounters in which workers can learn through the experience of feminist praxis, many of the skills needed for effective domestic violence work.

Developing skills through participation in feminist educational praxis

Participants shaped a shared standpoint that all workers in women's domestic violence organisations had to be provided with access to education in which they could engage with feminist meaning frameworks as those which underpin empowering practice. Participants identified how this knowledge informed women-led practice, in which workers affirmed women's strengths and knowledge, in which they sought to facilitate women's empowerment and where they understood that women alone could not change their situation. Following on Connolly (1997), and Schniedewind (1985), I argue that the skills needed for transformative feminist practice in anti-domestic violence work will also be developed as workers participate in feminist education. The skills needed for collaborative learning, in which both the teacher/tutor and learner share responsibility for group learning are those that are needed when workers engage with women who seek their support and interventions. This shared responsibility requires that traditional concepts of expert and novice are upended and positions each participant as both learner and teacher (Connolly, 1987; hooks, 1994; Manicom, 1992; Schniedewind, 1985; Shrewsbury,

1993). This is precisely the position that exemplifies empowering feminist practice, in which the worker seeks not only to share knowledge with women, but to affirm women as knowledge producers and to continuing their learning as they interact with women, listen to them and work alongside them as they struggle to reclaim safety and autonomy (Allen et al, 2013; Dobash and Dobash, 1992; Haaken and Yragui, 2003, Schechter, 1982, 1990; Stark, 2007; Sullivan and Bybee, 1999; Wood, 2015).

The experience of inquiry members illustrates that there was little space to think and reflect and this suggests that many frontline workers are unlikely to have opportunities to develop capacities for critical thinking and feminist reflexivity in practice. Learning opportunities must be provided in which explicit attention is given to the development of these skills. These skills can be consciously nurtured through creative approaches including journaling and role plays as illustrated in the work of feminist educators who teach about violence against women in higher education settings (Fuller and Russo, 2016; Meier, 2016). But feminist education provides more than merely a structuring support to learning in practice. It provides a space in which practice is created through the lived experience of developing skills through mutual engagement with colleagues with whom we share a joint endeavour as we seek to co-create the conditions for transformative learning for all (English and Irving, 2015; hooks, 1994; Iverson and James, 2017; Schniedewind, 1985). A commitment to feminist praxis in education spaces will strengthen workers' capacities to contribute to the ongoing formation of feminist communities of practice both within their organisations and wider movement spaces. Thus an active interplay between education and learning in practice can be nurtured and lessen the disconnect between what a worker learns through participation in these different settings.

I do not assume in making this assertion that there is a seamless process from classroom to communities of practice or the wider movement. Theories from within social movement learning emphasise that the kind of unlearning of deeply inscribed ways of thinking and being and the learning of alternative practices happens primarily as people practice in movement with others (Foley, 1999, Steinklammer, 2012; Zibechi, 2012). Each community of practice will be unique in how it makes

sense of the learning that workers manifest in their participation (Wenger, 1998). However, I suggest that participation in education at movement level, designed to coordinate and actively intersect with learning in organisations on an ongoing basis, will help bring a level of coherence in meaning frameworks and practice across the constellation of women's organisations that comprise the anti-domestic violence movement in Ireland.

Learning in nonhierarchical learning spaces where women's shared leadership is nurtured, provides anti-domestic violence workers an opportunity to learn skills in facilitating consciousness raising which they can then apply in their work at an individual and group level with women (Connolly, 1987; Wilson and Hillock, 2014). Consciousness raising as a learning process is continuous, open ended and has no point at which we can say we are finished learning. Therefore, we need to understand our learning not as a process that has a start and end point but as part of our work for as long as we participate in the movement. Concepts from within social movement learning and feminist pedagogy align with such lifelong learning approach. By working to the logic of movement time, rather than the logic imposed by managerialism and neo-liberalism, those creating learning opportunities and designing organisational structures can ensure that workers have access to meaningful learning trajectories and that learning and education serve the logic of transformative feminist practice.

Principles underpinning a feminist pedagogy for domestic violence work

In this section I foreground three key and interconnected principles that I argue must underpin a feminist pedagogy for domestic violence work. Firstly, education and learning cannot be seen as an entity or thing that is separate from our participation in the world of anti-violence work and activism but is of and for our work. Secondly that as our learning is necessarily about learning for transformation, that feminist praxis must be centred as the active mechanism through which we collectively create the transformed world within our movement and come to know in a practical sense that the alternatives we envision are real and realisable. Finally, that learning and knowledge production are inextricably linked.

Education and learning is of and for our work

Feminist scholars, practitioners and activists have generated a rich body of knowledge that articulates a clear vision for transformative change targeted at the eradication of gender based violence, and that describes in detail the components of transformative feminist practice (Dobash and Dobash, 1992; Edwards, 1987; Kelly, 1987; Lehrner and Allen, 2008; Mc Mahon and Pence, 2003; O'Connor, 2008; Schechter, 1988; Shepard and Pence, 1999; Shepard, 2005; Stanko, 1987; Stark 2007). The findings of this research illustrate how a lack of attention to how we learn, what we learn and where we learn seriously impedes progress towards the realisation of this vision. Reflecting on the numerous examples in the literature that illustrate that there are many committed practitioners, activists and organisations who are proactively and successfully working to embed transformative feminist values and practices into their work, a commitment to continual learning and self-transformation is evident (Ashbourne et al, 2016; Elliot et al, 2005; Kim, 2020; Kulkarni et al, 2019; Mc Phail, et al, 2017; Wilkin and Hillock, 2014; Wilson et al, 2015). Descriptions of these efforts reflect Zibechei's perspective on social movement learning as a process of emancipation that is:

....as always, as with any process, an incomplete process: an uncertain road, a journey that never reaches its destination. Why? Because emancipation is not an objective but a way of life (2012, 51).

A pedagogy for domestic violence work is centered on a perspective of education and learning not as a thing or place but as a force that is always present in our lives (Steinklammer, 2012). It is a force that we can more self-consciously shape in ways that serve the logic of transformative feminist practice and the wider social change movement. As a theory of situated learning, feminist pedagogy enables those in the anti-violence movement in Ireland to think about when, where and how workers can learn to become competent members of feminist communities of practice. Such a perspective means that efforts are made to bring a feminist lens and feminist praxis to all learning moments, whether emergent or consciously created.

Feminist praxis is central to emancipatory learning

If we understand learning and practice to be inextricably linked and interdependent, and that each is in the service of the other, then it follows that education and learning need to be afforded the same level of serious attention that we give to our practice. We understand this to be necessary not merely because it helps us to increase our competency to deliver on the goals of our organisations; it is not just about getting things done more effectively. The imperative to view education and learning as being part of the work of our organisations and movement is because we recognise that in striving for social change, we work to create the new worlds we envision as people who struggle together to make sense of our experience and to generate knowledge. Our attention is not merely directed towards content and curriculum therefore, but towards power, relationships and process. We are concerned with how participation in learning, whether in created spaces or informally in practice, provides for learners an experience of praxis, of knowing in a practical sense the difference it makes when emancipatory practice is the norm (Heron, 1996; Shrewsbury, 1993; Zibechi, 2012). Thus, we can carve out new territories for action in which we create “*the long-awaited new world*” (Zibechi, 2012, 24) within our movements, organisations and learning spaces.

Centering feminist praxis in future education and learning is also about connecting learning in principle to action for social change. Reflecting on the findings of this research, I argue that an absorption in ensuring the survival and continuity of critical services in the context of a number of adverse environmental factors has resulted in an absence of opportunities to learn in practice what it is to resist as part of a collective that acts for social change. Some of the group members initially believed that social change work should happen in spaces outside of their organisations. However, the opportunity provided through participation in this collaborative inquiry meant that a shared standpoint was shaped in which we came to recognise why and how social change work must be part of our work. Furthermore, we came to acknowledge that much of what we already do contributes to social change. We recognised however, that the potential for this work to effect lasting and impactful

change is much diminished because of sporadic, localised and atomised engagement with social change work that was secondary to our role as service providers.

The experience of participating in this collaborative inquiry resulted in group members feeling a renewed commitment to social change and a strengthened belief in the power of collective action. Group members identified that it was primarily because of the democratic processes employed and the nature of the egalitarian relationships within the group that this outcome was realised. We concluded that we wanted all of our colleagues to have access to collaborative, democratic and dialogic learning spaces. These spaces should be available to workers throughout their career, both within organisations but importantly for participants, in spaces where activists and practitioners from the wider movement can come together.

Participation in feminist learning spaces will provide workers with access to extant knowledge and theory and an experience of feminist praxis. It will also provide workers with access to learning as a form of research, in which collectively they can continually generate what Thompson (1997) defines as really useful knowledge in service to the emancipatory goals of feminist anti-domestic violence work.

Learning and knowledge production are inextricably linked

Participation in learning spaces that nurture reflexivity, critical thinking, imagination, and openness will go further than providing an opportunity for workers to engage with intersectional feminist knowledge. It will engage workers as knowledge producers as they contribute to the body of knowledge and theory through reflecting on their lived experience. Feminist pedagogy and feminist anti-violence work align epistemologically because they both center women's experience and feeling as a starting point for really useful knowledge production. Thus, the idea of education as a space in which domestic violence workers would come as 'unknowers' to be informed by 'experts' is rejected. Rather I argue for an approach in which both learners and teachers collaborate to shape shared standpoints so that we can produce knowledge that "*women want and need in their struggles to survive and to flourish*" (Harding, 2009,123)

This collaborative inquiry provides an example of where a feminist learning environment was collectively created and in which a group of domestic violence workers were able to form group standpoints on many aspects of our work. Individual group members' reflections on their participation in this inquiry illustrate how the re-valorisation of experience and feeling as knowledge ignited individual and group commitment to act. And yet, as a collaborative inquiry that relied primarily on experience without a rigorous engagement with theory and knowledge, we could only go so far in generating really useful knowledge. It is clear that committed and engaged feminist educators play a role in providing the kind of learning environment in which we can interrogate the quality of our knowing (Manicom, 1992) with reference to intersectional feminist knowledge. In addition, engaged feminist educators facilitate learners to acknowledge the discomfort and anxiety that arises when differences are expressed and conflicts are made visible (Amy, 2006; English and Irving, 2015; hooks, 1994; Kishimoto and Mwangi; 2009). Feminist educators do not assist the avoidance of these emotions and such feelings are utilised as a resource in facilitating the transformative learning that is necessary if workers are to face up to the challenges and dilemmas that trouble domestic violence organisations and movements.

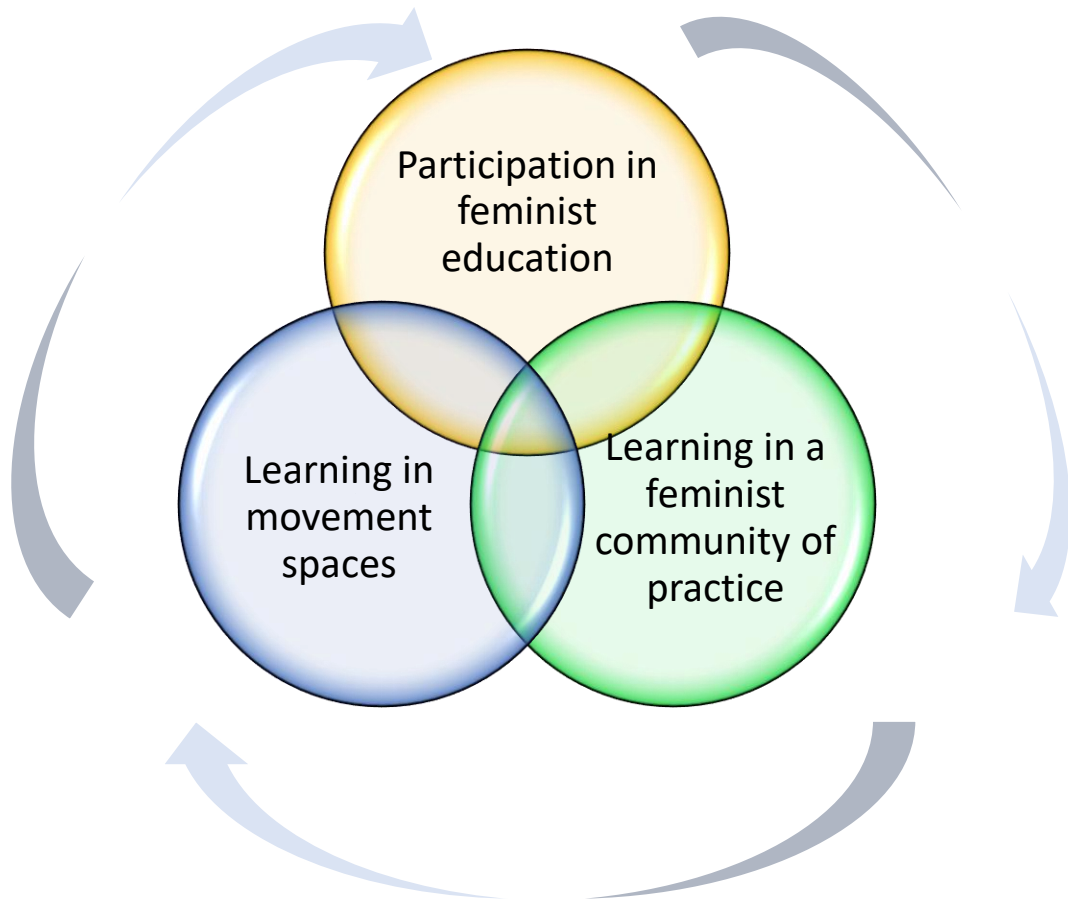
The arguments I have put forward in this section are essentially a proposal about a pedagogic approach that is compatible with feminist domestic violence work. To optimise learning that serves the logic of feminist anti-domestic violence work, I follow Wenger's (1996, 1998) argument that education must be kept close to practice and that practice and learning must be kept in an active interplay. In the following section I argue for a supportive architecture that sustains an active and ongoing interplay between learning in feminist communities of practice, learning through participation in feminist education and learning in social movement spaces.

A supportive architecture

Providing a supportive architecture is one way to support the active interplay between learning at all three levels as described above. One way to avoid the kind of

disconnect between education and learning in practice that Wenger (1998) Thomas et al (1998) and Buysse et al (2003) write of, is to resource those leading the development and provision of education within communities of practice to also provide leadership at movement level. I see two types of feminist communities of practice as supporting this model. The first would be within organisations, in which workers learn in practice and participate in learning opportunities provided at this level. The second is at movement level, in which a community of practice is consciously created to bring an action research approach to developing and sustaining this model (Buysse, et al, 2003; DePalma, 2009, Thomas et al, 1998). In this way, education and learning in practice can be provided as a structuring support to each other (Wenger, 1998). A role for this created community of practice would be to ensure that a continuous feedback loop is maintained in which education opportunities are built around and responsive to the ever changing contexts in which workers negotiate meaning in practice. The structures and processes that support learning within communities of practice can then coordinate with and build on the learning that is happening in feminist education and other movement spaces. I illustrate this concept in the following figure:

Figure 3: Feminist education, feminist communities of practice and a feminist social change movement in a dynamic and coordinated interplay.



I view community of practice as a theoretical model that could be adapted to intentionally build “creative and politically alive spaces that allow women to explore, challenge, and nurture political ideas” (English and Irving, 2015, 25) and that nurtured outbound and transformative learning trajectories (De Palma, 2009). A community of practice created at movement level would, I suggest, have a specific role in supporting this transformative learning trajectory by intentionally bordering on and overlapping with other communities of practice (Buysse et al, 2003; Thomas et al, 1998; Wenger, 1998) within women’s organisations and groups that have been traditionally marginalised, both in the community and the mainstream movement. A role for this movement level community of practice would be to build collaborations around education and learning towards the kind of internal transformations that are

needed. Overlaps with feminist education and research communities would also be important in ensuring that developments in education and learning support the logic of the movement. In this way, this community of practice can expand to include the kind of distributed expertise (Thomas et al, 1998) that can support and sustain the transformative change process that will be needed to establish an education and learning framework.

A question remains as to whether the approach I have proposed addresses a primary concern that motivated group members to participate in this inquiry. This concern focuses on the need to develop a professional profile for anti-domestic violence work through the attachment of a recognised form of accreditation or qualifications. I address this issue in the following section.

Reconciling the tensions inherent in credentialing feminist domestic violence work

Participants believed that providing workers with opportunities to gain professional qualifications under the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) was essential in addressing some of the weaknesses and dilemmas that troubled the movement. While there was unanimous support for credentialing anti-domestic violence workers' learning and expertise, participants were also aware of some of the tensions and possible unintended consequences that could arise from such a development. Anxieties articulated in the group are reflected in the literature on anti-domestic violence work in which processes of professionalisation have been identified as eroding the grassroots base of the movement, of excluding working class and other marginalised women from paid positions and power sharing within organisations, and in replacing feminist knowledge with gender neutral frameworks for anti-domestic violence work (Hanman-James, 2018; Lehrner and Allen, 2008, 2009; Markovitz and Tice, 2002; Mehrorta et al, 2016; Nicholls, 2014; Schechter, 1982, 1990). Recognising these dilemmas, group members nevertheless believed that workers' professionalism would be significantly strengthened and the legitimacy of domestic violence work could be better asserted in the external environment through the credentialing of education and learning.

Tessa's statement that what we wanted was to develop "*the kind of professionalism that we can be proud of*" reflects a shared standpoint in the group that the attainment of qualifications specific to domestic violence work would strengthen professionalism in a positive way if the sector could shape how processes of professionalisation were developed and institutionalised. Fitzsimons and Dorman (2013,) who have studied the dilemmas inherent in professionalising community development work, argue that the challenge is to "*push from the ground up*" to ensure that credentialing processes sustain emancipatory practice. Their research with community development practitioners illustrates that participation in higher education accrues many benefits to the worker including the validation of life experiences, an enhanced rigor in learning and the development of critical thinking skills. Like domestic violence work, community development work is demanding and high standards must be expected of the practitioner. Accreditation therefore is one way of enabling people to attain those standards and provides for the employer a benchmark for recruitment (Ibid). All of these benefits respond to concerns that motivated group members' participation in the inquiry.

The inquiry group did not explore how approaches to accreditation could be developed in such a way as to be compatible with the values and purposes of an education and learning framework. As a group we identified this subject as an area for future inquiry.⁴⁶ Collaborations with those who have negotiated a way of providing education and qualifications pathways whilst also maintaining inclusive and empowering education will be essential in guiding the movement in this endeavour. Following on Zibechi (2012) and English and Irving (2015), I argue that the movement will also be aided in maintaining emancipatory approaches to learning by integrating a focus on the movement as a pedagogical subject in future learning opportunities.

⁴⁶ This issue was addressed in depth by an expanded inquiry group within the domestic violence sector in 2020-2021.

Making the movement a pedagogical subject.

Considering the dilemma of reconciling feminist education with the demands and constraints of accreditation under the NFQ framework, I return to the writing of those concerned with social movement learning who argue for an approach to learning in which the movement itself becomes a pedagogical subject (English and Irving, 2015; Zibechi, 2012). A commitment to “*education in movement*” (Zibechi, 2012, 24) would ensure that all aspects of movement and organisational work are subject to ongoing critical reflection in movement learning spaces. Thus, workers are engaged on an ongoing basis in “*thinking together*” as they address challenges that may arise through the work of negotiating alignment with the NFQ framework. While new arrangements are likely to be negotiated by movement leaders, transformative feminist education is that which seeks to facilitate the empowerment of all participants to come to the fore as leaders in maintaining a feminist vision and practice at whatever level they work. In such movement learning spaces, different perspectives can be articulated and critically reflected on as workers engage in dialogue to shape shared standpoints on education, learning and accreditation (Shrewsbury, 1983).

Integrating a focus on this aspect of movement and organisational work into learning opportunities will, I argue, support workers to take charge of their learning at both individual and collective level when they experience that they can be effective in shaping what is learnt, how it is learnt and what gets valued as knowledge. It will help workers to understand the implications of feminist and non-feminist approaches to education and learning, thus strengthening knowledge and understanding of feminist approaches to work with women experiencing domestic abuse.

From vision to action to change

The integrated model of lifelong learning that I have discussed in this chapter articulates a vision that is far away from the actuality of learning and working for inquiry group members and their colleagues. Their experience reflects that of other workers as documented in reports from Safe Ireland (2014) and in Murphy et al (2020), which illustrate the struggles of frontline organisations who are constrained

in their work by levels and conditions of funding. The sustained energy and commitment that is needed if workers are to be facilitated to engage in a cycle of education and learning in practice can seem like a luxury to organisations that respond to women in critically dangerous situations whilst continually struggling to manage with inadequate resources (English and Irving, 2015).

As a veteran of anti-domestic violence work, both in frontline and management roles, I fully understand the challenges of maintaining reliable and accessible services that women can count on being available to them when needed. I have struggled with the dilemmas that many managers and workers face in balancing the needs of women with the needs of workers for space in which they can engage in “*ongoing reflection, renewal, and critique*” (Ibid., 23). The experience of participants in this study suggest that the needs of workers too often get forgotten or side lined and they are expected to respond to ever increasing numbers of women with ever decreasing resources and spaces in which to do the kind of reflection and learning that is needed to maintain effective and safe practice.

Suggesting that domestic violence organisations embrace a way of working that is substantially different to current conditions is a radical proposal and may be resisted by workers and leaders alike. Or perhaps this proposal will resonate with many in the movement. The domestic violence workers who participated in this inquiry, whilst recognising the challenges in providing such learning opportunities, nevertheless longed for more space and time in which they could reflect and learn with colleagues. By offering this model as a possibility for a future education and learning framework I am not arguing that this is *the* way forward in responding to domestic violence workers’ learning needs. I am making a proposal with which and against which those involved in the domestic violence movement can argue, dialogue, and imagine. My experience is that collaborative inquiry as an approach to learning and problem solving provides a way in which the domestic violence movement, or any such movement concerned with emancipatory change, can find a way to move from vision, to action, to change.

Collaborative inquiry as a strategy for learning and supporting change

Reflections at the end of each of the finding's chapters identify the limitations of collaborative inquiry as a research methodology. Acknowledging the limitations as discussed in these reflexive considerations, I contend that both the experience of participants, and the outcomes that we effected through our participation, illustrate that collaborative inquiry as a form of participatory action research does and can provide the possibility for people to address the problems that trouble their communities and to identify solutions through carrying out their own research (Brydon-Miller et al, 2011; Heron and Reason, 2017; Reason and Bradbury, 2008). Feminist participatory action research projects are, as stated by Lather (1988), *“powerful places to go for praxis to the extent we can formulate research designs that change people by encouraging self-reflection and a deeper understanding of their situations in the world”* (Lather, 1988, quoted in Reinhartz, 1992, 185). This FPAR project, as an experience of praxis, went further than providing an opportunity for participants to learn about self and others in relation to the world, but nurtured the emergence of a shared leadership in the group which provided the active mechanism through which we realised *“our ability to and our willingness to act on our beliefs”* (Shrewsbury, 1993, 13).

In previous reflections, I have identified the nature of democratic and nurturing relationships as a factor in the success of this collaborative inquiry. Three further aspects of our collaborative inquiry were particularly important in facilitating the group to generate useful knowledge and to realise their power to act through the utilisation of this knowledge. They are: the time that we had to think, learn, and imagine together; how finding common ground from which to launch our inquiry enabled us to move towards agreeing a shared standpoint; and the application of a feminist lens to our group endeavour.

Taking time to build knowledge and shared leadership

Having time to engage in an iterative cycle of reflection, meaning making and agreement building was identified by participants as a significant factor leading to a change in how they felt about their role as domestic violence workers. The time

available to us to cycle through several phases was, I would argue, critical in enabling the group to generate detailed descriptions that were reflective of the complexity and breadth of our experience as domestic violence workers. Accounts from group members suggest that the critical role that they play is almost invisible to those in power and in public discourse, where anti-domestic violence work is perceived solely as providing *“tea and sympathy”* (Charley). Collaborative inquiry aligns with feminist research principles in that it is concerned with truth values; who is acknowledged as knowers and what gets validated as knowledge (Brooks and Hesse-Biber, 2007; Collins, 1997; Harding, 2011; Heron, 1996; Letherby, 2003). Future inquiries, in which domestic violence organisations and workers insist on working to the logic of *“movement time”* (Zibechi, 2012) will provide many more workers with an opportunity to *“stake a claim”* (Wenger, 1998) for the critical nature of domestic violence work and the value of the domestic violence movement to society. Crucially, as illustrated in this research project, spaces in which workers can participate in collaborative and dialogic learning revalorise the knowledge of the feminist anti-domestic violence movement. This is knowledge which participants in this inquiry understood would empower them to resist the encroachment of non-feminist perspectives and practices that do not serve the best interests of the women for whom we work nor advance social change agendas.

Taking the time to delve deeper into our experiences and to cogenerate knowledge, resulted in group members experiencing a sense of connection and belonging to others in the group when they realised that their priorities, concerns, and beliefs were shared. This shift in feeling resulted in participants expressing hope about the potential for building community at movement level. The goals of feminist education which include building community, nurturing hope and connection with others, and fostering identification with a shared vision of change, were thus realised as an outcome of participation in this collaborative inquiry group (Connolly, 1997; Manicom, 1992; Mc Cusker, 2017; Shrewsbury, 1993; Weiler, 2010).

Our experience illustrates that collaborative inquiry provides an approach to learning and research that can be utilised by members of the anti-domestic violence

movement, including frontline workers, as they cooperate to address some of the problems and dilemmas that trouble the movement. Collaborative inquiry groups can be formed at any level within the anti-domestic violence movement and they do not require outside expertise nor academic researchers to either initiate or facilitate them (Heron, 1996). Such inquiry provides an accessible and compatible approach to research and learning, be it at movement level or organisationally within communities of practice, in which workers can make the link from learning to action. The limitations of this approach to research have been identified in this study. Our inquiry group could only go so far in generating knowledge that would be useful in the establishment of a learning and education programme. I argue for collaborative inquiry as an approach to learning and research that will be enhanced by access to formal education, by collaboration with those who have been traditionally excluded from the anti-domestic violence movement in Ireland and by collaboration with feminist educators and researchers.

As an emergent process of learning and action in which group members are involved in decision-making about all aspects of the project, each collaborative inquiry will be shaped in the doing of it, and the choices, methods and strategies will be driven by the issues facing the community, the questions they generate, and contextual factors specific to that group (Brydon-Miller et al, 2011; Heron, 1996). The time that I assert as being crucial to enabling a group of workers to re-connect and to realise their power to act therefore, can be decided upon and extended on agreement as participants assess the needs of the project. Projects that are externally initiated are often time bound and end before participants have had the opportunity to form a sense of collective agency (Paterson and Goulter, 2015). Collaborative inquiry as a long term learning strategy, when embedded within a feminist community of practice and a social change movement, does not have to have an ending. It can be part of the continuous cycle of reflection and action that characterises successful learning communities (Wenger, 1998; Zibechi, 2012). The time that we had in our group meant that we could continue to build on agreements and find enough common ground from which to act, while at the same time paying attention to the differences that existed within the group.

Finding common ground from which to launch an inquiry

As we got used to the non-linear and at times chaotic process of collaborative inquiry, we learnt to let go of expectations that we would produce something concrete. Group members agreed that going with the logic of an emergent process enabled a more in-depth inquiry as we did not have to rush to consensus, but rather accepted that *“we’ll go where we go, and we’ll end up where we end up”* (Charley). In the end, the group did come up with a concrete proposal about an approach for education and learning, but rather than this being an expectation of the group, we expressed our surprise and delight that we were able to produce such a tangible outcome.

Alongside the agreements reached that formed the basis for this proposal, there remained differences in the group. For example, while we came to an agreement about the centrality of feminist knowledge as underpinning effective domestic violence work, there were different perspectives on the employment of men in domestic violence services. For some this recent development eroded feminist principles of solidarity and female empowerment. For others, the involvement of men in some aspects of frontline work was not incompatible with feminist informed services. The point of a collaborative inquiry is not to reach a shared standpoint but to see if such a standpoint is attainable. The agreements reached provided enough common ground from which to proceed with our inquiry towards identifying a compatible approach to education and learning. The issue of male employees in women’s domestic violence organisations, alongside other issues that remain contested within the group, rather than being seen as divisive, engaged participants in a lively dialogue. We agreed that these concerns were ‘grist to the mill’ as learning opportunities that would ideally be addressed in learning and education spaces that would be provided under a future framework. The attitude to initiating such a group is in the first instance is to see if there is a basis for cooperation, rather than to try and forge shared standpoints (Reason, 1988).

Collaborative inquiry, as an approach to research, can be neither about proving or disproving extant knowledge, but must be open to the possibility that the group may take it in directions that initiating researchers may not identify with. I suggest that

people involved in a shared endeavour, which involves caring in any sense for the welfare of others, are likely to find a common interest in ensuring that their practice benefits rather than disadvantages the people whom they serve. I submit therefore, that in utilising collaborative inquiry as a knowledge generation strategy within the anti-domestic violence movement, it is unlikely that any group would be unable to identify common ground. As our group worked to agree a shared interest that would form our topic area, it was clear that all members were concerned about disparate responses to domestic violence that they perceived could further disadvantage rather than benefit women experiencing intimate partner violence. At this early stage however, we did not know exactly which approaches to anti-domestic violence work each group member found troubling and it was possible that on further inquiry we could have revealed opposing and perhaps irreconcilable positions. However, the fact that we all agreed that it was essential that there *was* an agreed foundation for effective domestic violence work meant that we had a basis from which to launch our inquiry.

As our inquiry progressed, we incrementally built a group standpoint that recognised the logic of feminist perspectives as informing effective domestic violence work. I contend that one of the factors that facilitated the formation of this group standpoint was the participation in the group of some women who identified with feminism as a framing perspective. By introducing a feminist analysis both in reflections and dialogue, feminist knowledge was made available as a resource to the group when considering the implications of approaching domestic violence work from different perspectives.

Applying a feminist lens

The dialectical process that is at the heart of collaborative inquiry in essence facilitates feminist consciousness raising when a specifically feminist lens is applied. Even if within a group there are participants who resist feminist understandings of domestic abuse, in such an inquiry group as ours, which was focused on strengthening practice, all participants commit to setting aside preconceived ideas, to examining different perspectives, and to participate in identifying responses that

benefit the people for whom they care. The praxis that is at the core of feminist participatory action research enables participants to experience that caring for each other in the learning and research environment inevitably requires a lived commitment to values of justice and equality (Amy, 2016; Iverson and James, 2017; Meier; 2016). This experience, and a dialogue in which feminist meaning frameworks are articulated as part of the dialogic process, will, I argue, enable many workers, who care deeply about the women whom they serve but who do not identify with a feminist perspective, to come to an awareness that caring for women necessarily involves working for social justice (Iverson and James, 2017). Collaborative inquiry employed specifically as a feminist approach to research and learning can therefore be used to advance women's social justice agendas (Reid, 2004; Reid and Frisby, 2008).

Bringing an explicitly feminist lens to a collaborative inquiry may not be enough to facilitate transformative learning if within a community of inquiry our world view and knowledge is limited and contaminated by hegemonic discourses about race, class, sexuality, and other social differentials. As my own struggles to facilitate reflexivity within the group illustrate, we need more than an engagement with the scholarship of those whose knowledge has been relegated to the margins if we are to nurture transformative learning environments. Drawing on the insights of social movement learning, I believe that it is when relationships of power are transformed through ongoing engagement in a "*movement in motion*" (Zibechi, 25) in which we self-consciously engage in processes of self-education as we practice, that we can contribute to the transformation of the world through transforming ourselves. This is why, access to spaces in which there is a consciousness of the integral nature of learning and action are essential if we are to come to know in a practical sense the transformative power of relationships in which emancipatory values are enacted (Zibechi, 2012). It requires us to think about education and learning not as a thing or place but as a force that is always present in our lives (Steinklammer, 2012) and that we can more self-consciously shape in ways that serve the logic of the movement and benefit the women and children for whom we work.

Chapter 12: Conclusion

Introduction

This chapter aims to draw out the significance of the research and foreground its key contribution: to articulate an education and learning framework underpinned by feminist pedagogy as integral to the work of the anti-domestic violence movement in Ireland. The chapter begins with an overview of the rationale for the research, including a re-stating of the research question and a reflection of the methodology deployed. A summary of the findings is presented from which the key argument of this thesis emerged: the necessity of education and learning and feminist pedagogy as integral to the work of anti-domestic violence organisations and the wider movement. The chapter continues with discussion of the model of education and learning. The next section identifies how this research contributes to knowledge within the sphere of feminist anti-violence work and the field of emancipatory models of education and learning. Research limitations are addressed and areas for further inquiry are identified. Finally, recognising the challenge implicit in the realisation of this expansive and holistic change, I reflect on how this experience of collaborative learning provides a pathway for anti-domestic violence organisations to progress this vision.

Background and research focus

At the beginning of this inquiry journey, I was managing a domestic violence organisation in the North West of Ireland. As a feminist practitioner and activist, my decision to initiate this collaborative inquiry was motivated by my own experience as a domestic violence worker/ manager and the impacts the absence of an education and learning framework had on my efficacy as a practitioner and actor for social change. Further, there were an accumulation of issues and concerns that I felt could be usefully addressed through examining how domestic violence workers could be supported and sustained through the establishment of an education and learning framework *specific* to their work. My experience indicated that this absence was implicated in many of the struggles and dilemmas that both organisations and workers encountered as they attempted to provide sustainable and effective

responses to women who experience domestic abuse. I was also concerned about what I experienced as an erosion of feminist knowledge and feminist practice within the wider constellation of organisations responding to women who experienced domestic abuse.

The study is informed by feminist theory about the causes and consequences of men's violence against women and about effective responses to the endemic nature of domestic abuse. I argue that the effective domestic violence worker is ideologically orientated towards a post structural feminist perspective in which gender as a central organising concept is inextricably intersected with an analysis of other systems of domination, most significantly capitalism and racism. Constituting ourselves as oppositional subjects to the enforcement of male, White and capitalist hegemony, I assert that domestic violence work must seek to contribute towards the transformation of the oppressive social structures that underpin the prevalence of domestic abuse. Recognising that domestic violence workers primarily focus on supporting individual women, the work of Ellen Pence and her colleagues Mc Mahon and Pence (2003) and Shepard and Pence (1999) is important in recognising that while domestic violence workers focus on the safety and recovery of survivors, they must also understand that creating space for action at the individual level can create space for action at the collective level when women are freed of the tyranny of abuse, reclaim autonomy and connect to community. This requires that transformative feminist practice, that foregrounds the political dimensions of feminist practice and that centres solidarity across difference as a defining principle, is strengthened and sustained in all aspects of anti-violence work (Ashbourne et al, 2016; Elliot et al, 2005; hooks, 1994, 2000; Kim, 2020; Kulkarni et al, 2019; Mc Phail, et al, 2017; Wilkin and Hillock, 2014; Wilson et al, 2015).

There are a variety of intersecting factors and forces that undermine and erode these goals, principles, and practice. These include processes of professionalisation and the incursion of neoliberal priorities into domestic violence work that are antithetical to the empowerment practice that is at the core of feminist practice (Hanman-James, 2018; Kendrick, 2002; Ishkanian, 2014; Markowitz and Tice, 2002; Mehrotra et al, 2016; Mc Donald, 2005, Murphy et al,

2000; Stark; 2007; Vachelli et al, 2015). An acknowledgement that organisations struggle to address several failings and weaknesses internal to women's anti-violence movements since their inception highlights a failure to centre an intersectional approach (Donnelly et al 2005, Macy et al 2010, Mc Phail et al 2002, Mullender and Hague 2001, Renzetti 1992, Richie 2000, Thiara et al 2012). I argue that the absence of an education and learning framework for domestic violence work in Ireland increases our vulnerability to non-feminist encroachments and weakens our capacity to address the factors that impede movement towards transformative feminist practice and social change. Acknowledging these well-founded critiques, ongoing endeavours to proactively embed transformative feminist values and practices into anti-domestic violence work exist (Ashbourne et al, 2016; Elliot et al, 2005; Kim, 2020; Kulkarni et al, 2019; Mc Phail, et al, 2017; Wilkin and Hillock, 2014; Wilson et al, 2015). A continual commitment to education and learning as integral to these efforts is evident in these accounts. In the absence of a learning framework for frontline domestic violence work in Ireland, this collaborative inquiry was established to identify an approach to education and learning that supported the logic of transformative feminist practice and social change work in the anti-violence movement in Ireland.

Research question and objectives

The central aim was to identify an approach to learning that would support and sustain the worker as both a feminist practitioner and a feminist social change actor. To achieve this aim, the research question was articulated thus:

What approach to education and learning is compatible with feminist anti-domestic violence work?

To address this central question three objectives were devised to identify critical pedagogical approaches to learning for the domestic violence movement.

- To illustrate the experience of this group of domestic violence workers and the factors that shape their work as practitioners and social change actors
- To collaboratively generate knowledge about the approach to education and learning that would meet the needs of domestic violence workers in Ireland

- To contribute to the domestic violence movement as a community of inquiry through initiating and facilitating a participatory action research project with colleagues from within the movement.

Methodology

The topic of this research has been relegated to the margins of domestic violence work and scholarship. My alignment with feminist standpoint epistemology meant that in breaking new ground I was determined to start from the standpoint of frontline workers, as knowers of their own lives and as capable of generating useful knowledge for the ongoing work of the wider movement (Brooks and Hesse-Biber, 2007; Collins, 1997; Harding, 2009, 2011; Hesse-Biber, 2007; Letherby, 2003). My choice of collaborative inquiry was informed by my commitment to feminist praxis and to producing useful knowledge that could be used for social change (Brydon-Miller et al, 2011; Reid, 2004, Reid and Frisby, 2008, Weiner, 2004). Nine of my peers from within the network of women's domestic violence organisations in Ireland joined me as co-inquirers and co-subjects in this research. Through a 13-month iterative process in which we recycled through reflection, interrogating our individual and group perspectives, meaning making and agreement building, the group generated a set of findings that form the basis of this study.

Summary of findings

The unique and critical nature of frontline domestic violence work

The purpose and practice of the domestic violence worker is multi-faceted, complex and challenging. As frontline workers, participants were witnesses to the egregious harms inflicted upon women and children by men who seek to coercively control within the private sphere of intimate relationships and the family. Descriptions of our work emphasise two key and interconnected dimensions to practice. Firstly, in providing safe spaces, women can speak, will be heard, believed and validated. Secondly in providing space for action, women can explore the options available to them and with the support of an advocate, negotiate the complex and risk filled terrain as they journey towards safety, autonomy and recovery from violence and abuse.

By surfacing our tacit knowledge, the group identified the knowledge and skills that constituted an effective response to women across these two dimensions. Group members considered how all learners, regardless of orientation towards feminism, could be supported to acquire the knowledge necessary to develop an orientation to domestic violence work that was about empowerment and rights rather than about individualised behavioural change models of work. In considering values and orientations that underpinned effective practice, the group concluded that it was essential that all workers commit to progressing social justice for women and children as a core goal for their work. We also shared an understanding that it was essential that workers understand domestic abuse as a process of coercive control that is profoundly gendered if they were to avoid women blaming responses to the women for whom they worked.

There was a marked absence in our dialogue about the importance of developing our knowledge and critical thinking skills with reference to theory and knowledge about racism, class discrimination, and other forms of oppression. These not only intersect with women's experience of domestic abuse, but shape how we see the world and how we are located in relation to many of the women with whom we work. An absence of data in this instance is a finding in itself and reflects findings in previous chapters that illustrate the marginal position that an intersectional approach to domestic abuse holds in our awareness and in our thinking. This finding brings to the fore the critical need for education for domestic violence workers to centre intersectional feminist theory and practice.

Integrated throughout the inquiry were accounts and descriptions of the various tensions and balances that domestic violence workers have to negotiate and manage on a day-to-day basis. Many of these involved recognising and affirming women as best placed to assess what would work for them whilst also recognising how the impacts of abusers' patterns of behaviour often distorted women's perspectives. As advocates, workers must challenge inadequate and discriminatory responses from more powerful state actors and agencies while at the same time continue to build and maintain positive working relationships. In this respect, the inquiry elucidated

the critical role that domestic violence workers hold in the community in creating visibility about the risks posed by abusive men, in fostering a greater understanding of the dynamics of coercive control and in refusing to tolerate the silencing of women, women blaming and other discriminatory attitudes. This study illustrates the unique and critical role that domestic violence workers play in community efforts to address men's violence against women and children. I have argued for the expansion of this role to consider how frontline domestic violence workers can contribute to movement building by bringing feminist consciousness raising to the fore of their practice and in supporting women to link to feminist communities of social change actors.

Despite the critical nature, breadth and complexity of domestic violence work, group members' accounts illustrate that they have had little and, in some cases, no education or training about key aspects of their practice. Participants spoke of the dearth of non-formal learning opportunities in the sector where workers could gather to share and deepen their knowledge about their work. Furthermore, up until their participation in this inquiry, group members recorded having few opportunities to articulate and elucidate their own understanding of how they practiced as domestic violence workers. Questions need to be asked about how so much can be expected of domestic violence workers when so little is provided to them in terms of learning supports.

These findings point to affirming and troubling aspects of anti-domestic violence work in Ireland. Despite the lack of a comprehensive and universal provision of learning supports for workers, there is clearly some being provided. For this group of 10 workers at least, feminist meaning frameworks seem to be central to these. At both organisational and sectoral level group members were being supported to remain women centred and women led. We understood that women are in situations not of their own making and were committed to practice that centred women's knowledge and agency. Group members were knowledgeable about numerous aspects of domestic violence work and described in detail how this knowledge is

employed in the utilisation of skills. However, the inquiry revealed important consequences of the absence of an education and learning framework.

Occluding the distinctive nature of domestic violence work

Group members described in detail what is distinctive about domestic violence practice and why this must be protected and strengthened through ongoing education and learning. A failure to assert and protect the distinctiveness of domestic violence work has led to a diversity of responses within the wider sector, some of which, in the experience of participants, serve to impede rather than support women on their journeys to safety and autonomy. For example, the inquiry group stated that inappropriate practice models, including social care and counselling, fill a vacuum created by the lack of a recognised educational pathway into domestic violence work. In addition, an absence of a clear and formally recognised educational pathway into domestic violence work contributes to inequities in relationships with other professionals with whom we seek to collaborate in the best interests of women and children. Participants spoke of how the lack of collaborative learning spaces led to experiences of isolation in our work, of feeling disconnected from a wider community of practice and of feeling despondent about the potential of organisations and the wider movement to effect the kind of changes needed to protect women and children and reduce the prevalence of domestic abuse.

A significant finding is that while all group members held what was essentially a feminist analysis on domestic abuse, there were limits to our knowledge. We affirmed that knowledge of how other forms of oppression manifest in women's lives and intersect with experiences of domestic abuse was essential, while at the same time we struggled with an intersectional feminist analysis of men's violence against women. Where and how can domestic violence workers and organisations address the continuing exclusion and silencing of women on the margins of the anti-violence movement in Ireland? Critical and collaborative learning spaces led by women who have been excluded and marginalised from the mainstream movement are essential if we are to confront the contradiction between what we say and what we do (Ritchie, 2000, 2006).

Group members asserted that if as a sector we are to affirm the importance of our work, address the weaknesses in our practice, and assert the legitimacy of domestic violence work within the external environment, that a comprehensive and formally recognised education and learning framework, available to all workers, was an essential part of a supportive architecture. In effect, we concluded it is time that we 'take ourselves seriously'.

The erosion the transformative potential of the anti-violence movement in Ireland

The findings of this study reflect developments in other countries where the political vibrancy and urgency that powered women's anti-violence movements in their early days has been eroded by processes of professionalisation and the co-optation of movement goals by neo-liberal priorities (Hanman-James, 2018; Kendrick, 2002; Ishkanian, 2014; Markowitz and Tice, 2002; Mehrotra et al, 2016; Mc Donald, 2005, Murphy et al, 2000; Stark; 2007; Vachelli et al, 2015). One of the damaging consequences of these developments has been the relegation of survivors to the margins of anti-violence social change work and the subsequent loss of a grassroots base from which to build a mass movement. Domestic violence workers play a pivotal role, located between the individual work with women subjected to male violence and collective feminist action to end all forms of male violence. I argue that they are ideally positioned to contribute to the building of the mass movement that is necessary if an expansive and transformative vision of change is to be realised. I agree with Pence and Mc Mahon (2003) who assert that our role is to facilitate survivors' empowerment as leaders and activists in the wider movement, rather than to act as agitators for social change on their behalf. Bringing feminist consciousness raising back to the centre of feminist anti-violence practice is critical if workers are to realise this potential. However, without opportunities to step away from the daily grind of frontline work, workers have no opportunity in which to develop their own critical consciousness of the root causes of violence against women, the changes that are needed to achieve gender justice and the ways in which a radical vision of change can be progressed through the mobilisation of a mass movement.

In addressing the immediate and urgent needs of women and children harmed by men's violence it is understandable that our gaze has been diverted from this more radical vision of change. The same processes and forces that have eroded feminist practice have virtually eradicated spaces for critical thinking and collaborative learning (English and Irving, 2015). But the changes that have been affected by our focus on institutional reform, whilst improving responses to many women and children, have not reduced the prevalence of men's violence against women (Hanman-James, 2018; Stark, 2007). A focus on institutional reform will be necessary for as long as men's violence against women prevails, but without movement towards a radical upending and restructuring of patriarchal capitalism, we are effectively running to stand still.

Deprived of learning opportunities that counteract the compromises that feminist anti-domestic violence organisations have made to secure their survival, the attainment of an expansive and transformative vision of change remains as a distant and unrealisable goal. Taking movement time to engage in thinking together, and as Steinklammer (2012) terms it, thinking struggle together, is in itself a radical act, being in opposition to those forces who have an interest in maintaining privilege in all its forms (Zibechi, 2012). To build a mass movement then we must, as hooks (2000) exhorts, engage in mass consciousness raising. It cannot be expected that domestic violence workers can realise their potential in contributing to this gargantuan endeavour when they have been denied the very learning opportunities that are needed for emancipatory social change work. An approach to education and learning therefore must facilitate increasing domestic violence workers' capacities to effectively support women as they struggle to free themselves from the entrapment of coercive control *and* enhance their role as frontline practitioners to contribute to a mass feminist movement towards a radically transformed world.

When I started this research, I conceived of an appropriate pedagogic approach to be primarily the provision of feminist education, with some supports at organisational level for learning in practice. Through developing an understanding of how people learn from the perspective of theories of situated learning, my

understanding of a compatible approach to learning has transformed to see that learning in practice as being of equal significance to participation in education (English and Irving, 2015; Foley, 1999; Harley, 2012; Lave and Wenger, 1991; Steinklammer, 2012; Wenger, 1998; Zibechi, 2012). As workers are learning all of the time as they practice, a pedagogic approach must include how organisations can optimise informal learning to serve the nurturance of feminist communities of practice (Wenger 1996; 1998).

A model for education and learning

Building on an approach to learning collectively shaped by the inquiry group and informed by theories of critical pedagogies and situated learning, I argue for the provision of education and learning opportunities at three interconnected levels: within feminist communities of practice, within feminist education spaces and within wider, diffuse, and diverse movement spaces. In chapter 11, I presented a model that is underpinned by feminist pedagogy. The latter provides a philosophy of education, curricula and approaches to education and learning for anti-domestic violence workers that serve the logic of feminist anti-domestic violence work as feminist pedagogy is rooted in the feminist movement and continue to be part of and for the movement (Manicom, 1992). The model generates opportunities for education and learning at organisational and movement level, in both formal and non-formal education spaces, and where informal learning is valued and supported. Central to this approach is a commitment to the resourcing and facilitation of a parallel process of lifelong learning for domestic violence workers through participation in feminist education, feminist communities of practice and the wider anti-domestic violence movement. What is critical to this model is that learning in these different settings overlap and that they are in a coordinated and dynamic interplay with each other, continually supporting, informing, and shaping both learning and practice at all three levels.

Participation in feminist education and learning spaces at movement and organisational levels enables the worker, whether novice or experienced, to be part of an ongoing feedback loop, critically reflecting on their experience, on the

challenges of applying what they know to what they do, all the time generating new knowledge which can be used to sustain the dynamic interplay between learning and practice at all three levels. Thus, workers can be part of the ongoing development of a curriculum that is not just about providing access to knowledge and information, but about providing opportunities for transformative learning experiences through participation in feminist education that is built around their practice (Wenger, 1998). To support this ongoing and coordinated dynamic, I propose that a feminist community of practice be purposefully created at movement level. This community of practice will have a role of overlapping with communities of practice at organisational level, sustaining a continuous feedback between participation in education and participation in practice, and nurturing open and outbound learning trajectories for workers by overlapping with other communities of practice outside of the anti-domestic violence movement.

In developing this model, I recognise that its purpose is not to synthesise theories of community of practice, social movement learning and feminist pedagogy into one approach, as this could obscure the potentiality and strengths that each approach can bring to an education and learning framework. It is important that learning in all three of these settings provides a trajectory that enables the worker to continually move towards a fuller embodiment of transformative feminist practice. The 'glue' that prevents learning at these three levels from becoming separated and potentially diverging from each other in ways that disrupt movement towards transformative practice is feminist praxis. It requires, as Ellen Pence (1987) argued, that we live the vision we seek to create or as Zibechi expressed it, create "*the long awaited new world*" (2012, 20) within our movement.

The aim of an education and learning framework is not to forge a sameness, compliance, or standardization in how workers and organisations think about and act in response to domestic abuse. I agree with De Palma who states that sameness is "*suspicious*", and that difference is a source of "*productive dissensus*" (2009, 363). An education and learning architecture is about building a coherence and a continuity in how a community of practice, or a constellation of communities, engage in a joint

enterprise (Wenger, 1998). As domestic violence work is in essence, concerned with emancipatory practice, it follows that domestic violence workers are more likely to have meaningful learning experiences that lead towards transformative feminist practice when emancipatory values and principles underpins practice and learning in all movement spaces.

By centring intersectional feminist knowledge, workers will have an opportunity to engage with the vast and rich body of knowledge that provides explanations for the prevalence of men's violence against women within intimate relationships and that informs transformative intersectional feminist practice. Through this engagement, workers will be better able to contribute to the joint enterprises of their communities of practice in a way that builds coherence and maximises the potential for that community of practice to serve the best interests of all people and children subjected to domestic abuse. The curricula that feminist pedagogies provide are never static but rather are responsive to the lived experience of all participants. In the context of learning support for domestic violence workers, this means that the experience and feelings of workers will be valued as knowledge and that the curricula will be forever evolving to reflect the dynamic nature of knowledge production at all levels in the anti-violence movement (hooks, 2000). This ensures that education is part of meaningful learning trajectories for domestic violence workers (Wenger, 1998).

Such an approach is part of what bell hooks (1994; 2010) terms, engaged pedagogy. Learners are not subjected to the *"assembly line approach to learning"* (Ibid., 13) but are facilitated to critically engage with theory that helps them make sense of their own lives and to think about how this knowledge supports them to take action. Critically engaged pedagogy means that the teacher is also a learner and that students also shape and interpret what happens in the classroom. It requires a holistic approach to leaning, where the physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being of the student is as important as what they are learning (hooks, 1994; Iverson and James, 2017; Meier, 2016). Engaged pedagogy reflects the core principles of transformational anti-violence work in that the goal is to support learners on journeys to becoming fully self-realised, by enhancing *"their capacity to live fully and*

reply” (hooks, 1994, 22). The goal is to provide learners with access to ways of knowing that can liberate them from the forces that diminish their well-being and that prevent and impede their engagement with emancipatory action. As feminist practice in responding to men’s violence against women is, in essence, emancipatory practice, then it follows that a compatible approach to education and learning must be about enacting emancipatory practice in all learning spaces and be, as hooks stated, *“education as the practice of freedom”* (Ibid., 21).

Knowledge contribution

This study set out to identify a pedagogical framework that is compatible with the values and goals of feminist anti-domestic violence work in Ireland. Based on findings generated through an action research project in which ten domestic violence workers collaborated, a model of lifelong learning underpinned by feminist pedagogy is identified as serving the logic of feminist practice by providing meaningful learning opportunities that respond to the purpose of domestic violence work, and the ways in which workers must practice in order to fulfil that purpose. This study contributes to knowledge about compatible approaches to domestic violence worker education and learning. As such, it addresses a significant gap in knowledge within the field of domestic violence practice. A substantial body of research exists on the purpose, role, and practices of domestic violence workers and about the challenges and dilemmas that trouble them in their work. There is, to my knowledge, no corresponding body of work that addresses the educational and learning needs of frontline domestic violence workers in women’s organisations and the kind of approaches that would respond to those needs.

The contribution to knowledge is built on the knowledge contribution of the collaborative inquiry group. As an under-researched, misunderstood, and de-valued field of practice, I foreground the contribution of the group in addressing this knowledge gap by providing rich descriptions of practice, the many challenges we have faced in our work, and in shaping a shared vision of a future approach to education and learning for domestic violence workers. I believe the work of the group is significant in “staking a claim” for the critical and unique nature of feminist anti-

domestic violence work and the importance of developing a supportive architecture that provides access to meaningful learning opportunities on an ongoing basis for workers.

The knowledge that has been generated about supporting situated learning through the development of a model of learning for domestic violence workers will not only have relevance for anti-domestic violence agencies and networks worldwide, but for other fields of practice where members wish to bring a consciousness to the potential for such learning in enabling participants to become competent members of their community of practice. This study builds on the work of De Palma (2009) who argues that as a concept, communities of practice is adaptable to serve the logic of those communities concerned with emancipatory goals. The knowledge generated in this research therefore will be of interest to educators, activists and practitioners who are concerned to strengthen and sustain the work of such communities of practice.

Finally, this research demonstrates what a group of women who share a commitment to women's safety, autonomy and flourishing can achieve when they are provided with the time, space, and a small amount of resources with which they can carry out their own research. By making visible the process through which this group were able to generate really useful knowledge, this study illustrates the potential of feminist participatory action research as a way in which feminist communities of practice can find solutions to the problems that hinder their work (Brydon-Miller et al, 2011; Reid, 2004, Reid and Frisby, 2008, Weiner, 2004). I believe that the significance of this contribution is that as a group we came to know through experience and feeling that providing collaborative, democratic, and dialogic learning spaces works. In writing this thesis, I have demonstrated that participation in an emancipatory learning space results in a renewed hope and belief in the possibility of change and the emergence of a commitment and a willingness to act for that change. As feminist anti-domestic violence work is in its essence about transformative change, the experience of the group provides the strongest evidence for an approach to education and learning that is transformative for the learner.

Limitations of this research

The multiple positions that I held throughout this research provided me with the possibility to reflect on both the merits and limitations of collaborative inquiry as a research methodology. These are discussed in detail in chapters 6 to 12. Revisiting the reflexive considerations included throughout this thesis, it is arguable that the factors that commend collaborative inquiry as a research methodology are those that can also limit its usefulness in terms of generating sound and supportable knowledge. I highlight three characteristics of our collaborative inquiry that seem to be to be paradoxically both supportive and hindering in terms of the quality of our inquiry. Firstly, the warm and reciprocal relationships in the group created a sense of openness and safety that enabled participants to express themselves freely and fully. However, an investment in maintaining this group rapport prevented the group from inquiring in a deeper way into some long-held assumptions, an inquiry that may have surfaced latent differences and conflict within the group. Secondly, the insiderness of co-inquirers knowing generated a quality of knowledge that I argue speaks powerfully to the experience of domestic violence workers, but at the same time I recognise how our shared positions as co-subjects also impacted on our capacity to maintain the level of critical subjectivity needed. A paradox in carrying out insider research therefore is that the co-inquirer/co-subject position simultaneously enhances and limits the quality of knowledge production. Finally, collaborative inquiry necessarily requires that a group be small enough to provide all participants with an opportunity to speak and to be heard. Taking the time to excavate our experience for meaning has, I argue, enabled this group to go deep in describing our practice and in identifying the factors that strengthen and undermine empowering feminist practice. I question however whether the smallness of the participant cohort resulted in valuable perspectives and knowledge being excluded from this knowledge generation project.

Acknowledging these limitations, I present this study as starting from the standpoint of the ten domestic violence workers who participated in this inquiry, but I assert that this research does not stop here (Harding, 2001). The work of the collaborative inquiry group and this thesis are a contribution from which a growing a community

of inquiry within the wider domestic violence movement continues to think together, learn together and act together for change. I envision this wider community of inquiry networking with other social change movements, within the field of adult and community education and other knowledge communities not yet identified. Using the knowledge generated in this project and by other scholars, activists, and survivors of gender-based violence, it is anticipated that this project will support future feminist action in the field of domestic violence work.

Further areas for inquiry

Several issues and aspects of domestic violence work and of the wider movement could benefit from further research. I focus on those that came to the fore in both our group dialogue and in my later analysis of data. The first of these is issues in relation to identity and the anti-domestic violence movement in Ireland. A number of participants identified that the demographic profile of the wider movement is not representative of the diversity of women in Ireland, and they believed that these exclusions impact on the movements' capacity to respond to women who experience marginalisation on the basis of ethnicity and sexual orientation. The marginalisation of an intersectional analysis is identified in this research as a critical area of concern for the domestic violence movement in this country and a priority focus for the development of a future education and learning framework. I suggest however, that before moving to design such a framework, or alongside its development, that a deeper and wider level of inquiry is needed to gain a broader understanding of how these critical issues manifest within organisations, impact on the domestic violence worker, and most importantly, have real life impacts for women and children experiencing domestic abuse.

Other areas that came to the fore as requiring a movement wide inquiry are those issues that participants identified as exemplifying fragmentation within the movement in terms of approaches to practice. The employment of men in frontline services and the extension of services to men who experienced domestic abuse were perceived by group members as illustrating how gender-neutral perspectives inform some organisations' response. There was a shared understanding in the group that

safe and effective practice is underpinned by knowledge of the profoundly gendered nature of coercive control. While there remains some difference amongst participants in relation to these two issues, there was a consensus that more time needs to be spent inquiring into these two areas. Group members agreed that it was essential that women who access, or who may wish to access domestic violence organisations, are involved as participants in future research into these developments and that their experience and knowledge should be central to informing a shared position on these issues within the movement.

A third issue that group members believe fragments a coherent and cohesive response was the different stances of organisations in relation to behavioural change programmes for abusers. Here again there were some differences of opinion but there was a shared sense of unease and uncertainty about what standards these programmes worked to. Findings in this study emphasise the critical nature of this concern and the need for further inquiry, at movement level initially, to scope out to what degree organisations are involved in these programmes, what are the push factors that motivate their involvement, and most importantly, what impact or change is experienced by those women whose partners or ex partners participate in these programmes.

I recommend that a participatory action research approach be brought to research on all these key issues thus maximising the potential for these studies to generate knowledge that can be used by the wider movement, by organisations, and by individual workers, in continuing to strengthen effective feminist practice. Such projects provide an opportunity for collaborations with those women who have been traditionally excluded from movement leadership and power sharing, thus, in the doing of this research, can transformative ways of working be experienced by all involved. Research initiatives will also provide an opportunity for domestic violence organisations to bring knowledge about aspects of domestic violence work that remain contested within the movement into learning and inquiry spaces.

Research provides practitioner/researchers with an opportunity to engage with knowledge and practices that are integrative of diverse perspectives that perhaps

challenge some long held assumptions. There is movement at a global level towards a wider and more holistic understanding of community accountability in which restorative justice practices, including behavioural change programmes for abusers, are centred. The concerns of group members illustrate that a greater level of engagement and knowledge about these programmes is essential. Bringing a collaborative and dialogic approach to such inquiry could provide a way in which collaborations are forged between those providing services to women survivors of domestic abuse and those providing programmes for abusers. Furthermore, an inquiry focus on the similarities and differences between women and men's experiences of domestic abuse and the different kind of survivor led responses required, could provide opportunities to forge fruitful partnerships with those organisations responding to men's experience of domestic abuse whilst also strengthening feminist informed responses within the movement.

A participatory action research approach will be particularly important in future work to progress the establishment of an education and learning framework. What the group has proposed, and what I further develop as a framework in this thesis, is a new approach to education and learning. I believe that it is essential to integrate an inquiry focus into any future projects that progress this vision. Ongoing inquiry with managers and workers within the anti-domestic violence movement in Ireland should be sustained to ensure that developments are grounded in the lived experience and knowledge of frontline workers. In this way, more and more workers can be drawn into an extended inquiry that provides them with an opportunity to interrogate their core paradigm and to examine the implications of working from within different meaning frameworks. In this respect, inquiry as a strategy overlaps with participation in feminist education and movement learning spaces. This inquiry must extend to include as participants women who experience domestic abuse as ultimately, they must be the beneficiaries of any proposed changes. An ongoing commitment to evaluation and participatory action research is core to the success of any programme that seeks to develop pedagogic solutions that sustain the transformative change work of the anti-domestic violence movement in Ireland.

Final thoughts

In the absence of an education and learning framework for anti-domestic violence workers, I argue that in establishing such a framework it is necessary to state a clear standpoint that privileges feminist meaning frameworks and feminist process over other perspectives as providing a structuring framework for practice. Claiming such a stake in the future of the anti-domestic violence movement in Ireland inevitably brings up issues of power. It is, as Wenger (1998) states, “*a proposal of identity*” and “*a bid for ownership of meaning*” (235). But who gets to decide what matters in making such proposals? Who decides what constitutes success or failure? What voices are silent or absent within the anti-domestic violence movement in Ireland? In privileging certain perspectives, others are bound to be marginalised. Claiming a territory in relation to the content of and approaches to education and learning may be contested.

Creating spaces for different perspectives to be voiced and for conflict to arise when contestation is made explicit, is an integral dimension to the ongoing process of learning that characterises engaged and committed feminist social change movements and organisations as “*living, breathing, questioning, transforming*” (Connolly, 2018. 27). Moving to establish a framework provides an opportunity for learning spaces to be created in which leadership and frontline workers are involved in a collaborative and dialogic process with the intention of building shared standpoints towards the creation of an education and learning architecture for anti-domestic violence work. I am confident that utilising collaborative inquiry will provide a way in which workers and organisations can dialogue across difference and to generate really useful knowledge for the ongoing work of the anti-domestic violence movement in Ireland. Employing collaborative inquiry as one strategy in a range of learning approaches will enable workers, whatever their level of experience, and however they identify with feminist perspectives on domestic violence work, to think and to learn together. Collaborative inquiry as a learning strategy provides spaces that are without a curriculum and whilst they require some initiation and leadership initially, they are essentially horizontal learning spaces in which each participant shapes the learning and inquiry agenda. As people engaged in a joint

enterprise, I have no doubt that common ground can be found in any group of domestic violence workers from which to embark on a collaborative knowledge generating endeavour. Giving participants time to engage with the logic of feminist knowledge through reflection and dialogue, will, I am confident, provide for each worker an opportunity to continue movement towards transformative feminist practice.

Collaborative inquiry respects the learning journey of each individual participant. It is not a process that seeks compliance or sameness. The findings in this research illustrate that it is a process however, in which shared standpoints, connection to others and the formation of a shared vision can emerge. Most importantly, as an approach to feminist learning, it provides the potential for women to realise their power to act and as a form of action research, collaborative inquiry provides the opportunity for participants to act on that realisation. This has been the most gratifying aspect of having had the privilege to lead and facilitate this collaborative inquiry group.

Each group member came to this group with an openness and a willingness to make visible to each other their experiences, feelings, and thoughts. All were committed to generating knowledge that could be useful in the ongoing work of their organisations and the wider movement to address the prevalence of violence against women within intimate relationships. Our achievement in producing a framework for education and learning both delighted and surprised group members. In the last session where we reflected on our experience and on what we had cocreated, I perceived that there was a sense of lightness, of excitement, of possibility; a power that seemed to reside in the collective commitment to use the knowledge that we had generated to take action for change. That power has been utilised by group members who continue to motivate a change programme within the movement towards the establishment of an education and learning framework. I will end this thesis with a quote from group member Grainne, who beautifully expressed the change that ignited our willingness to act when she said:

We all came to this group with a little spark,
and here we are, all blazing!

Appendices

Appendix 1: European and national policy and funding contexts

EU policy contexts.

There are two key policy documents at EU level that currently direct State policy on domestic violence. these are

- 1) ***The Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (The Istanbul Convention)***. (European Commission. (2021).

The Council of Europe have agreed a set of comprehensive standards to prevent and combat violence against women and domestic violence. The convention was adopted by the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers on 7 April 2011. Countries ratifying the Convention obligate themselves to fully address violence against women and domestic violence in all its forms, to take measures to prevent violence against women, protect its victims and prosecute the perpetrators. Ireland ratified the Convention on International Women's Day, 2019 (Safe Ireland, 2019).

The Convention sets standards across all aspects of service provision, prevention work and criminal and civil justice remedies.

- 1) ***The EU Victims' Rights Directive*** (Citizen Information, 2021)

The EU Victims' Rights Directive is a binding legal document for all EU members. The directive sets out minimum rights for victims, wherever they are in the EU. There are a range of provisions in the Bill requiring Gardaí and other legal practitioners to shift to a victim centred response. Ireland brought the provisions of the directive into Irish law in 2015. Recognition of and referral to victims' rights organisations by Gardaí, Court staff and other legal personnel is one of the key provisions under the bill.

Irish policy and funding contexts

The primary policies and strategies in Ireland that have implications for the work of domestic violence organisations are:

Cosc Second National Strategy on the Prevention of Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based violence. (Cosc, 2021)

This document outlines a whole of government approach focused on three high level goals:

1. Change societal attitudes to support a reduction in domestic and sexual violence
2. Improve supports available to victims and survivors and hold perpetrators to account
3. Implementation of monitoring and data collection measures

Tusla pillar on domestic, sexual and gender based violence. (Tusla, 2021)

the agency was given the responsibility for provision of services to victims of Domestic, Sexual and Gender Based Violence, whether in the context of the family or otherwise. Tusla's purpose is:

To lead a coordinated approach to developing, supporting and facilitating organisations, agencies (both statutory and non-statutory) and communities in addressing the prevention of DSGBV and in providing care and protection for individuals, children and families.

Tusla is the primary funder for frontline services responding to domestic abuse. They are implementing commissioning of services as part of an ongoing restructuring process.

HSE policy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender –based violence. (HSE, 2021).

This document contains recognition of the role of HSE in responding to domestic and sexual violence. The policy states that the HSE will take all possible steps to prevent and reduce the prevalence of violence against women and domestic violence. It also seeks to ensure that all families experiencing or at risk of experiencing Domestic Violence and/or Sexual Violence will receive a continuum of supports from health and community service providers who will understand the issue and who will recognise and respond to the impact this type of violence has on health. The policy

is accompanied by a comprehensive practice guidance document for all practitioners in both agencies.

An Garda Síochána Policy on Domestic Violence (An Garda Síochána, 2021)

This policy document details how Gardaí should respond to domestic violence and all members are required to be familiar with its details. The policy is built around an understanding of the specific nature of domestic violence crime and Gardaí are required to be cognisant of the ongoing risk to the victim. The Gardaí's specific role in enforcing the Domestic Violence Act 1996 (2002, 2015, 2018) is outlined. The document contains a pro investigation and pro arrest stance; however, neither of these measures is mandatory.

Legislative framework

There are a number of legislative acts that have implications for women and children experiencing domestic violence and for domestic violence services (Citizen Information, 2021). They include:

- The revised Domestic Violence Act 2018. Domestic violence is named as a crime for the first time under this act and coercive control is criminalised.
- The Children and Family Relationships Act.
- The Children's First Act 2018.
- The Victims' of Crime Act 2017
- Data Protection Act May 2018
- The non-fatal offences against the person act 1997

Appendix 2: Collaborative inquiry implementation timeline

Phase	Implementation	Timeline
<i>Initiation</i>	Communication and dissemination of materials to all domestic violence services on Safe Ireland website	April 2017
	Visit to 27 DV organisations	May to August 2017
	Recruitment of participants	July to Sept 2017
	<i>Session 1</i>	October 2017
	Establishing the conditions for group learning Contracting the participation of co-inquirers	
<i>Launching</i>	<i>Session 2</i> Identifying shared interests to form and agreed topic for research Forming a launching question for our inquiry Establishing the conditions for group learning	December 2017
<i>Collaborative knowledge building</i>	<i>Sessions 2 – 9</i> Cycle of iterative reflection, dialogue and agreement building	December 2017- November 2018
<i>Preparing for action</i>	<i>Session 8 and 9</i> Agreement of focus for action phase and action planning	November 2018

Appendix 3: Overview of the nine collaborative inquiry sessions

Session 1 – October 24th, 2017. The focus in our first collaborative session was on initiating the inquiry. Group members shared with each other the interests and concerns that motivated them to participate in the inquiry. People had not committed to participation at this stage and were given an opportunity to learn more about the project and the process of collaborative inquiry. All participants decided on the day to sign up to the full inquiry and signed consent forms. Practical details around recording the inquiry and data were agreed.

Session 2 – December 18th, 2017. The focus of this session was on agreeing shared interests that would form the inquiry topic and to agree an overarching research question. Individual reflection, and small group dialogue followed by feedback to the full group resulted in the group agreeing that there were three aspects of our work that we wanted to inquire into. The group worked to shape and form an overarching research question that encompassed these three concerns.

Session 3 – January 22nd, 2018. In this session we focused on identifying where we would start our inquiry. After much reflection and dialogue, the group agreed to divide the inquiry into two key stages focusing on firstly, the foundations of effective domestic violence work and secondly, on our experiences and needs as lifelong learners. We took time to learn more about the process of collaborative inquiry and to agree how we would together build knowledge. We started to consciously use collaboratively inquiry skills as we moved to reflecting on specific aspects of our experience.

Session 4 – March 26th, 2018. Much data had been generated in the first three sessions in a free flowing and generally disordered manner. In session 4 we focused in a more structured and conscious way on reflecting on our experience as domestic violence workers and in dialoguing about our tacit and embodied knowledge. Sharing our reflections, we dialogued to create shared meaning about the values and concepts that underpin effective domestic violence practice and how we utilised this knowledge in practice. In this session we also explored issues in relation to our identity as social change actors and several key contextual issues.

Session 5 – April 30th, 2018. In this session we reflected on the knowledge we had collaboratively generated in the inquiry to this point and focused on making sense of this knowledge in relation to our experience as learners in the domestic violence sector. Implications for future learning and education were identified. We discussed whether we should move on to develop a curriculum or to define some key principles that would underpin a future framework. After much dialogue we agreed to focus on the latter.

Session 6 – May 29th, 2018. We started this session with a reflection and dialogue about our experience of the research process. The focus of the session was to agree core principles for a future education and learning framework. Drawing from the data we had previously generated we shaped four key principles. The issue of formal recognition was identified as a key area that needed deeper inquiry.

Session 7 – September 24th, 2018. Different perspectives in relation to attaching formal recognition to a future education and learning framework were examined by the group. We considered the possibility of not going down this route but concluded that formal recognition would help strengthen and sustain our work. The group examined various options under the QQI and other recognition structures. A decision was made to include recognition under the QQI structure in our proposed education and learning framework.

Session 8 & 9, residential sessions – November 5th and 6th, 2018. This session focused on bringing the collaborative inquiry process to a close and moving into the action phase. A number of outstanding issues were refined and clarified through further dialogue. The group reviewed and agreed our proposed education and learning framework. We collaboratively envisioned a clear structure for how this framework could be supported. The group identified and agreed clear goals for our first action phase and developed a time framed action plan. An evaluation of the process and final reflections on our experience of the inquiry was facilitated. Closing activities brought this phase of the collaborative inquiry to an end.

Appendix 4: Initial letter to domestic violence organisations

From: Niamh Wilson,
Dunfore,
Ballinfull,
Co. Sligo

19 April 2017

To: Managers of women's domestic violence services in Ireland

Dear Manager,

I am writing to you to tell you about a research study I am doing on the education needs of domestic violence workers in Ireland. I have worked in the domestic violence sector for almost 30 years. In September 2016 I left frontline work to pursue a PhD in Maynooth University. The study I am doing is focused on the education needs of domestic violence workers in Ireland and how best to respond to those needs. I have recently received ethical approval from Maynooth University for this research and am now recruiting participants from among the women's domestic violence sector in Ireland.

The primary approach employed in this research will be Participatory Action Research [PAR]. This will involve a group of staff from the domestic violence sector forming a collaborative inquiry group and working with me as co-inquirers on the study. This collaborative inquiry will happen over an 18 month period starting in September 2017 and finishing in March 2019. Co-inquiry members will be required to attend seven full days' collaborative inquiry sessions during this period. The knowledge generated by this study will be made available to the wider sector for consideration in its work to combat violence against women in intimate relationships.

I enclose a flyer inviting eligible workers (including yourself as a manager) to consider applying to join the collaborative inquiry group and would very much appreciate it if you could provide a copy to all of your staff. I would like to visit domestic violence organisations over the next 10 weeks to discuss this research further and answer any

questions you may have. I would also be delighted to talk with you or any of your team by phone should they have any queries or concerns or to respond to e-mails so please do not hesitate to contact me.

I look forward to speaking with you at a later date about this research project and the potential for participation of a staff member(s) from your organisation.

Yours sincerely,

Niamh Wilson
John and Pat Hume Fellowship
Department of Adult and Community Education
Maynooth University

niamh.wilson@nuim.ie Phone: 087 2075649



**ARE YOU INTERESTED IN
EXPLORING THE EDUCATION
NEEDS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE
WORKERS IN IRELAND?**

If you:

- Are a manager of a specialist service for women experiencing domestic violence or
- Are an advocate, support worker or refuge worker providing a service directly to women experiencing domestic violence and
- Have worked for a minimum of 4 years in a domestic violence service

you may be interested in joining a group of colleagues from the domestic violence sector in Ireland who will explore this issue.

My name is Niamh Wilson. I am organising a study in which a group of staff from domestic violence services for women will work together to inquire into the education needs of domestic violence workers in Ireland and how best to respond to those needs. Participants in this collaborative inquiry group will meet for 7 full days over an 18 month period to reflect and draw on their experiences as domestic violence workers. Knowledge produced by this collaborative inquiry group will be made available to the wider domestic violence sector for further consideration and will also be used by me in completing a PhD thesis.

If you wish to express an interest in joining the collaborative inquiry group or would like further information, please contact me at:

087-2075649 or niamh.wilson@nuim.ie

Closing date for applications to join the co-inquiry group is
June 30th, 2017.

*Niamh Wilson, John and Pat Hume Fellowship,
Department of Adult and Community Education, Maynooth University, Co. Kildare*

Appendix 6: Information sheet for prospective participants

Domestic violence workers in Ireland: a Feminist Studies response to their education needs.

Project Information

What is this research about?

This research aims to identify what kind of education programme would be most suited to the women's domestic violence sector in Ireland. The overarching research goal is to explore how the dual role of the domestic violence sector as both a social service provider and a social change agent can be supported and strengthened through education. A key feature of this research is that it will include a collaborative inquiry with members from within the domestic violence sector.

Why is this research needed?

The National Framework and Standards for Domestic Violence Organisations in Ireland (Safe Ireland 2015) is a significant step towards strengthening the domestic violence sector by setting evidence based standards for the sector. In this context, this study will explore if an education framework is required to support the consistent implementation of this framework and also to enable the Irish domestic violence movement to maintain and enhance its social change capacity.

The research will investigate if an educational framework for the domestic violence sector will support the sector to protect and consolidate its core principles, strengths achievements. In addition, like any community of practice, the sector is always learning, developing and strengthening its practice. This study aims to explore how an education framework designed specifically by and for the domestic violence sector in Ireland can support these lifelong learning needs.

How will this research be carried out?

This research will employ a Participatory Action Research [PAR] approach. This means that rather than there being an "expert" researcher/s who researches other people's experiences and contexts, that people who will be affected by the matters being studied are involved as co-inquirers. PAR is concerned with addressing issues affecting a community and with identifying practical solutions to address those issues. It is concerned with not only how solutions and changes can affect individual practice, but how they can also impact on the wider community and on social justice change.

This research process involves a group of collaborative inquirers from the women's domestic violence sector working together in a cycle of reflection and action to identify the best possible response to the education needs of domestic violence workers. As the researcher leading this study, my role will be to organise a systematic inquiry and to ensure that a safe,

open and communicative space is created while at the same time supporting the collaborative inquiry group to stay focused on the aims of the study. In addition, I will also carry out interviews with some of the key people in national support organisations in Ireland and with some managers of domestic violence education programmes in other countries.

How long is this research going to take?

This PAR project will take four years to complete and the collaborative inquiry stage is estimated to take 18 months, **commencing in September 2017 and completed by March 2019.**

What time commitment would I need to make?

The collaborative inquiry will be carried out during seven full day sessions over an 18 month period. In addition, group members will identify some changes they will make between collaborative inquiry sessions and some time for individual reflection between these sessions will be needed. Because of the time commitment required, it is recommended that workers interested in joining the collaborative inquiry group get the support of their management for their participation.

Will I receive financial support to participate?

A contribution to travel expenses will be provided and lunch, refreshments and materials will be supplied.

Who can join this collaborative inquiry group?

The collaborative inquiry group will be comprised of workers in women's domestic violence services in Ireland. In order to draw on a level of experience and knowledge that has been developed over a number of years, group members must have worked for a minimum of four years in frontline service provision for a minimum of 17.5 hours a week. This is the only essential criteria for participation in the group.

Ideally, the group will comprise of a good mix of workers holding three different roles within the domestic violence sector; service managers, support and advocacy workers and refuge workers. Inclusion of a diversity of women based on social differentials including age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and geographical location will be considered as a priority. While an attempt will be made to ensure that the inquiry group is as inclusive and representative of the diversity of women in the sector as possible, it cannot represent the domestic violence sector or speak for them.

What are the risks and benefits of participation?

It is not envisaged that participation in this collaborative inquiry will carry any substantial risks for individuals. The collaborative inquiry group will work together to identify potential risks and solutions and strategies that can prevent and minimise any negative outcomes for participants. There are a number of potential risks that you may wish to consider before consenting to join this group. They include:

- Managing the demands of frontline work and participation in this project could potentially result in members of the collaborative inquiry group experiencing increased stress or tiredness.
- Examining professional practice necessarily requires that co-inquirers are open to identifying weaknesses and failures within our own practice and within the wider sector. This can be difficult to do and may be challenging for participants.
- Sharing information and knowledge from the collaborative inquiry group with the wider sector means sharing the “good” and the “bad” news. How this will be received by the sector is not predictable at this stage but potentially, participants could find that there is some dissent from colleagues if they do not like or agree with the research findings or interpretations .

These are potential risks and they may not emerge as problems during this research. There are many solutions and strategies that collectively the group can identify and utilise to either prevent these risks from emerging in the first place or to minimise their negative impact if they do. I will liaise with organisations and service managers prior to the commencement of the research to confirm their support for individual staff member’s participation.

There are a number of potential benefits for participants and they include the opportunity to:

- Take time out of frontline work to reflect on our purpose and practice, finding space and support to restore energies and strengthen knowledge and skills
- Reflect on the wider social change aspect of domestic violence work and how we do/can integrate this into our everyday practice
- Reflect on our strengths, achievements, weaknesses and challenges and consider how education could enhance the individual worker’s and the sector’s response to domestic violence
- Be part of contributing new knowledge that will enhance the work of the domestic violence sector in Ireland and elsewhere, specifically in relation to our identify as domestic violence workers, education and recognition. These are largely unexplored areas not only in Ireland but internationally. You could be part of a research group that breaks new ground in generating knowledge in these areas.
- Be part of a collective that creates a new educational pathway to supporting and sustaining domestic violence workers and organisations
- Learn more about social research, feminist research approaches and Participatory Research and Action. Many of the collaborative inquiry methods we will use in the group can also be used to support reflective practice on an ongoing basis in your organisations.
- Add to your repertoire of experience and skills by developing competencies in research skills.

How will consent and confidentiality be protected in this research project?

Taking part in the study is entirely voluntary and a participant can withdraw their consent to participate at any stage. Consent will be negotiated with participants at different stages of the research. You can withdraw information you specifically contributed up to the submission of the project and thesis report.

You have the choice to be identified as a collaborative inquiry group member or to remain anonymous. I will protect your anonymity at each stage of the research and in subsequent research outputs .

Issues of confidentiality will be discussed on an ongoing basis by all participants. Collective decisions will be made about how to handle sensitive information and what information will be held confidential to the group.

It must be recognized that, in some circumstances, confidentiality of research data and records may be overridden by courts in the event of litigation or in the course of investigation by a lawful authority. In such circumstances, Maynooth University will take all reasonable steps within law to ensure that confidentiality is maintained to the greatest possible extent.

What will happen the information generated in the group?

The information generated by the collaborative inquiry will be used to produce a report on the education needs of domestic violence workers in Ireland. This report will be made available to the wider sector as a contribution to its ongoing work to address domestic violence. In addition, as the academic researcher pursuing a PhD I will be solely and finally responsible for the completion of a thesis report and the presentation of data and interpretations within it. Knowledge and data generated by this research will be used in subsequent research activities such as conference presentations and papers.

If you are interested in joining the collaborative inquiry group or would like more information about this research project, please do not hesitate to contact me or my academic supervisor at the contact details below.

Researcher	Academic supervisor
Niamh Wilson Department of Adult and Community Education Maynooth University Co. Kildare E-mail: Niamh.Wilson@nuim.ie Phone number: 087- 2075649	Dr. Michael Murray Department of Adult and Community Education Maynooth University Co. Kildare E-mail: michael.j.murray@nuim.ie Phone: 01- 7083591

Appendix 7: Researcher profile sent to DV organisations.

Profile Niamh Wilson

I have worked as a domestic violence advocate for almost 30 years advocating for the rights of individual women and children *and* wider social change. A core belief underpinning my work is that the rationale of the domestic violence movement is to imagine a future without violence and to act to effect the necessary change to realise this vision (Dobash and Dobash 1992). I have worked as a frontline service provider in both refuge and support and advocacy services and held roles as an educator, trainer, facilitator, researcher and community development worker supporting community responses to violence against women. For the past 11.5 years I have been the manager of a domestic violence organisation. During this time, I have carried out research and produced a number of critical studies on aspects of domestic violence in Ireland. In September 2016 I left my position as manager of Domestic Violence Advocacy Service, Sligo, Leitrim and West Cavan, to pursue a PhD study in Adult and Community Education in Maynooth University. I was privileged to be awarded the John and Pat Hume Fellowship in June of last year. This award enables me to carry out this research on a full time basis for the four year period of the PhD programme.

I have developed an understanding of the importance of education, mentoring and reflective practice as core components in the architecture that supports effective and accountable responses to the concrete needs of women and children and progresses a transformative vision for social change. My long held interest in the role of education in supporting the women's anti-violence movement to realise its mission and goals led me to Maynooth University to pursue research in these areas. In 1996, I completed an HDip in Adult and Community Education investigating how feminist education supported new domestic violence advocates and impacted on their emerging identity as feminist activists. In 2013, I completed a MEd in Adult and Community Education exploring education frameworks for domestic violence organisations in four countries.

I now propose to carry out a study deploying a Participatory Action Research [PAR] approach to investigate educational frameworks for domestic violence workers in Ireland. Utilising a feminist Participatory Action Research [PAR] approach, I aim to engage domestic violence advocates in a cycle of research, action and reflection towards the production of practical solutions to the current lack of an educational framework for the domestic violence sector in Ireland.

Appendix 8: Participant profile

NAME	TYPE OF ORGANISATION	ROLE IN ORGANISATION	LENGTH OF TIME IN DOMESTIC VIOLENCE WORK
RABIYA	Community based support information and advocacy service in provincial town	Manager	8
DEIRDRE	Large urban organisation providing range of services and responses including refuge	Training and outreach worker	9
KATHLEEN	Community based support information and advocacy service in provincial town	Support and advocacy worker	6.5
JACKIE	Large urban organisation providing range of services and responses including refuge	Support and advocacy worker	27
LORRAINE	Large urban refuge	Assistant manager	19
BRENDA	Community based support information and advocacy service in provincial town	Accommodation support worker	30
CHARLOTTE	Community based support information and advocacy service in provincial town	Support and advocacy worker	11
MOE	Community based support information and advocacy service in provincial town	Support and advocacy worker	6
LINDA	Large urban organisation providing range of services	Helpline coordinator	19
NIAMH	Maynooth University	Initiating researcher	29 years

Appendix 9: Collaborative inquiry group members full name and organisation.

Rabiya Ali, Ascend Domestic Abuse Services, Tipperary

Deirdre Barrett, ADAPT Domestic Abuse Services, Limerick

Kathleen Bourke, Laois Domestic Abuse Service

Jackie Carroll, Cope Galway Domestic Violence Services

Lorraine Donohoe, Rathmines Women's Refuge

Brenda Harvey, Domestic Violence Advocacy Services, Sligo, Leitrim and West Cavan

Charlotte Matthews, Longford Women's Link

Moe Reynolds, Longford Women's Link

Linda Smith, Women's Aid

Niamh Wilson, PhD student, Maynooth University

Appendix 10: Participant consent form

Domestic violence workers in Ireland: a Feminist Studies response to their education needs.

Consent form

Please tick each of the following statements to show that you have read and understood the information sheet and that you give your consent to participate in this research project.

Statement of consent	Tick to consent
I _____ confirm that I have read the information sheet about this research project	
I understand that the aim of the research is to explore the education needs of domestic violence workers in Ireland and how best to respond to those needs.	
I consent to participate in a collaborative inquiry group as a co-inquirer in this project.	
I agree to participate in seven full day co-inquiry sessions.	
I understand that the purpose of the collaborative inquiry is to discuss domestic violence workers education needs and is not a space for the discussion of individual cases	
I give my consent to be identified as a member of this co-inquiry group or I wish to remain anonymous but recognise that while all attempts to protect my anonymity will be taken by the researcher and co-inquiry group members, that there is a risk I may be identified by a person external to the co inquiry group (e.g. work colleague) who knows I am participating	
I understand that issues of confidentiality will be discussed on an ongoing basis. Collective decisions will be made about how to handle sensitive information and what information will be held confidential to the group.	

I understand that there may be limits to confidentiality as outlined in the information sheet	
I understand that the researcher, Niamh Wilson, is carrying out a PhD study and that data and knowledge generated from the co-inquiry will be used to complete a thesis report. The presentation of data and interpretations in this report will be the sole responsibility of the researcher	
I understand that some of the information will also be used for further publications and presentations by the researcher	
I understand that I can withdraw from this research at any time and can withdraw information I contributed up to the submission of the thesis report.	
I understand that records of the collaborative inquiry will be held confidentially for a period of up to 10 years in the Department of Adult and Community Education in Maynooth University	

Full name printed: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

If during your participation in this study you feel the information and guidelines that you were given have been neglected or disregarded in any way, or if you are unhappy about the process, please contact the Secretary of the Maynooth University Ethics Committee at research.ethics@nuim.ie or +353 (0)1 708 6019. Please be assured that your concerns will be dealt with in a sensitive manner.

Appendix 11: Collaborative inquiry group contract

Collaborative inquiry group contract agreed 24th October 2017

As members of this collaborative inquiry group we will:

- Respectfully challenge and allow ourselves to be challenged
- Share responsibility for tasks/actions between sessions appropriate to each persons' situation and access to resources (e.g. time)
- Respect group decisions
- Be mindful of ourselves and others when in the group and be open to being challenged and challenging, and supportive to each other in relation to our participation
- Work to create safety in the group so that we can explore diversity of opinion.
- Maintain confidentiality. This means that no personal information about group members will be shared outside of the group. Each member will take care to protect the dignity and anonymity of any one they worked with when sharing and reflecting on experiences as domestic violence workers. Members will not share individual people's experiences outside of the group.
- Be committed to the group and to the research. While this means coming to each session, group members also accept that people may not be able to attend due to illness or for other reasons beyond their control.
- Stay focused but also accept a level of flexibility in exploring the research questions
- Not rush to consensus and be aware of the risks of group think
- Bring our sense of humour to the group and the work we do together

Appendix 12: Approval letter from Maynooth University Ethics Research Committee

MAYNOOTH UNIVERSITY RESEARCH
ETHICS COMMITTEE
MAYNOOTH UNIVERSITY,
MAYNOOTH, CO. KILDARE, IRELAND

Dr Carol Barrett
Secretary to Maynooth University Research Ethics
Committee

16 March 2017

Niamh Wilson
Department of Adult and Community Education
Maynooth University

RE: Application for Ethical Approval for a project entitled: Domestic violence workers in Ireland: A Feminist Studies response to their education needs

Dear Niamh,

The Ethics Committee evaluated the above project and we would like to inform you that ethical approval has been granted.

Any deviations from the project details submitted to the ethics committee will require further evaluation. This ethical approval will expire on 31 March 2019.

Kind Regards,

Dr Carol Barrett
Secretary,
Maynooth University Research Ethics Committee

C.c. Dr Michael Murray, Department of Adult and Community Education

Appendix 13: A guide to reading the data.

The findings are presented chronologically. Each of the chapters presents data from one or from two successive sessions. The exception to this is where data from session 8 is combined with data from 4, 5, 6 and 7. This is because session 8 was a review session where we reviewed previous decisions made and inquired further into aspects of the research topic that participants wanted to revisit.

Overview of findings chapters

Chapter	Data generated in:
Chapter 7. Prologue: Identifying a research focus and question	Session 2 and 3
Chapter 8. Laying the foundations: Identifying the values, beliefs and knowledge that underpin effective domestic violence responses	Session 3
Chapter 9. Digging deeper: Deepening our understanding of the importance of a gendered analysis of domestic abuse	Sessions 4 and 8
Chapter 10. Defining the distinctive nature of domestic violence work.	Session 4 and 8
Chapter 11. An approach to education and learning for domestic violence workers The benefits of a recognised education and learning framework for domestic violence work An approach to education and learning for domestic violence work	Session 5 and 8 Session 6, 7 and 8
Chapter 12. Group members experience of our collaborative inquiry: Learning, connection and empowerment.	Session 9

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