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**What's the Story on Domestic Violence?**

**(Draft)**

"What is meant by 'reality'? It would seem to be something very erratic, very undependable – now to be found in a dusty road, now in a scrap of newspaper in the street, now in a daffodil in the sun. It lights up a group in a room and stamps some casual saying. It overwhelms one walking home beneath the stars and makes the silent world more real than the world of speech – and then there it is again in an omnibus in the uproar of Piccadilly. Sometimes, too, it seems to swell in shapes too far away for us to discern what their nature is. But whatever it touches, it fixes and makes permanent. That is what remains over when the skin of the day has been cast into the hedge; that is what is left of past time and of our loves and hates. Now the writer, as I think, has the chance to live more than other people in the presence of this reality. It is his business to find it and collect it and communicate it to the rest of us."

(Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, 1929. Penguin edition 1993:99)

## Abstract

My research focused on women's strategies of survival living with abuse, using Freirian education with a group of women. As a worker, facilitator and researcher I kept a research diary and personal diary to document the process. However, over time, the boundary between 'research' and 'personal' issues became fuzzy. I spent many months wrestling with notions of my-self and my role.

The aim was to develop the 'capacitation' and self-transformation of group members through engagement in social action, as we developed our ideas I became aware that I was beginning to experience my own 'self-transformation'. The contents of my diaries became clearer and changed from being 'the ramblings of a whining pseudo academic' to 'biographical research data'. My new problem became academic justification – in my confusion I turned to that all knowing entity Google - and discovered I wasn't 'self-indulgent' but was in the process of writing 'autoethnography'.

To whom it may concern,

The paper you are about to read is an interpretation of events that took place during 2001 through to the present. They represent reflections on experiences and memories of moments of being that were felt by the author whilst she was writing, reflecting, engaging and talking to this story, which in the beginning, was about educating women who had experienced 'domestic violence' - how to raise awareness about strategies of resistance and social action, and consider how the process of engaging in discussion and social action would be self-transformative to those involved. However, the more they talked, the more difficult it became to identify and explain the 'domestic violence experience' – the everydayness of living with a never ending pursuit of *rationalising irrationality*. It is not a discrete act, but a way of being that eventually becomes a system of understanding - a way of life. They began to realise, that to try and convey what *living with madness* was like 'within a discourse governed by reason…is an undertaking, which at the least, is fraught with difficulty. Madness is, after all, defined, one might say constructed, by its very *difference* from reason.' (Stone, 2000: 18)

And so you are invited to read a testimony to their endeavour to communicate the 'domestic violence experience'. Their intention, to develop a transformative politics, as it transpired, occurred in the act of telling, and the process of reflecting on and writing this account. In their search to develop an educational tool with which to train 'others', they came to realise that the tool was the story of how they tried to develop a strategic response to 'domestic violence' in the city where they lived. And now we ask that you join in the dialogue with the writer 'so that the process of mediation

between abuse and culture may proceed toward validation of the experience and transformation of the culture.' (Lovrod, 1998: 32, quoted in Stone 2004: 30).

While you are reading, it is helpful to remember that 'identity is not an object but a system of understanding...and narrative is the form of meaning that is particularly suited for expressing unity and purpose.' (Polkinghorne 1996: 299-300). If you are ready, we shall begin....

One day while she was sitting listening to a woman talk about her life, she began to wonder how we come to understand the stories we are told. It seemed to her that in our attempts to respond, empathise, and advocate for women we somehow lose the essence of what was really being said. She wasn't so naïve as to think that we could consider every individual case, that was impossible given the numbers of women they were talking to, and of course there had to be some sort of unified response, and she was grateful to the one's who had gone before and made things so much better. But even as she recognised the advances that had been made, she knew that the way they categorised, quantified, theorised and identified with 'abused women' everywhere, they were somehow missing something...she just couldn't quite figure how to explain what it was.

The thing was that now violence against women had been acknowledged as a social problem and everyone agreed that it existed, as if now that it had been named, it was real - they had the feminists to thank for that...which she did (Dobash & Dobash 1984, 1992; Brownmillar 1976; Carlen & Worrall 1987;

Kelly 1988). And they were now just beginning to celebrate the fact that for 30 years they had worked hard to raise awareness and fight for the cause (www.womensaid.co.uk). Yet within this version of the past, of advancement within the movement as an onward and upward struggle, there was something about violence against women becoming a category of analysis that led her to think that wasn't it time they also thought about how women lived within the category…how do women identify with their life as a social problem?  Joseph Davis had been thinking about similar things when he explained that his work looked at 'how understandings of victims have been shaped by specific ways of thinking about and acting upon persons with troubled identities…how persons have been conceptualised within therapeutic practices…and how this flow of meanings has an "upward" movement into public culture and therapeutic rationale and a "downward" movement, through therapy, into the lived experience of those seeking help' (2005: 12-13).

Sometimes it seemed that the women she spoke to lived with a contradiction, because now that everyone agreed that domestic violence was wrong and '*shouldn't be tolerated'*, and that abuse was a violation of your human rights…didn't that make living with it different?  When characters from soap operas like  'little Mo' from Eastenders, and the numerous 'victims' from Coronation Street, and films like 'Sleeping with the enemy', all showed the plight of victims, why was it still so hard to identify with 'being a victim' and why was it so hard to get help, and how could she as a 'worker in the field' do more than empathise and advocate?  She knew there was more to it than

that…and as she pondered she listened to the woman sitting opposite

explain…


"You know if I were to see somebody from all that time ago,
they would say
I had no idea you were going through that…
because they were normal…
Well, yes…
they seem to be so called normal…
but looking back you don't know whether they are or not,
because it's a façade most of us put on.
Life is an act really…isn't it?

Because, sometimes I look at pictures of myself before I met him
and I think
I wish I could go back to that person
that was oblivious to mental abuse,
do you understand what I mean?

That confused feeling that was constantly
'what am I doing?
Is it going to last forever?
When's it going to end?
I want to go back to when I never thought like that…

And I wonder now how I did it.
It was as if it was all done to prove I wasn't ill or a weak woman.
I mean I loved him,
but he made it impossible to live there
and in the end it was making me into something
I didn't really like in myself.
I felt as if I was in danger of losing my immortal soul…
when I think about how I live,
I mean I feel as if I don't walk along the floor…
I slither."

"But sometimes I think we helped them be what they were…
because we did everything they wanted us to…
because you just get into the habit of giving in.
I mean you know it's not normal,
you just want it to work out.
The person you were when you met knows it's not normal
but later on you start thinking maybe it is…
maybe it is me…
when you're a normal person you know it's not right
but as the years go on
day after day

you start to think
do I deliberately try to annoy him…?"

And who was she, this woman sitting opposite?  She was a woman like any woman, her name was Mrs Brown or some other Mrs, Miss or Ms…and she was similar but different to so many she had heard before (Fine 1998).  Yet there was something in the way they talked, and the way she listened that made her feel she had to do something with the stories being told.  But it wasn't until much later it became clearer why they could draw her in like a will o' the wisp, it was as if there was something in the *act of telling* of the story that became the reason for telling it in an absurd back to front reality that she could never get hold of…there was never a beginning.  And in the process of listening about *experience* she kept thinking about how turning their stories into academic text seemed so inadequate…she knew that this was all 'really rich data', but somehow to call it 'data' seemed offensive in a way because they were testimonies to lives that women had lived and now that she had heard them, she had become a witness…Did that mean that she had a responsibility to tell their story?  Because testimonials can do that, they bear witness to an event and ask you the reader to sit on the jury, to identify your own expectations and values with the one's you are being told, they cannot be ignored and in a way we are obligated to take notice (Beverley, 2000).  And she did feel that somehow it was her duty, or that at least she should 'do something', but like so many of them said 'at the end of the day we're all too old, too tired, too busy, too confused, and too jaded for all this…and what we are all feeling is…its fine talking… but we would like to see some action…'.

And who could blame them?  Who was she to them?  What did she know?

And how would she be able to make anything happen?


She had the feeling that somehow to mould what they were saying into a

discreet narrative would pin it down to a place it didn't fit – as though their

explanations of feelings were somehow being lost in translation and given an

order and linearity they didn't possess.  She wasn't the only one to think this

because Shoshana Felman (1995) had similar thoughts when she wrote about

the 'unrepresentable' in her teaching about testimony and trauma - she

develops an idea of a *precocious testimony* … 'the very principle of poetic

insight and the very core of the event of poetry which makes…language –

through its breathless gasps – speak ahead of its knowledge and awareness

and break through the limits of its own conscious understanding'… and she

goes on to say how poetry can speak beyond its means and is able to testify

to a half-known trauma, the repercussions of which, in their 'uncontrollable

and unanticipated nature, still continue to evolve even in the very process of

the testimony.'  (ibid 1995: 29-30, quoted in Stone, 2004: 26-27).   And they

could all testify to that, because by being in the group and talking, telling their

stories, planning for events, and testifying to what had happened, on

reflection, seemed to be the only way it could be understood as it had evolved

as a process…it was as though self transformation occurred in the act of

telling.  It was situational and the identity of the women with them-selves and

'others' was always changing in context…this was why they were finding it so

difficult to convey what had been happening these past three years…

**Deconstructing the beginning…**

Before we begin at the beginning there are some things you need to know to understand how things worked out.  Because it wasn't supposed to be like this, it was supposed to be a nice neat account of how a group of women learned through social action, and in a way that's what they did, but in a more messy 'real life project as it is lived' (Lather, 1993) type of way… and so what you are about to read is presented as a dialectical discussion between the author and her-self, and to explain the unfolding plot the story starts here at the end as 'the consequences precede the story because they are enmeshed in the act of telling' (Bochner & Ellis, 2000: 746).  Although the story appears to start at the beginning of their journey, it wasn't until probably half way through that she realised that her personal narrative mattered and 'in reality', she realised that she had directed the scenes and although they had all played their parts, she was author and co-author of the stories presented.  But she didn't know this then.  It was in the act of 'writing as a method of enquiry' that this became apparent – as the story played out while she was writing she began to see things differently (Richardson, 2000:  923-948).

Without her diary none of this would have happened, she owed it all to her diary, in which, she pulled her-self apart, she argued, agreed reflected and discussed her role as worker, researcher, participant – a dialogic process. Other's have done this and recommended the 'self-awareness of the anthropologist in the field be explored through such forms as the diary, which should be seen as integral to the anthropological endeavour'  (Okely 1992:

6).  And they were anthropological, they examined the exhibits of their past, their photos, family history, domestic violence leaflets and videos, and transcripts of their discussions were all presented and considered and documented in her diary.  In the final acts she came to realise that her preliminary research aims 'to consider the self-transformative process' of the women she had worked with were as much to do with her self-transformation as theirs. And as she hadn't even considered her-self as a player in the game despite her intention to undertake participatory action research, she realised that there was more to self-reflection than looking in the mirror – confirming to yourself that yes you are a researcher and yes you have thought of your-self!

Initially she had two diaries – the research diary and the personal.  The research diary discussed 'the research' which involved planning meetings, action agenda's, outcomes, targets, how the group would expand, campaign and take social action to raise awareness of violence against women and in the process she would consider how women learned through being involved. Her personal diary talked about her life, how she felt, what she was doing in work, in research in her life, how it made her think, how she was confused. After some time she began to cross over - there wasn't a distinction, her 'life had become a "text," "text" had become her [my] "life". Writing the text was transforming her [my] life.  Living her [my] life was living her [my] text.  The text took her [me] over, overtook her [me], took her [me] where she [I] did not know she [I] would go' (Richardson, 1998: 466). Perhaps it was because she 'couldn't live in any of the worlds offered…one writes because one has to create a world in which to live' (Okely 1984, quoted in Bochner, 2000: 746).

The reasons can be discussed later, for now lets just try and understand how this story came to be and why it is being told in this way.  Instead of an abstract academic journal that allows 'facts to speak for themselves', it is presented as a narrative fiction - a story that you are part of.  You as the reader are invited along the journey of a research project as it was lived over a period of three years.  Please engage with the text and de/construct your own version of the process as it occurs to you when you read - take in – digest - interpret - the different themes and theoretical considerations that are introduced.

> "Come with me, reader.  I am toying with you, yes, but for a real reason.  I am asking you to enter the confusion with me, to give up the ground with me…Enter that lostness with me.  Live in the place where I am, where the view is murky, where the connecting bridges and orienting maps have been surgically stripped away."  (Slater, 2000: 163 quoted in Stone, 2004:29)

As you take your first steps into the story it is helpful to think of the different states of being – of the researcher-self, the self and multiple selves that form the moments of being that we experience – it was the sense of experiencing a multiplicity of selves and identification with other women's versions of them-selves that informed the writer while writing – that this was not one story, but many, there was not one author, but many, and so the problem became how to write this in a way that 'does justice' to the many voices contained within.

Not that moments of being are neatly packaged in quite the same way in 'real' life, but the words are trying to represent different feelings and interpretations at similar times – the linear time of the research process and at the same time an interpretive - linear time example - of reminiscences of past times – the memories that come to mind between the acts we live in.  To let you know this is happening the experiences and ideas are presented as a change in font.  So… academic / research speak is times new roman, the person / self / voices of the others is Arial.  Obviously there is an overlap, because I write now in Arial so what is this?  This is the voice of the writer who is occasionally beginning to arrive at a place where she is seemingly semi-comfortable with the multi-layered voices of her-self…?

As you may recall, the underlying theme to all of this began, as she said, with her preoccupation with how we communicate our ideas, from the women telling their story to feminists campaigning for a cause, to academics writing up their thesis, we all rely on our skills of communication.  For a long time she tried to keep the stories separate, hers and 'the women's', but how was she to write it?  How do you keep the two levels going at the same time and explain the way research changes and is adapted along the way, and communicate it effectively, without losing the multi-layered meanings that occur in 'real' life?  She didn't want to lose the women's voices, they were there, sometimes she couldn't tell between them, it seemed as though all their voices were enmeshed together.   And though she recognised that she didn't have the 'right to speak for others' she knew that 'as a qualitative researcher, we can more easily write as situated, positioned authors, giving up, if we choose, our

authority over the people we study, but not the responsibility of *authorship* of our texts.' (Richardson 1990:  28)  She knew she was responsible for what was being written, but she wanted to keep the 'others' voices in there too. She kept thinking about Patti Lather's (1993) 'discourse of the real' and Virginia Woolf's writing on moments of being - how to convey the multitude of reasons people have for making a decision about what they do and why they do it as situated agents within their own lives.  And then she met Art Bochner and Carolyn Ellis who reminded her that 'the texts produced under narrative inquiry would be stories that create the effect of reality, showing characters embedded in the complexities of lived moments of struggle, resisting the intrusions of chaos, disconnection, fragmentation, marginalisation, and incoherence, trying to preserve or restore the continuity and coherence of life's unity in the face of unexpected blows of fate that call one's meanings and values into question.' (Bochner & Ellis, 2000: 744)

And that was what she had spent months agonising over – how to convey what Art and Carolyn had so succinctly said.   Do you remember that initially she had wanted to know how to 'create the conditions necessary to enable women experiencing abuse to recognise their resistance and learn from their experience to take social action and change their perceived position.'  And she thought she could do this by working with a small group of women in a way that enabled them to identify opportunities, barriers and constraints, working against women trying to gain a voice in domestic violence discourse. The idea was to write a collective story that 'displayed an individual's story by narrativizing the experiences of the social category to which the individual

belongs…' (Richardson 1990: 25-26), and thereby develop a sense of shared consciousness and transformative political action.

Her dilemma was how to write about these two levels of reality – taking social action and becoming part of domestic violence discourse in practice and 'Communicating for Change' (McHale, 2004); and their reflections on how they experienced and rationalised abuse as situated selves – it seemed to her, an impossible task.  She became a literary shopaholic, seduced by the latest journals, lured by a good looking cover, she became convinced that somebody 'out there' had the answer…and one day in desperation she turned to that all knowing entity – Google and typed in 'autoethnography'.  It was a serendipitous link from Pat Chambers (2003) she introduced her to Andrew Sparkes (2002) who introduced her to Ellis and Bochner (2002).  Meeting Ellis, Bochner and Sparkes, she realised that there was a whole group of them meeting up for some time and she hadn't known, they helped her to understand that there was a way out of this feeling of impossibility which she had become trapped in – the *impossibility of me* – the idea that as a researcher *and* participant in our own research we are continuously analysing and self reflecting on our-selves and act as a constant referent – the observer and observed in the research process – there was something about the way everything within their research seemed to re-inform itself that she needed to try and understand.  Without an autoethnographic method to rely on, the language with which to engage and translate their 'data' and artefacts, did not exist.  Not only did she have to write about her position in 'reality', but also there was the overwhelming dilemma of how to write of the madness felt by

many abused women as a lived reality, and that's where Brendan Stone (2004) came in.  He let her know about the problems others had had in writing madness in 'trauma theory'  – where 'writing without power…is an ethical mode of being because it is predicated not on a desire for total understanding, but allows for an excess – the unknown and the foreign which is outside of comprehension, and approachable only via art, via the elliptical, the sidelong, the metaphorical.'  (Stone, 2004: 30)  With these 'others' to help her it was beginning to seem possible to be able to write about what had happened, to restage the events as they appeared to her in a way that tried to 'allow the other – in its very distress – to be heard, may be to re-experience the roots of the distress and disorder which have precisely engendered, or been engendered by madness.  Yet it may only be in such a mode of narrative existence that an authentic and therefore ethical, relation with the self…is possible.'  (Stone, 2004:  31) Read on and see what you think…


**When they started….she was writing the Diary of a self indulgent researcher**


They had been using the Duluth, Multi-Agency Women's Support Group education programme called 'In Our Best Interests' to facilitate a women's group they held every fortnight – there were others, but in the end it was Betty, Gail, Joanne, Jean and her. It was based on Freire's (1970) ideas – after a while they realised that they wanted to develop the concientization and  'capacitation' of group members (Carmen & Sobrado 2000), which meant that they wanted to engage in dialogue and be part of a critical learning environment to develop the skills necessary to make social changes. The idea behind this type of participatory action research is that facilitators try to

reflect on the work of the group and try to ensure that change occurs on an individual and structural level – learning occurs through praxis (Carr & Kemmis 1986; Kling 2000; Sung Sil Lee Sohng 2000; Wadsworth 1998). So they tried to engage on two levels, the individual 'concientization' of members as they came to recognise their 'positionality', which is the way 'one's identity is akin (and defined) as a political point of departure, as a motivation for action, and as a delineation of one's politics.' (Alcoff 1988: 431); and they began to work towards using what they had learned to influence and engage in domestic violence work in the city where they lived. Their intention was to be active and learn through engagement, their ideas didn't develop in an abstract sense but were developed in praxis. They had grown tired of being a 'talking shop' they wanted to see the response to other women change, their intention was to improve things for other women similar to themselves and develop a strategic social and political response to violence against women. And that's how she started using a diary so much, because this method recommended reflecting on your role as a facilitator, and to feed your ideas back into your work, which she did (McGill & Beaty 1992). And through these reflections she recognised that they needed to clarify ideas about the group, by considering things like – were they 'empowering', who was in the group, why did they focus on women, which women were they talking to?

**After a while…she wondered where do we get out ideas about domestic violence from?**


They started to think about where they got their ideas from about domestic violence in the first place.  Because in order to recognise your 'positionality' and put yourself in a wider social context they needed to understand how they came to understand what abuse was.  A woman called Teresa de Laurentis (1986) explained that she had recognised some time ago that subjectivity changes according to social and historical context, and that women needed to engage in a reflective process and practice to understand this.  She described a 'self analysing practice' that gives agency to the individual.  Alcoff (1988) used Teresa's point and related it to identity politics and said that 'by combining identity politics with the concept of the subject as positionality, we can conceive of the subject as non-essentialised and emergent from historical experience and yet retain our political ability to take gender as an important point of departure. Thus we can say at one and the same time that gender is not natural, biological, universal, ahistorical or essential and yet still claim that gender is relevant because we are taking gender as a position from which to act politically' (Alcoff 1988: 433).


Using these writers she was able to consider and focus on the experiences of 'abused' women as a distinct social category, and to begin thinking about which women they were talking to (Fine 1998).  During this time she used grounded theory on some of their initial discussions (Henwood & Pidgeon 1995), and developed the idea of an overarching theme of *identifying with* a possibility of change or having a *lack of identity* with change for women experiencing abuse.  She began to consider how

domestic violence discourse in itself shaped women's perceptions of their experience

of abuse and she began to direct her attention to the importance of identity as a

'system of understanding' (Polkinghorne 1996) in the process of naming, taking

action and surviving abuse – and how within this process they were a part of the

discourse that had shaped the way they thought, and was continuing to shape theirs

and other women's perceptions of abuse.

**Sometime after that…she thought about being educated…**

By thinking about their own 'systems of understanding' they started to think about

how they themselves and 'other' women became educated about 'abuse' and

'domestic violence' – how it is named, how it is experienced, how it is resisted, how it

is lived, on an everyday level. She started to consider how their ideas seemed to

straddle two levels. They were trying to develop the group as a campaigning group

that would inform policy and raise awareness amongst local agencies and the

community to improve the response to women experiencing abuse; and at the same

time she was interested in how the group themselves experienced this process and

reflected on their own feelings on what had happened to them in the past and how this

informed their ideas and involvement in the group. She was getting increasingly

confused about her role, facilitating the group to make changes, and facilitating the

group as a researcher trying to observe what was happening, and at the same time

desperately trying to record anything and everything that became 'significant.'

To facilitate her, they began to meet at different times, in a different location so that

the context could shape the discussion…or that at least different ideas could be

discussed.  Again the diary became the sounding board for what they thought was going on – herself as a worker, herself as a researcher, the participants, and the facilitator.   She met some really interesting writers during this time that really helped her think about what they were doing.  Jean Barr's (1999) Liberating Knowledge - research, feminism and adult education; Anne Ryan's (2001)  Feminist Ways of Knowing – towards theorising the person for radical adult education;  Jenny Horsman's (2000) Too Scared to Learn – women, violence and education;  Mojab & MacDonalds (2001) study 'aims at contributing to the debate on issues of informal learning and begins from a premise that learning is a socially constructed phenomena and, as such, is "genderised", "racialised", and shaped by other social formations including class or immigrant status.'(Mojab & MacDonald 2001: 2)  These writers, and Lave (1996) and Wenger's (1998) work on communities of practice helped her think about situated learning and context and how their group 'learned' and were part of a wider community of practice and how groups can be socially excluded from learning (www.infed.org.uk).

**After what seemed like a long time…it occurred to her that some women don't speak until they are spoken to…**

She realised that if we don't speak until we are spoken to then how can we begin to tell stories.  By meeting regularly, recording the group discussions and working toward developing 'good practice' in the city, they were engaging in social action. But she still needed to try and understand what the women thought about being involved in the group, how they came to be in the group, how they identified with their action/involvement and how they located their 'positionality'.  She didn't want to

repress their stories using a question and answer method of enquiry (Mishlar 1986). One day as she handed out one of the transcripts of their discussions one of the women said it looked like a play and that their parts read like actors speaking, this planted the seed of the idea of using story, image, art to convey their feelings. They reflected on the things they had said and tried to locate and contextualise their understanding of what had happened as actors in their own reconstructed versions of their past. It was around this time that she began to consider the narrative approach set out by Milner (2001), Milner & O'Byrne (2002) and Bruner (1990, 1991), she liked the idea that there are no 'real' or 'true' understandings that re-storying the past might enable more positive views of the self to come forward. Polkinghorne's (1996) article about changing from a 'victimic to agentic life plot' also fit with what they were doing. As she reflected on their actions and how they were able or not able to act, what worked against them, what worked with them…the whole notion of how 'domestic violence' work – campaigning, policies, funding, training, awareness raising – could be seen as a performance. She began to consider how their work, and their involvement re-informed their actions. How opportunities were shaped, allowed to flourish, or hindered by the movement they were trying to be a part of, and that they and were located within the discourse and through their action, stories and experiences they might be able to influence 'other' peoples perceptions of 'domestic violence' in the city.

**Does life imitate research or research imitate life…?**

Her life as a research participant was beginning to feel like her 'real' life…and in her real-research life she was a participant observer of what sometimes appeared to be a dictatorial 'other' self, the research project manager, who embarked on a machiavellian pursuit of 'her' research aims…all the while maintaining a semblance of detachment and otherness that never really quite convinced… her-self at least. All this time she had been working to maintain her role on the outside to facilitate the work of the group – advocate, multi-agency co-ordinator, trainer. This straddling of the different spaces had always been an issue. Her role as a 'provider' and 'identifier' of services had always been part of the process of understanding of how it all worked. Who bought and sold the services was the name of the game. And as they had talked for so long about how to communicate their ideas, to try and get people to reflect on what 'domestic violence' means as a lived reality, they decided to present their 'events of abuse' as displays that could be experienced at an 'action planning workshop' she had been asked to organise so that they might write a strategy for a multi-agency response to domestic violence for the city. Although they felt uncomfortable calling their pieces 'art installations', because they weren't 'real artists', that is what they were – exhibits of experiences of their lives – they communicated their idea in a way that their voices and text wasn't able to . Being present at the displays, to explain and discuss them with the participants the group were able to contextualise what was being presented. They had achieved what they set out to do, to educate the audience and 'get people to talk to themselves: "Yeah…how do I feel about this issue?" This requires communicative experiences.

Thus, the most effective communication epitomizes and provokes such thought within the confines of the available opportunities' (McHale, 2004: 214).

All the time she maintained her position and adhered to the rules of engagement – to be professional, to be a researcher, to be reflective, to be involved, to record events, to write her diary… about her research, her positions, her life, being a mother, being a wife, being…A. N. Other, a category, a body experiencing life as defined by 'others' (Smith 1987).

In the midst of documenting a project as it was lived, she realised she was documenting her life as it was lived. And as she remembered, recalled, re-visited, her thoughts and ideas and identified with her 'positionality' she realised that she was 'working the hyphen' that Fine (1998) talked about, and that the plot to engage in social action had masked the sub plot of her changing identity with the 'domestic violence experience' and that their aim to devise a training tool to raise awareness in the community, as it transpired, became the story of the process of devising a training tool to raise awareness of her-self and 'others'…and so, using autoethnography, our story enabled us to have a conversation with ourselves, to invite readers into the dialogue and widen their understanding (Ellis & Bochner, 2000).

**Who were 'we' in the end?**

Who were we, the women we've been talking about, the others, us, the women who may or may not buy into the cause…the patriarchal cause? The one's who don't want to be 'victims', who are not sure if they are 'feminists'. Sometimes its assumed they

suffer from 'false consciousness' because they don't identify with the category that they are given.  We all come with a past, we know 'oppression', we know 'sexism', we know 'abuse', but it is possible to buy into part of the category, use the parts to fit our ideas for now, until we decide on our future identity, we are being and becoming as we engage in the dialogue. Is it our socialisation and the social construction of our reality, that makes us agree to the rules of engagement that shapes our beliefs, our actions and thoughts…that men are like this and women are like that…like Gail said, "I'm a little bit confused now, looking back, because I say I want it equal but then I think, hang on a minute I think you should do just a little bit more for me." That confusion reigns is a positive, our position is always changing as we identify with our position and locate ourselves from what has gone before, and what we expect to happen in the future, all we can do is act on the opportunities that are available to us at the time – and by using her diary to explore her self awareness it became apparent that discourse on domestic violence forms the backdrop against which action takes place. Her initial conundrum, why didn't women identify with being a 'victim' started to make more sense when she located their experience in the culture of domestic violence working which can serve to reinforce a stereotypical notion of an 'abused woman'.  And perhaps they never did see themselves as 'victims' because they weren't -  they managed bad situations with the tools that were available to them at the time, they were sophisticated strategists maintaining their family system in the line of fire, anything but a victim, and it all depends on which way you look at it.  The contradiction, turned out to be domestic violence discourse itself, which constantly *asked* the women what they wanted but didn't actually *listen* to them speak.

Now you have read up to here, perhaps you think that this is a torch song, an elegy to all the women who have been part of this endeavour to understand what Jean called, *the awakening* – if you take a minute to imagine that you are slowly opening your eyes to the possibility that there is another version of reality where all the women you may have been thinking about are holograms, each experiencing events that are similar yet different from each other, and the story itself looks like a kaleidoscope of multiple discourses that transform the reader as they engage with the text, each turn allows a new meaning – a different way of looking at what 'domestic violence' means if you look at it this way...

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