

# Women's experience of violence in the aftermath of the Black Saturday bushfires

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## ADDENDA

p. 36, footnote at end of paragraph 2: The theory of sacrifice is exemplified and contextualised in the story of Jesus Christ (The Holy Bible: King James Version, 1769). This example assists in defining the concept of 'scapegoats' and clarifies the components of sacrifice as theorised by Girard (2005) and others (see for example, Keenan, 2005; Reineke, 1997; Weir, 1995). In considering a gendered analysis, the bible narrative demanded that Jesus Christ be a man, as a woman of that time and place would have been prohibited from taking the leadership role he took. Although aspects of the New Testament foreground women (such as resurrection appearances to women first, and the roles of his mother, Mary, and the prostitute, Mary Magdalene), the authors of the gospels were men of their time, and translations over two millennia continue to interpret the bible through the lens of patriarchal men and cultures. The result is that the story of Jesus Christ is a male construct and his is the sacrifice that is epitomised above that of the women who populate the New Testament. Even though Jesus Christ is portrayed as advocating for women, the women's voices themselves are absent.

p. 71, Map 3 caption: The stars indicate three towns that were part of a project entitled, 'Advancing Country Towns'. Although this project has no relevance to this thesis, the map was the best available to indicate the location of towns mentioned in the thesis.

## Contents

Abstract.....	5
Declaration.....	6
Acknowledgements.....	7
Dedication.....	9
Acronyms.....	10
Definitions.....	11
Conventions adopted in the thesis.....	12
1: Introduction.....	13
Context.....	13
Background.....	14
Structure of the thesis.....	16
Significance of the study.....	18
2: Literature review on women and disasters.....	22
Introduction.....	22
Gender and society.....	23
Women marginalised in disaster management.....	25
Theories of gender construction – learning masculinity and femininity.....	26
Socially constructed gender inequity.....	29
Theories of sacrifice.....	35
Women as scapegoats.....	38
Renegotiating gender boundaries in disaster.....	39
No windfall for women in disaster.....	41
Gender and violence.....	43
Gender and disaster.....	46
Higher global female mortality in disasters.....	47
Australian context for gender and disaster research.....	52
Disaster and domestic violence.....	53
Explanations for increased violence against women.....	57
The under-reporting of violence against women in disasters.....	60
Violence and disaster in Australia.....	63
Conclusion.....	65
3: Methodology.....	67
Context.....	67
Ethics and recruitment procedures.....	77
Data recording and analysis.....	79
The sample.....	80
Difficulty in recruiting women.....	81
4: Surviving Black Saturday.....	84
Introduction.....	84
Stay or go bushfire preparation policy.....	85
Those who stayed.....	91
The day after.....	94
Expectations of masculinity.....	95
Women alone.....	99
Pressures after the fires.....	100
Stressors.....	104
Increased alcohol and drug abuse.....	108
Psychological effects of disaster.....	110
Re-emergence of past trauma.....	114
Relationships in crisis.....	116
Closer to divorce.....	122
Conclusion.....	123

5: Violence against women after disaster.....	125
Introduction .....	125
Findings of increased violence against women after Black Saturday .....	126
The link between domestic violence and disaster .....	127
No data on domestic violence after Black Saturday .....	128
‘No data, no problem’ .....	140
Possible explanations for post-disaster domestic violence .....	142
Theory 1: Disaster unmasks existing domestic violence.....	143
Theory 2: Disaster exacerbates women’s vulnerability and men’s use of violence .....	147
Theory 3: A culture of denial .....	153
Women affirm increased domestic violence after Black Saturday.....	159
Real domestic violence? .....	165
Conclusion .....	167
6: Privilege and sacrifice .....	169
Introduction .....	169
Opportunity after disaster to reinforce patriarchy.....	170
Opportunity seized after Black Saturday .....	176
Unequal access to economic power .....	177
Violence and its denial.....	181
Happily ever after in the gender order .....	182
‘Poor men’ – more valued, more deserving of empathy .....	186
Sacrifice.....	187
Women’s sacrifice after Black Saturday .....	189
Pressure not to speak: ‘How can I complain?’ .....	192
Inadequate specialist and community service response to domestic violence.....	195
Inadequate emergency response to domestic violence .....	201
Conclusion .....	209
7: Conclusion and future actions .....	211
Key findings.....	213
Recommendations for future action .....	214
1: Prioritise domestic violence.....	215
2: Inadequate data .....	216
3: Entrenched gender roles .....	217
4: Women’s sacrifice.....	218
Recommendations for future research .....	219
Conclusion .....	220
References .....	222
Appendix 1: Depiction of heroes after Black Saturday .....	241
Appendix 2: Participant information and consent, and ethics approvals.....	246
Appendix 3: Recruitment flyer.....	254
Appendix 4: Interview schedules.....	255
Appendix 5: Relationship characteristics.....	256

## Abstract

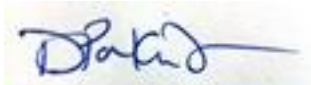
This thesis documents the first Australian research to interview women about their experiences of domestic violence after catastrophic disaster. As such research is rare in developed countries, it addresses a gap in the disaster literature. Interviews with 30 women in two shires in Victoria confirmed that domestic violence increased following the Black Saturday bushfires on 7th February, 2009. The scant research that exists internationally indicates that not only is the notion of 'women and children first' a myth, but that women are disproportionately affected by disasters primarily as a result of their poverty relative to men and prescribed gender roles. This research found that women experiencing increased male violence were silenced in preference of supporting suffering men – men who had been heroes in the fires or were traumatised or unemployed as a result of the disaster. The silencing was evident in the lack of statistics on domestic violence in the aftermath of Black Saturday, the neglect of this issue in recovery and reconstruction operations, and the responses to women's reports of violence against them by legal, community and health professionals. Three broad explanations for increased domestic violence after Black Saturday are identified – drawn from empirical findings from the field and the research literature. Theoretical concepts from two disparate fields – sacrifice and male privilege – help to explain a key finding that women's right to live free from violence is conditional. Indeed, the aftermath of Black Saturday presents Australians with the opportunity to see how deeply embedded misogyny is and how fragile our attempts to criminalise domestic violence and hold violent men accountable for their actions. The post-disaster period – characterised as it is by men in uniforms on the ground working, saving, rescuing and restoring; powerful imagery about the role of wives and mothers; increased violence by men; mandatory care-loads for women; and the suffering of good men – presents fertile ground for the fortification of male hegemony. Yet, post-disaster change does not have to be regressive, reinstating and reinforcing the traditional inequitable structure – a structure that has high costs for men and women. An emergency management response to disaster that has embedded gender equity at all levels, together with education of communities on the contribution of strict gender roles to suffering in disaster's aftermath, could exemplify and hasten a more equal society where men's violence against women is rare.

## Declaration

The work contained in this thesis has not been previously submitted to meet the requirements for an award at this or any other higher education institution. To the best of my knowledge, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made and clearly acknowledged.

Under the Copyright Act 1968, this thesis must be used only under the normal conditions of scholarly fair dealing. In particular no results or conclusions should be extracted from it, nor should it be copied or closely paraphrased in whole or in part without the written consent of the author. Proper written acknowledgement should be made for any assistance obtained from this thesis.

I certify that I have made all reasonable efforts to secure copyright permissions for third-party content included in this thesis and have not knowingly added copyright content to my work without the owner's permission.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Debra Parkinson', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Debra Parkinson

14/11/2014

## Acknowledgements

Memories of the women I met through this research stay with me. Their stories of what happened on the 9<sup>th</sup> February, 2009 and in its long aftermath reveal the tribulation and assaults they experienced. The risks they took in participating in this research – and their strength in doing it anyway – become evident. I join them in their hope and belief that research can effect positive changes and prevent others suffering in the same way.

In 2010, Professor Denise Cuthbert agreed to take on the supervision of this PhD thesis. Professor Cuthbert supervised this thesis alone until 30<sup>th</sup> July 2011 when she became an external associate supervisor. I will be forever grateful for her encouragement, her careful and insightful advice throughout, and her quick attention to my requests. From August 2011, Denise was joined by my co-supervisors, Dr Kirsten McLean and Dr Danielle Tyson. Thank you Kirsten and Danielle for your thoughts and direction at critical stages in the thesis, and for the expert assistance you provided whenever I asked. Thanks to Monique Keel for proof-reading this thesis.

The Monash University Political and Social Inquiry (PSI) staff have encouraged and assisted my work at each critical juncture from confirmation and mid-candidature, through to financial support for a writing retreat and travel to Japan to present this research. Special thank you to Dr Michael Janover, who convened the panels and provided excellent feedback, and JaneMaree Maher, Dr Helen Forbes-Mewett, Narelle Miragliotta, and other panel members. Thanks to Scott Xu and the panels approving study grants. A special thanks to Sue Little and the library staff, and to Sue Stevenson, whose patience and kindness made each administrative step easier.

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My deep respect and appreciation to Gough Whitlam who let my generation have an education beyond secondary school. Admiration and thanks to Germaine Greer, who, back in the 70s, opened my young eyes to structural discrimination. And eternal gratitude to my parents.



# Dedication

For Claire.

## Acronyms

ABC	Australian Broadcasting Corporation
ATAPS	Access to Allied Psychological Services
CFA	Country Fire Authority
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
CRAF	Common Risk Assessment Framework
LGA	Local Government Area
RCC	Research Coordinating Committee (Victoria Police)
VBRRA	Victorian Bushfire Reconstruction and Recovery Authority

## Definitions

**'Disaster'** includes natural disasters such as bushfires, floods, earthquakes, hurricanes and cyclones. However, war, terrorism, drought and climate change are excluded. Enrico Quarantelli (1994) described droughts, famines and some epidemics as 'diffused' and concluded that disaster is best understood as 'an occasion involving an immediate crisis or emergency'. The definition used by the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR) is that disaster is:

'a serious disruption of the functioning of a community or a society causing widespread human, material, economic, or environmental losses which exceed the ability of the affected community or society to cope using its own resources'.  
(UNISDR, 2009, para. 25)

- **Fire-affected regions**

The **'fire-affected regions'** for the purposes of this research are those located in the Shires of Mitchell and Murrindindi

- **Domestic violence/ Family violence**

The terms 'domestic violence' and 'family violence' are reluctantly used in this report reflecting their various use by participants, workers, authors and in different states and countries. These terms are euphemistic and infer an equal violence which is unsupported in crime statistics (VicHealth, 2011). Where possible, the terms **'Violence against women'** is used. **'Domestic Violence'** and **'Family violence'** are defined differently by laws in each Australian state and territory. In 2011, in their *National Plan*, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) stated that 'Domestic violence' includes physical, sexual, emotional and psychological abuse:

'While there is no single definition, the central element of domestic violence is an ongoing pattern of behaviour aimed at controlling a partner through fear ... It can be both criminal and non-criminal.' (Council of Australian Governments, 2011a, p. 3)

In Article 1 of the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, 1993, The UN states:

‘The term violence against women means any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women ... whether occurring in public or private life.’ (UN, 1993, Article 1)

In the Victorian context, ‘Family violence’ is defined in the *Family Violence Protection Act 2008* ("Family Violence Protection Act ", 2008) as follows:

‘(1) For the purposes of this Act, **family violence** is —

(a) behaviour by a person towards a family member of that person if that behaviour —

(i) is physically or sexually abusive; or

(ii) is emotionally or psychologically abusive; or is economically abusive; or is threatening; or

is coercive; or

in any other way controls or dominates the family member and causes that family member to feel fear for the safety or wellbeing of that family member or another person ...’ —

("Family Violence Protection Act ", 2008)

### ***Conventions adopted in the thesis***

- Terminology: Some of the women interviewed lived with continuing mental health issues and some worked as health professionals. In their narratives, they used terms their counsellors or psychologists had explained, for example, ‘de-bonding’, ‘narcissism’, ‘paranoia’. These terms, and terms like ‘depression’ and ‘anxiety’ were used in a colloquial, conversational sense rather than as diagnoses and are repeated here in the same way.
- Referencing of websites: Page and/or paragraph numbers are generally not provided as the search function enables quick retrieval of quotations.
- All names used for research participants are pseudonyms, including their family members and others they refer to by name.

# CHAPTER 1

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## 1: Introduction

### Context

Australians have a one in six estimated lifetime exposure to natural disaster (McFarlane, 2005) and Victoria is one of the three most fire-prone areas in the world (Valent, 1984, p. 292). On February 9 2009, the Black Saturday fires — classified as ‘catastrophic’ — resulted in the greatest loss of life from a bushfire since white settlement with 173 deaths. A further 414 people were injured and 2133 houses were destroyed (Cameron et al., 2009; Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission, 2010b). Displacement was estimated to be in the order of 7,000 people (Atkins, 2011, p. 4). The ferocity of the fires, the total devastation of whole communities, and the individual tragedies were a new and traumatic experience for the people living and working there. Even when people had survived bushfires in the past, nothing prepared them for Black Saturday.

Large-scale disasters are typically managed in a gendered way in which assumptions are made about the role of men as protector and women as protected (Eriksen, 2014). In the most obvious example, men are at the frontline in fighting bushfires much more than women. Yet over the half century leading up to Black Saturday, 40 per cent of those killed in bushfires were female (99 females and 146 males) (Haynes et al., 2008) and on Black Saturday, females accounted for 42 per cent of deaths (73 females and 100 males) (Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission, 2010b).

Women’s responsibility for children and other dependents increases their risk by complicating efforts to escape or fight the fires. Risks for women reach beyond the actual disaster to its aftermath, as the research literature suggests violence against women increases after disaster. Yet there is a gap in the Australian literature of the sociological aspects of disaster recovery in Australia. While previous Australian research has looked at what happens in disaster-recovery phases, none focuses on the experience of women in

regard to violence. In the tumult of disaster recovery, domestic violence is often ignored, unrecognised and unrecorded.

In this research, narratives of domestic violence are captured from 30 women who survived Black Saturday. The personal is indeed political as each woman's story of individual struggle is much more than that — her circumstances dictated to a large degree by the expectations society has of men and women.

## **Background**

The literature review on women and disasters in Chapter 2 shows that in developing countries women are at greater risk of mortality in a disaster, and increased violence against women is characteristic of a post-disaster recovery. Although little is written on the link between natural disasters and domestic violence in developed countries, in 2012, Megan Sety (2012) identified there had been interest in exploring this link in the late 1990s. Publication of *The Gendered Terrain of Disaster* in 1998 – edited by leading gender and disaster scholar, Elaine Enarson – was a catalyst. This was followed by a resurgence of interest a decade later after frequent and severe natural disasters.

In Australia, there appear to be no published research studies investigating increased rates of violence against women in the wake of a disaster,<sup>1</sup> yet there was attention to this issue in a 1992 symposium on *Women in Emergencies and Disasters*, convened in Queensland by the Bureau of Emergency Services. This was followed by a special edition of *The Macedon Digest* on the symposium where three papers touched on concern about increased domestic violence. In her short article on the 'Special Needs of Women in Emergency Situations', Councillor Beth Honeycombe from the Burdekin Shire Council in Queensland notes, 'an increase in domestic violence is repeatedly found in post-disaster situations' (1994, p. 31). In a second article, social worker Narelle Dobson writes on the period following the 1990 Charleville flood:

Human relations were laid bare and the strengths and weaknesses in relationships came more sharply into focus. Thus, socially isolated women became more isolated,

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<sup>1</sup> Kerri Whittenbury (2013) has found evidence of increased violence against women in relation to declining water availability. As drought has a slow-onset, it is excluded from the definition of disaster used in this thesis as recommended by Quarantelli (1994).

domestic violence increased, and the core of relationships with family, friends and spouses were exposed. (Dobson, 1994, p. 11)

A third paper delivered by Jan Williams (1994), the Divisional Head of Community Services Development, Department of Family Services and Aboriginal and Islander Affairs in Queensland, summarises the salient points in proceedings of a workshop conducted by Jan Van Landewijk and Kathleen Shordt in Amsterdam in 1988 on 'Settlements and Disasters'. This paper notes, 'women's health and security is not only directly affected by the direct impact of the disaster but also by vulnerability to unchecked male violence and aggression' (Van Landewijk & Shordt, 1988, cited in Williams, 1994, p. 36). Although Williams does not identify increased violence against women, she writes of the need to provide domestic violence services after disaster and describes at length those in place in Queensland.

In countries similar to Australia, evidence reveals that domestic violence, child abuse and divorce all increase in the wake of disasters (Anastario, Shehab, & Lawry, 2009; Clemens, Hietala, Rytter, Schmidt, & Reese, 1999; Enarson, 1999; Fothergill, 1999; Houghton, 2009b; Jenkins & Phillips, 2008b; Schumacher et al., 2010). In the United States, a 2009 study (Anastario et al., 2009) showed a four-fold increase in intimate partner violence in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina (Phillips, 2011). In New Zealand, following the 2004 Whakatane flood, Rosalind Houghton (2010) reports that the workload of the Women's Refuge tripled and callouts to police doubled, and after the 2006 South Canterbury snowstorm in the Timaru Districts, she identifies that 'the Women's Refuge case file summaries suggest that there was indeed an increase in domestic violence reports to the police' (2010, p. 281). In 2010, New Zealand police reported a 53 per cent increase in callouts to domestic violence incidents over the weekend of the Canterbury earthquake on September 4<sup>th</sup> (Houghton, 2010). Six months later, the five domestic violence services in Christchurch reported that 'inquiries increased to 47 in the first two days after the earthquake' on 2.3.2011 – an estimated 50 per cent increase (Phillips, 2011, para. 1).

In Australia to date, no published research has documented women's experience of violence after disaster. Despite work in recent decades to address domestic violence in the community generally, it is apparent in the research literature that lack of recognition of violence against women in the private domain may be taken to a new level in a post-disaster

context where stress levels are high, men are often unemployed and sometimes suicidal, and memories are fresh of their 'heroic' deeds. Support services, too, may be overburdened with primary and fire-related needs in the aftermath of a disaster and this all combines to exacerbate a willingness to overlook violence against women.

The dearth of research on violence against women after disaster in developed countries and its almost complete absence in Australia led to this research. Many disaster scholars have pointed to the gap in the research documenting women's experiences, particularly research with women directly, and some have explicitly called for more research to be conducted on this topic (Enarson & Phillips, 2008; Fothergill, 2008; Tyler et al., 2012). Indeed, more research is needed for both women's and men's experiences of increased violence after disasters but this contribution focuses on women's experiences.<sup>2</sup>

### **Structure of the thesis**

Part 1 of this thesis is the apparatus, detailed in the first three chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the topic and gives a general background to illustrate the gap in the existing body of knowledge and the need for this research. The second chapter is the literature review and emerging research questions. A traditional funnel approach is taken, as a wide lens is necessary to understanding the dynamics of what happened after Black Saturday. The research literature on gender and society narrows slightly to theories of gender construction, exposing the enculturation of babies to men or women, with attendant rewards and penalties dependent on sex. Within each of these sections is consideration of how this operates in disaster situations. Theoretical explanations for the increased violence against women after disasters emerge from two disparate fields – theories of male privilege and theories of sacrifice. Male privilege as a theoretical concept is well established and broadly accepted. Drawing on sacrificial theories is perhaps more controversial as it is rarely linked to theories of violence against women. Nevertheless, both paradigms offer useful insights to understanding the dynamics of increased domestic violence after disaster, and these sections of the literature review summarise relevant parts of these rich, problematic bodies of theorisation. The chapter then examines research on the highly gendered nature

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<sup>2</sup> Research on masculinity and disaster is outside the scope of this work, but initial research has begun (Zara & Parkinson, 2013).



of violence in society generally, and this is followed by an analysis of the existing literature on gender and disaster. It is here that the research literature becomes more scarce, both in developed countries and in Australia specifically. This gender and disaster section reports on the higher mortality of women after disasters globally, laying bare the myth of 'women and children first' and then narrows to lament the lack of research in Australia on gender and sociological aspects of disaster. The locus of need for this research then follows in the disaster and violence section. Again, research in developed countries is rare but what does exist reveals a connection between disasters and increased violence against women. Explanations for this association from the literature, along with the under-reporting of violence against women in disasters, provide the backdrop for considering violence and disaster in Australia – an under-researched topic. It is this gap that the current research begins to address.

Chapter 3 outlines the methodology, clarifying the specific intent of the research endeavour, and the procedures followed. Ethics and recruitment processes, and data collection and analysis are described in detail, along with a description of the final sample. Reflection on difficulties in recruiting women and the significance of the study concludes this first part.

Part 2 of the thesis is the exposition. Data driven, Chapters 4 and 5 tell the story of what happened on Black Saturday and in its long aftermath. Chapter 4 draws back from the topic to give the layered and complex context within which violence emerged. The women interviewed spoke at length about the day, linking it explicitly to their experiences and observations of increased violence. It is therefore critical to spend some time immersed in the terror of Black Saturday. The narratives take us into the unrelenting pressures of the aftermath, too, implicating practical housing and employment issues, alcohol and drug abuse, psychological effects on survivors and re-emergence of past trauma. Many described relationships in crisis and edging towards divorce. Chapter 5 begins with a summary of the research findings of increased violence against women and then takes a broad view, reporting on the lack of data on domestic violence incidents and its apparent neglect by disaster recovery agencies. No data, unfortunately interpreted as no problem, leads to a widespread denial of increased violence against women. The chapter then analyses the range of hypotheses offered from the literature, the family violence sector and the women interviewed. It concludes with the women's clear statements of violence against them

which, for most was either new violence, not previously experienced in their relationship, or sharply escalated from pre-disaster levels.

Part 3 – Chapters 6 and 7 – contains the theorisation, interpretation, and conclusion. Chapter 6 draws heavily on the women’s narratives to exemplify and link the theoretical concepts of male privilege and theories of sacrifice. It asserts that the window of opportunity for change offered by catastrophic disaster resulted in reinforcement of traditional gendered roles where men were expected to provide and protect, and women were expected to put their own needs last, forgoing employment and leadership roles in disaster recovery to first and foremost support their husband and children. The expectation for women facing violence by their partner in the disaster’s aftermath extended to putting up with this for the greater good. Chapter 7, the conclusion, states the contribution of this thesis, suggesting future actions and pointing to future research and policy opportunities.

### **Significance of the study**

This report documents the findings of qualitative research conducted over two years from late 2009 to 2011. It captures the experience and knowledge of women who survived Black Saturday. The accounts of the women in this sample reveal that 17 of the 30 women experienced domestic violence that they attributed to the Black Saturday bushfires.

The question of causality is controversial and less important than acting on the knowledge that increased domestic violence and disasters are linked (Bain, 2014). The extent to which this finding is generalisable to the wider population affected by Black Saturday is two-fold, implicating both that specific post-disaster population and wider populations in the disaster zone. Cognisant always that this is qualitative research and makes no claims on representativeness of the sample to the wider population, nevertheless, it is noteworthy that the sample was drawn from a small population, made smaller by post-disaster relocation. It is equally noteworthy that there were barriers to women’s participation in this research. Both practical problems of managing complex lives in the reconstruction period and the taboo nature of this research – exacerbated by disaster tensions discussed in depth in this thesis – served to silence women.

The sample for this research was a purposive sample, where women were invited to speak about their experiences of Black Saturday and its aftermath, including experiences of violence. It is unclear if similar results would be obtained if this study was conducted again in this same population. However, it is probable that more women would come forward for interviews if the research was to be repeated in the same population, particularly when society's willingness to hear of increased violence against women after disaster grows. The passing of time, too, allows women to recognise the nature of the violence against them, particularly after leaving abusive relationships, as identified in a previous research project:

[Partner rape research] participants told us, with hindsight, that denial or non-recognition of the rape served as a survival strategy. If they had recognised it as rape, they could not have managed their situation ... As a result, the way women complete surveys would be inaccurate. A legal interpretation would state that rape was occurring because consent was absent, and yet the women were interpreting their rape as something their partner had a right to, until the benefit of hindsight told them otherwise. This standpoint is supported by the 2005 ABS data which examines sexual violence by perpetrator type. Of women experiencing sexual violence 'since the age of 15', 21.7% was by a previous partner. This is ten times the figure for current partner, of 2.1%. (Parkinson & Cowan, 2008, p. 18).

Although there is no claim of representativeness of this sample to the whole population given its qualitative nature, the 17 women from the sample who spoke of increased violence in their own or their daughter or sister's relationship would be only *some* of a bigger group of women enduring domestic violence after Black Saturday. This is likely to be the case in Mitchell and Murrindindi shires and beyond to other fire-affected regions. This claim is supported by the fact that the interviews could have continued beyond the data gathering period allocated. Other women were recommended for interview but the timeline for this research prevented their inclusion. During the data-gathering period, despite interest in participating, women from outside Mitchell and Murrindindi shires were excluded from the study because of their location.

It is probable that similar results would be obtained if this methodology were to be repeated after a future catastrophic disaster. If women feel safe to speak of the violence

against them, even in circumstances where they are silenced as effectively as after Black Saturday, they are likely to echo the accounts of the women in this sample.

Delegates enquiring about the *Identifying the Hidden Disaster* Conference at which the initial findings of this research were presented (Parkinson & Zara, 2012c) reiterated the need for such open discussion of domestic violence after disaster. Enquirers included workers at the Red Cross and in church groups, many of whom welcomed this first exposure of an issue that reflected their own observations of working in the field, post-disasters. One commented, 'Finally a conference that lifts the lid on what is widely understood, but not spoken about' (Personal communication, 2011c).

Interviewees for an evaluation of the 2011 Bush to Beach weekend event for women confirmed that increased domestic violence was still a problem in their communities almost three years after the fires.<sup>3</sup> In addition, requests for information and resources from this research were received from Queensland Police, the South Australian government, and Tasmanian domestic violence workers following observations of increased domestic violence after disasters in their states; and from the Victorian Department of Human Services and the Municipal Association of Victoria in anticipation of this occurrence in future disasters in Victoria.

Family violence professionals also emailed. One wrote that after Black Saturday in the Gippsland area in Victoria, an increase in family violence 'was reported by a number of the agencies working in the region' (Personal communication, 2011a) and another regional co-ordinator emailed, stating that a local worker in Murrindindi shire had identified a problem 'getting referrals from police' and 'there could be issues around how they identify it and lack of reporting' (Personal communication, 2011b). Further corroboration was found in subsequent research with 32 men on their experiences of Black Saturday and its aftermath (Zara & Parkinson, 2013). One participant in that research was frustrated by the unsatisfactory response by police and community services to domestic violence, citing one instance in particular where there was a two month delay between referral and response by

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<sup>3</sup> Confidential evaluation conducted by Women's Health Goulburn North East in 2012.

services. He described his street as 'replete with domestic violence' (Zara & Parkinson, 2013, p. 35). Another spoke of his concerns for his daughter and grandchildren:

The police were called on numerous occasions ... The police were very understanding, much more so than I think he perhaps deserved ... We thought he might ... top the lot of them ... There were times I felt threatened because he's built like a brick toilet and I was always aware that if he did decide to take a swing ... there'd be absolutely no question that he'd flatten me with one punch. (Zara & Parkinson, 2013, p. 35)

The claim of this research is that there are indications that the findings are generalisable to the extent that many women will experience increased domestic violence from male partners after catastrophic disaster. Black Saturday up-ended and scattered entire communities. For some, the wholesale disruption continues still, five years after the event, and will continue for many people, for years to come. The value of this research for us as friends, family, colleagues and human beings, is that we have the opportunity to hear directly from women about what happened, and understand how the Black Saturday bushfires affected them and the people around them. In this document, 30 women reflect beyond the terror of the disaster itself, and beyond the heroism of individuals, to speak of how this disaster has irreversibly changed aspects of their lives and their sense of self.

## CHAPTER 2

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### **2: Literature review on women and disasters**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter analyses a range of sources and materials related to the gendered impact of disasters, situating this in the broader scholarship of gender and society and the construction of binary and prescribed gender roles. An understanding of socially constructed gender roles is intrinsic to understanding gender based violence:

Evidence shows that key predictors of violence against women relate to how individuals, communities and society as a whole view the roles of men and women. Some of the strongest predictors for holding violence-supportive attitudes at the individual level are low levels of support for gender equality and following traditional gender stereotypes (VicHealth, 2009). (Council of Australian Governments, 2011a, p. 18)

The socially constructed inequality between men and women is a key enabler of gendered violence (True, 2012; VicHealth, 2007) and the theory on violence against women provides context for examination of gendered violence after disasters. Scholarship on male privilege and theories of sacrifice inform understanding of these dynamics. There is currently greater consensus on theories of male privilege than sacrifice, as little has been written that uses sacrificial theories to illuminate violence against women after disasters.<sup>4</sup> While the data gathering aspect of this research has focused on women's experiences after Black Saturday, it is necessary to draw on other research that seeks to explain the gendered inequality that persists.

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<sup>4</sup> Interest in the theory of sacrifice is evident in diverse studies from economics to criminology to history and literature (Florczak, 2004; Smith & Doniger, 1989; Young, 1996). In her examination of crisis in criminology and criminal law, Alison Young (1996, p. 9) states that she aims to examine the importance of 'concepts of community for the crimino-legal tradition'. She continues, 'To that end, I have made use of the work of Girard (1986) on the scapegoat and inflected it with a question directed at the Hegelian problematic of community, as to whether Woman might be always already constituted as a surrogate for the originary outlaw of the community' (1996, p. 9). She draws further on Girard's work on the scapegoat to 'consider then how the concept of the victim, and the concomitant notion of sacrifice, might help us to understand three manifestations of crisis' (p. 51). However, with the exception of the few studies I have found (Avril, Lesley, Morgan & Davis., 2012; Crawford, 1998; Jeffrey, 1998; Roberts & Renzo, 2007; Slawsky, 2004; Solnit, 2005, 2009), the use of sacrificial theories to explain violence against women after disasters would appear not to have been used in this context.

## Gender and society

Much scholarship on gender and society speculates that biological and genetic differences do not explain the differential treatment of men and women, girls and boys, in different cultures around the world. Simone de Beauvoir wrote in 1949, 'One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman' (de Beauvoir, 1983, first published 1949, p. 295). The different interpretations of how being a woman, for example, may be experienced and enacted show gender to be fluid – socially *re*-constructed again and again, even within the same culture (Allen, 2002; Austin, 2008; Deutsch, 2007; Pease, 2010a). Rather than a biological fact, gender is accomplished through routine social actions and interactions (Connell, 2009; Jurik & Siemsen, 2009; West & Zimmerman, 1987). Consideration of contrasting displays of hegemonic masculinity in South Africa and Sweden reveal different expectations of men in these two countries (Hearn & Morrell, 2012; Hearn et al., 2012). Similarly, consideration of stereotypes of the ideal woman in Australia in the bush and in the city, in the 1950s and now, reveal different expectations of womanhood. What is normal for men and women changes in history, culture and situation – clearly the 'doing' of gender is negotiated and contested (Coles, 2009; Pacholok, 2009) with how much is won and lost depending on power relations (Kahn, 2011). Duke Austin writes:

The categories used in language, such as the gender categories of feminine and masculine, emerge from the interaction of a group of people at a particular time and in a particular place within a system of power struggles, differences, and negotiations. Categories of understanding are therefore contextual, yet humans act as if the categories were real, which makes the categories real in their consequences (Thomas 1923). (Austin, 2008, p. 2)

The consequences of gender construction for women in Australia in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century are evident in statistics. Australia is ranked 25<sup>th</sup> in the world for gender equality (Hausmann, Tyson, & Zahidi, 2010). It is known that one in three Australian women experience domestic violence and one in five women are victims of sexual violence (CASA Forum Centres Against Sexual Assault, 2013). It is estimated that one woman in ten experiences rape by a partner (The National Council to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children, 2009) and one woman a week is killed by her partner in Australia (Broderick, 2011). The prevalence of

violence against women, itself intolerable, exacerbates women's financial circumstances and intensifies gender inequity.

In the Australian state of Victoria, more females than males aged 55-64 were homeless in 2011 (51 per cent) (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011b) and 82 per cent of single parents are women (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011c). Men and women are treated differently in the workplace. This includes a preference for men in hiring, where 40 per cent of employers in Australia see women with children as undesirable employees (Zhu Howorth, 2013), to sexual harassment of women at work, through to higher valuing of traditional male sectors (Cerise, 2009; McDonald & Flood, 2012; Noble & Pease, 2011; Pease, 2010b; Summers, 2003; Zhu Howorth, 2013). Fair Work Australia stated in their 2012 decision<sup>5</sup> on equal remuneration that gender discrimination was influential in the 17 per cent pay gap (WGEA, 2012). Between 2011 and 2012, the pay gap to new graduates doubled to \$5,000 per annum more for men (WGEA, 2013) indicating that operation of the 'glass escalator' for men and the 'glass ceiling' for women begins with the first career step (Noble & Pease, 2011, p. 33).

At the end of working life, the gender difference in superannuation balances is well-documented with women retiring on an average superannuation balance of \$112,000, compared to \$198,000 for men (Keene, 2013). Almost two-thirds (63 per cent) of Australia's superannuation belongs to men (Potts, 2013) reflecting the pay differential and cultural expectation that women rather than men are more likely to work only part-time due to caring responsibilities (Hodgson & Medd, 2013; WGEA, 2012). The Australian Sex Discrimination Commissioner reported in 2013 that three quarters of primary carers are women: 92 per cent of those caring for children with disability are women, as are 70 per cent of those caring for parents (AHRC, 2013, p. 1). Contrary to assumptions that equality exists for young women, this gap is predicted to affect generations to come (Cerise, 2009). Other inequities abound:

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<sup>5</sup> In this decision we have concluded that for employees in the SACS industry there is not equal remuneration for men and women workers for work of equal or comparable value by comparison with workers in state and local government employment. We consider gender has been important in creating the gap between pay in the SACS industry and pay in comparable state and local government employment.' (Fair Work Australia, 2012)



One of the greatest examples of inequality between women and men in Australia today is the lifetime-earning prospects of a young woman who has spent years at university. A report released in October 2012 showed that a 25-year-old woman with post-graduate qualifications would, over her lifetime, earn \$2.49 million. The 25-year-old man who had sat beside her in class would, by contrast accumulate \$3.78 million (AMP.NATSEM, 2012) ... [Furthermore], 'men who hold a Bachelor degree or higher and have children can expect to earn around \$3.3 million over their working life (AMP.NATSEM, 2009)'. Yet a woman with similar education and children can expect to earn \$1.8 million. That's nearly half the amount men will take home (Ibid). (Summers, 2013, pp. 53-54)

### ***Women marginalised in disaster management***

Women face discrimination in disaster management, too. Women are essential to volunteer and professional organisations but are rarely in positions of power (Tyler, 2013), both in the United States and in Australia. In 2011, the New South Wales Rural Fire Service reported levels of engagement with women in their service, indicating their reliance on women as volunteers primarily in non-operational roles and with barely a presence in leadership roles:

Women currently constitute 21 per cent of the 68 396 'operational' RFS volunteers, who include firefighters, team members, crew leaders, team leaders and officers (personal communication, NSW RFS Corporate Planning, Research & Governance Group, 2012). Women hold 7 per cent of crew leader, team leader and officer positions and constitute 22 per cent of firefighters and team members. Currently, 2 per cent of all brigade captains and 4 per cent of deputy captains are women. The 1850 'non-operational' volunteers, who fulfil roles such as communications and catering, are 40 per cent women. At the salaried end of the scale, women fill 32 per cent of a total of 969 staff positions. This gendered division of both membership numbers and roles reflects the continual reliance on patriarchal structures for the control of both technology and nature. (Eriksen, 2013, p. 3)

There is ongoing gender inequity in emergency management, and evidence of situations where men predominantly take charge of disaster management 'systematically excluding women, their needs, competences and experiences from contributing to these efforts'

(Neumayer & Plümper, 2007b, p. 12). In the United States, for example, Krajeski and Peterson write:

Indeed, we have seen women lead some of the nation's most effective recovery organizations, but have even more frequently seen their contributions thwarted. (Krajeski & Peterson, 2008, p. 210)

Gendered assumptions have characterised much post-disaster response (Scanlon, 1997) and each step in recovery reflects (and exaggerates) the inherent power structures at play in the community (Enarson & Fordham, 2001). In Australia, too:

Scant attention is paid to women and their roles in the emergency management landscape. This is particularly relevant in the field of community bushfire preparedness and mitigation. The culture of emergency management remains a very masculine field with the command and control system continuing to dominate and influence the roles and processes of emergency events. (Proudley, 2008, p. 37)

The public/private dichotomy of men's and women's work in disaster management was on display after the Charleville floods in Queensland, where 'the most public aspects of the clean-up were a male affair' and the emergency services – including police and the military – were mostly men (Dobson, 1994, p. 12). Women's recovery work is far less visible, less valued and usually contained within households (Cox, 1998; Dobson, 1994; Shaw, van Unen, & Lang, 2012). The concept of keeping the family unit together is not recognised, nor is the responsibility for its emotional, spiritual and physical well-being (Cox & Perry, 2011; Honeycombe, 1994). The heroes were public and they were male (see Appendix 1), and this portrayal has been challenged as misleading (Fuller, 1994). As Dobson stated:

I believe that there were many heroines among the women who held their families together, who carved out a home from the mire, and continued to contribute through their community and professional work. (Dobson, 1994, p. 13)

### **Theories of gender construction – learning masculinity and femininity**

Gender as a social construction and hegemonic masculinity are thoroughly theorised, most notably and pervasively by Raewyn Connell in her book, *Masculinities* (2005), first published in 1995, and by others (Donaldson, 1993; Jurik & Siemsen, 2009; Messerschmidt, 2012;

Pease, 2010b; Wedgwood, 2009; West & Zimmerman, 1987). Connell's early work on class shifted focus to include gender theory in the 1970s, with identification that power dynamics and social change were absent in sex-role theory (Demetriou, 2001). Connell has since inspired and sharpened debate internationally over many decades since her first publication on gender in 1974, continuing as a critically important thinker and leader in masculinity studies, acknowledged as such even by those who critique her work (Coles, 2009; Demetriou, 2001; Moller, 2007). Other influential scholars – including Allan Johnson, Judith Butler, Francine Deutch, James Messerschmidt, Bob Pease, Candace West and Don Zimmerman – have joined Connell to bring a keen awareness of the inequality that accompanies enactment of gender. Criticisms of Connell's theoretical stance, though sparse in relative terms, centre on the perceived dissonance between male hegemony – 'that form of masculinity that is considered culturally to be most dominant at any given time' (Coles, 2009, p. 41) – and the way individual men experience their power or lack thereof (Coles, 2009; Hearn & Morrell, 2012; Moller, 2007). Such criticisms leave unaddressed the systemic privilege of men and enduring oppression of women:

The world gender order mostly privileges men over women. Though there are many local exceptions, there is a patriarchal dividend for men collectively, arising from higher incomes, higher labour force participation, unequal property ownership, greater access to institutional power, as well as cultural and sexual privilege ... The conditions thus exist for the production of a hegemonic masculinity on a world scale – that is to say, a dominant form of masculinity that embodies, organizes and legitimates men's domination in the world gender order as a whole. (Connell, 2005, pp. 260-261)

Other criticism includes claims of reduction in complexity in the conceptual system developed by Connell (Moller, 2007) and criticism of its apparent dualism of hegemonic and non-hegemonic masculinities in her theorising (Demetriou, 2001). Rather than criticism of Connell, others extend the critique to *readers* of Connell's comprehensive theory, contending that it has been taken up in a piecemeal fashion, ignoring three key aspects – the influence of psychoanalysis, the importance of non-hegemonic forms of masculinity and the role of cathexis (Wedgwood, 2009).

The discourse on gender is punctuated by other significant theorists. For example, West and Zimmerman's contribution in 1987 on 'Doing Gender', too, has endured in its influence. The article captured the imagination of researchers in feminist, masculinity and gender scholarship and sparked writing on both 'doing' and 'undoing' gender – recently joined by discussions on 'overdoing gender' and 'postgender' (Butler, 2004; Deutsch, 2007; Johnson & Repta, 2012; Jurik & Siemsen, 2009; Risman, 2009; Willer, Rogalin, Conlon, & Wojnowicz, 2013).

In her similarly generative chapter on 'Undiagnosing Gender' (in her 2004 book, *Undoing Gender*), Butler writes:

[T]o 'be diagnosed with gender identity disorder is to be found, in some way, to be ill, sick, wrong, out of order, abnormal, and to suffer a certain stigmatization as a consequence of the diagnosis being given at all ... [Such a diagnosis] continues to pathologize as a mental disorder what ought to be understood instead as one among many human possibilities of determining one's gender for oneself. (Butler, 2004, p. 76)

Essentialism in gender studies distils into the notion that men and women are different – sex is captured with a tick on one of two boxes and gender is ignored (Johnson & Repta, 2012). Instead, sex and gender are more accurately understood as located on a spectrum or continuum rather than as a dichotomy, and Messerschmidt (2009) agrees, warning against simply changing the enactment of gender roles with no effective change to male privilege. Instead, he suggests that success may be measured in challenge to the essentialism of binary distinctions, and Risman (2009, p. 84) urges a move to a post-gender society, writing, 'A just world would be one where sex category matters not at all beyond reproduction; economic and familial roles would be equally available to persons of any gender'. Post-genderism recognises the liberating effects of medical achievements such as the birth control pill and new technologies that 'have the potential to radically blur the distinctions between categories of gender, sex, and sexuality' including artificial wombs, cloning and sex-change surgery (Johnson & Repta, 2012, p. 29).

### ***Socially constructed gender inequity***

The privileging of men and concurrent subjugation of women in our society is well documented, if ignored regularly as evidenced by the 'waves' of feminism. Influential theorists write powerfully that the invisibility of privilege is its strength, and that the apparent natural order implicit in privilege and members' sense of entitlement fortify and justify inequity (Bolin, Jackson, & Crist, 1998; Connell, 2005; Kimmel, 2013; Pease, 2010b; Scanlon, 1998). Judith Allen (2002, p. 192) writes, 'the fish do not know the water is wet' and Pease (2010b, p. 14) that 'belief in the naturalness of inequality leads most people to accept and live with existing inequalities in the same way that we live within the laws of gravity'. Taken from the title of her 1999 book, Jean Harvey's term, 'civilized oppression' neatly captures the way in which preferential treatment for one gender is normalised in everyday life. A raft of terms reiterates this point. Gender researchers write of practices that are 'unconscious', 'habituated', 'ingrained' and 'pervasive', and of widespread acceptance of norms that privilege men (Noble & Pease, 2011, pp. 32-33). They write of normalising men's experiences and marginalising women's (Cundiff, 2012, p. 160); of a 'male gaze' (Mulvey, 1975) and a 'masculinist lens that emphasize[s] a belief in an essentialized male superiority' (Kahn, 2011, p. 68).

Different aspects of privilege are apparent from individuals' self-perception when seeing their reflection in a mirror. Michael Kimmel (2002) described looking in the mirror and seeing a generic human being, where his own race, gender, class and sexuality were all invisible to him. He cites a conversation between two women where a white woman described looking in the mirror and seeing a woman, whereas the other woman described seeing a black woman (Kimmel, 2002). Others may see first a woman with a disability or a lesbian. Germaine Greer believes that above all else, women are women first, and that in 'constructing its male elite, masculinist society continues to be cruel to most men, all women and all children' (1999, p. 309). Dimensions of privilege are taken for granted by those who possess them – in our society, it is predominantly white people, men and the middle class (Coston & Kimmel, 2012) – and contributes to a culture of entitlement in which men expect preferential treatment, believing it to be only fair (Kimmel, 2013). By way of example, Jack Kahn (2011, p. 68) suggests we consider whose surname is taken in a relationship, or by children.

Embedded and invisible assumptions of the natural social order leave those with privilege 'off the hook' (Noble & Pease, 2011, p. 32) with no expectation to examine the unearned nature of their privilege, nor to work to a more equal society (Pease, 2010b). This is despite evidence that the privilege of these groups exists only because of the oppression of others. Echoing Susan Brownmiller's (1993) contention that rape by some men is a way for all men keep all women in a state of fear, Connell (2005) points out there is a patriarchal dividend for *all* men as a result of women's subordination. Even the majority of men who do not live up to images of hegemonic masculinity still benefit from male domination. In creating, constructing, enacting or 'doing' gender, the culture of patriarchy thrives as the social norm determined and reproduced by the dominant groups (Deutsch, 2007; Pease, 2010a, 2010b; West & Zimmerman, 1987). The stark inequities between the genders are not explained by different abilities:

Sex differences, on almost every psychological trait measured, are either non-existent or fairly small. Certainly they are much smaller than the differences in social situations that are commonly justified by the belief in psychological difference – such as unequal incomes, unequal responsibilities in child care and drastic differences in access to social power.'(Connell, 2005, p. 21)

Gender differentiation is strictly enforced from pre-birth when nursery-wall paint colour and baby clothes cannot be chosen until the ultra-sound detects whether the baby will join the privileged gender or the oppressed (however civilised this oppression). The cost for women is the lower valuing of their contribution to society and the determination by patriarchy of the parameters of that contribution. Women are not equal partners in the efforts and rewards of society. While 'men symbolized the whole society', as Judith Allen (2002, p. 200) writes, 'women could only exemplify their own sex's maternity' and try to live up to the expectations of men. It seems the nature of being a woman is determined by the masculine ruling elite and subject to change. For women who want to be accepted, their own embodiment and enactment of womanhood is less important than fitting the template supplied (Kaschack, 1992 cited in Kahn, 2011, p. 60). The template Alice Fothergill identifies (in her study on the stigma of accepting charity) was for traditional middle-class women to be a care-giver, 'giving of yourself, helping others, and being self-sacrificial' (2003, p. 666).

However, the closer women conform to the ideal female stereotype as imagined by patriarchy, the greater the penalty for all but a few, as female virtues of modesty, self-sacrifice, and being a wife and mother are not the features of workplace and financial success. There are expectations of role enactment for men and women and reward or punishment generally depends on how closely individuals conform to stereotypes (Demetriou, 2001; Messerschmidt, 2009). The source of the problem is *power*, with men taking more of everything: money, attention, influence, status, even leisure (Connell, 2005). Francine Deutsch reframes this as:

When sex category is activated, the stereotypes associated with it are also automatically activated. Thus, in a wide variety of situations, men are automatically viewed as more competent, giving them advantages that can easily lead to self-fulfilling prophecies (Ridgeway and Correll 2004). (Deutsch, 2007, p. 116)

The power that flows from greater ownership and control also confers power over intellectual freedom, for example, Jurik and Siemsen (2009) note the resistance to new world views evident in some editorial decisions:

[T]he struggle to publish [West and Zimmerman's] 'Doing Gender' and its continued reinterpretation in ways that make it more consistent with gender role theory reflect the difficulty involved in challenging canon. (p. 72)

Writing in Canada, Joseph Scanlon describes another instance where editorial decisions determined attitudes to gender, legitimising the perception amongst emergency managers that women are less competent than men after a disaster (Scanlon, 1997). Scanlon suggests that emergency personnel generally attribute greater panic and confusion to women than men and that this is unfounded. He refers to early academic writings to show that this idea was promulgated by 'the first scholar in the field of Sociology of Disaster, Samuel Henry Prince'. In writing about the 1917 Halifax explosion that killed 2,000 and injured 9,000 people, Prince drew on an unpublished manuscript by Dwight Johnstone, omitting 'all the positive references to women and the negative references to men' (Scanlon, 1997, p. 4).

After Hurricane Katrina, the media ignored any considered coverage of how gender influenced the way men and women experienced and were affected by the disaster, instead

focussing on archetypal characteristics of womanhood and linking it to helplessness, while celebrating male heroes. As Elaine Enarson (2006) writes, 'needy women' and 'strong men' were presented. Other researchers, too, point out the negative portrayal of women in disaster situations such as Hurricane Katrina, with female images ranging from the 'old, infirm, heavily pregnant or paralyzed' (Boisseau, Feltey, Flynn, Gelfand, & Triece, 2008, p. viii) to the vociferous with mothers' outbursts against the conditions their children were forced to live in; and then to blaming women for their inability to rescue those in their care from the disaster and its aftermath. Boisseau et al. noted that female medical staff 'who remained behind with patients were vilified for "murdering" the patients who did not survive' (Boisseau et al., 2008, p. viii). For some women in New Orleans, their frustrations post-disaster led to activism and the establishment of various women's groups to improve responses and bring change (David & Enarson, 2012; Tyler, 2007).

Historically, men have gained from women's subjugation and this advantage to men persists, with highly privileged men having the most to gain from maintenance of the status quo. It is they who most often control what is published in both mainstream media and academic journals, and indeed what is included in school and university curricula. Nancy Tuana (2013) asks, 'whose interests are served by the knowledge that mainstream science deems worthy of development, and whose interests are served by the knowledge projects that are overlooked or ignored' (Tuana, 2013, p. 17). In rural areas, the interplay of media and traditional power structures reinforce the stronger conservatism and patriarchy that continues to characterise many rural communities:

The 'doing of gender' in everyday rural practices has with time ensured the normalisation of hegemonic masculinity in everyday life. As a result men are more likely than women to hold power in rural communities past and present, as knowledge and power are facilitated by discourses shaped in rural communities around hegemonic masculinity (Alston, 1995; Liepens, 1998). Research has furthermore shown how the normalisation of patriarchal relations through discursive practices is legitimised through the media (Agg and Phillips, 1998; Liepens, 2000), whilst institutional patriarchal structures resistant to change reinforce them (Alston, 2005). (Eriksen, Gill, & Head, 2010, pp. 333-334)



Clearly, the impact of a disaster reflects the way a society is structured, with individuals affected differently depending on gender as well as class, age, ethnicity and disability. Alice Fothergill (1998) echoes this premise, writing that 'social processes ... are more visible in times of a disaster' (Fothergill, 1998, p. 12). Disaster exacerbates and entrenches gender inequalities, yet the gender differential operates even in ostensibly equal and enlightened societies. Susanna Hoffman, an anthropologist, survived the 1991 Oakland firestorm in California where 25 people died and 6,000 were left homeless. Five years later, she reflects on the social impact of this disaster, particularly regarding a resurgence of defined gender roles:

The Oakland Firestorm survivors to a large degree represented the pinnacle of modern sexual definition ... The women of the community were independent, men equitable, couples by and large egalitarian. People of both gender occupied the same segments of space, public and private arenas, hours of day and night. [... But for many after the fires, the] return of old behaviors and the loss of new was so swift, so engulfing, and so unconscious, few understood what occurred. Many unions, long and short, broke apart. (Hoffman, 1998, pp. 57-58)

Gendered roles were accompanied by age-old gendered slurs, as fire-affected women sought to rebuild their lives. Negotiations with officials were impeded as women – lacking the import of men – were dismissed, and their concerns disregarded:

The more insistent women were with insurance officials, the more we were promoted to the second level of the 'difficult' category... By deeming women 'difficult' or more, of course, one removes them from individuality and places them in a grouping where their complaints are rendered meaningless, and thus dismissible ... Over time not only insurance officials, but architects, contractors, and workers, stereotyped us in this old cultural fashion and devalued our voice. (Hoffman, 1998, p. 60)

When the standard is a white male (Kimmel, 2002), and measurements of normality are formulated from him, disadvantages follow for women and non-whites. This androcentrism extends beyond nuclear family formation and the workplace to psychological interpretations of normality. Traditional counselling, for example, despite claims of

objectivity and neutrality, take a masculinist perspective, even blaming women for the consequences of men's oppression in the social order (Kahn, 2011). As Jessica Cundiff writes:

In the late 20th century, mainstream psychological research was accused of being "womanless" and "raceless" by excluding women and members of racial-ethnic minority groups and by interpreting their experiences as deviant from White male norms ... [This reflects] assumptions that men and Whites are more typical members of the category "human" than are women and racial-ethnic minorities. (Cundiff, 2012, p. 158)

The gender inequities that privilege men and penalise women in the everyday are heightened during disasters and their aftermath, creating what Elaine Enarson and Betty Morrow (1998) term 'gendered disaster vulnerability'.

#### **The patriarchal dividend – unequal shares in a bigger pie**

Maleness ensures one dimension of privilege, and all men are advantaged to some degree and in some circumstances because of their sex (Kahn, 2011). Yet, clearly, patriarchy values some expressions of masculinity more highly than others. In Western societies, characteristics associated with the ideal man are wealth, power, and heterosexuality, and he exhibits bravery, strength, emotional stability – he is logical, rational, decisive and self-controlled (Austin, 2008; Coston & Kimmel, 2012). The modern notion of perfect maleness, characterised by 'honor, athleticism, courage [and] physical toughness [is] ...sharpened by countertypes of failed or unhealthy masculinities – [with] the label "unmanly men" ascribed to Jews, Gypsies, homosexuals, idiots, and other marginal men' (Allen, 2002, p. 194). The intersection of individual men's characteristics determines their standing in the male hegemony and their access to the patriarchal dividend (Pease, 2010b). Race, for example, is obvious as mitigating privilege, with disability, sexuality and class as further sites of compromised privilege (Austin, 2008; Coston & Kimmel, 2012; Dowd, 2010; Kimmel, 2002).

Shelley Pacholok (2009, p. 474) writes that 'hegemonic masculinity cannot exist unless there are subordinated Others ... who are constructed as deficient in some way'. The relationship between hegemonic masculinity or the 'masculinist paradigm' (Kahn, 2011, p. 64) and marginalised masculinities is two-fold. At one level, hegemonic masculinity is not inclusive

of the diverse ways men experience life and enact their lives, instead working to oppress difference and foreground dominant masculine norms (Kahn, 2011). Yet, on another level, men who embody marginalised masculinities are necessary for the concept and reproduction of hegemonic masculinity as they obviate who is included and excluded (Austin, 2008; Pease, 2010b). Indeed:

The prevailing system of patriarchy pushes certain voices out of the public sphere and toward the periphery. This constant attack on marginalized voices maintains the status quo and upholds ideologies that perpetuate sexism and gender violence. (Phillips, 2012, p. 259)

Nevertheless, systemic gender inequality over-rides the unequal distribution of power and reward to the competing versions of masculinity (Pease, 2012). The shares in the patriarchal dividend may be unequal, but the pie for men is bigger.

### **Theories of sacrifice**

The flipside to male privilege is the sacrifice expected of women. Gender is signified from birth to ensure most people assume their expected gender role. Boys become men: leaders, protectors and providers. Girls become women: mothers and nurturers first and foremost, combined with responsibilities to bring in family income. This double load, long written about, has not eased in the half century since women won the right to take on 'men's' jobs with career possibilities and financial rewards. Female parents, for example, spend more than twice the time caring for children under 15 as male parents. In an average day, mothers spend eight hours and 33 minutes while fathers spend three hours and 55 minutes with their children (AHRC, 2013).

The everyday meaning of 'sacrifice' is to give up something for a person or purpose considered more important. It describes women's lot in the same way 'privilege' describes men's. Women's sacrifice has been so inscribed and so normalised that little has been written in terms of the theory of sacrifice. Indeed, the theorisation of sacrifice is interpreted differently by theology and philosophy scholars, and feminists have criticised it for essentialising women – or ignoring them as in a theorisation on sacrifice as being done by 'man' 50 years ago (Van Baaren, 1964). It seems little has changed, as Rene Girard's oeuvre

on sacrifice, for example, has been rightly censured as reductionist and one-dimensional, lacking any critique of women as protagonists or even as victims (Kirk-Duggan, 1994). Yet within its rich and problematic body of theorisation, there are insights that link the data in this research to the literature and assist our understanding.

The story of Jesus Christ encapsulates the key concepts of the theory of sacrifice and provides an accessible introduction.

Sacrificial blood, the scapegoat, laying the foundations of a society through an act of ritual murder – these are sinister social constants. The Jewish extermination of the Canaanites, the Christian crucifixion of the Messiah, the Muslim jihad of the Prophet all shed the blood that blesses and sanctifies the monotheist cause ... the primitive survives in the postmodern, the animal survives in man, the beast still dwells in *Homo sapiens*. (Onfray, 2007, p. 198)

Christians believe that Jesus Christ suffered and died on the cross for their sins. There was no 'sacrifice of sacrifice' as there is with martyrs and suicide bombers where their motivation is heavenly reward (Dawkins, 2006; Keenan, 2005; Ptacek, 2006). Although the characteristics of sacrifice have been variously and complexly described (Girard, 2005; Keenan, 2005; Reineke, 1997; Weir, 1995), examination of the powerful cultural story of the perfect sacrifice of Christ clarifies the elements.

There were many precursors to this ultimate sacrifice in the Gospels. The Old Testament of the bible contains descriptions of sacrifices throughout, from Noah (Genesis 8: 20), through to Abraham's consent to murdering his own son, Isaac (Genesis 22: 1-13), through to detailed directions on how to conduct sacrifices for various purposes (Leviticus 1: 1-17) (The Holy Bible: King James Version, 1769). Obedience to God – even to the sacrifice of one's son or to martyrdom – was seen by Judeo-Christians as pleasing to God, and such sacrifice had the potential to offer salvation to others (McBrien, 1995). It was Good Friday, though, that appeared to represent the ultimate sacrificial logic.

According to the New Testament, a week after Palm Sunday, Pontius Pilate theatrically washed his hands of Jesus, and gave in to the crowds clamouring for his crucifixion (Matthew 27: 24) (McBrien, 1995; The Holy Bible: King James Version, 1769). The sacrifice was planned, and Jesus of Nazareth knew what lay ahead, willingly playing his part.

His words regarding the cup of his blood being poured out for the many have definite sacrificial overtones (cf. Mark 14:24). The setting of the Last Supper within the context of the Passover celebration – with the sacrificed lamb as the center of the meal – would have heightened awareness of Jesus' sacrificial intentions.

(McBrien, 1995, p. 1151)

As Slavoj Žižek (2008) notes, Jesus of Nazareth gave himself as a scapegoat in order to save everyone else. His was the perfect sacrifice as he was an innocent victim and the gain was purely that of humankind. The deaths of the two common criminals who hung on crosses either side of him were not sacrificial deaths, they were not innocent and therefore not worthy of being sacrificed (Žižek, 2008). Jesus was an outsider in some respects – his was not a noble birth, he kept company with prostitutes, he was ostracised by those who held power, he was controversial, disrupting and undermining commercial and justice processes and ideology. There was veneration before execution. Girard (2005) describes sacrificial settings that encompass veneration of the scapegoat before the execution, and Palm Sunday a week before the crucifixion exemplified this when Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey to the rapturous reception of crowds throwing their coats on the ground for the donkey to walk on, waving palm branches and welcoming him. There was a public ritual over many gruelling hours, epitomising formal state-sanctioned violence, the effect of which was to unite society and lead to (a period of) cohesion and calm.

Girard writes that 'the concept can be traced back to spontaneous unanimity, to the irresistible conviction that compels an entire community to vent its fury on a single individual' (Girard, 2005, p. 314) and extends this argument to assert that 'there can be nothing in the whole range of human culture that is not rooted in violent unanimity – nothing that does not find its source in the surrogate victim' (Girard, 2005, p. 312). It is a short step from the scapegoat ritual to the legally sanctioned death penalty (Girard, 2005, p. 313). Roland Boer draws on Julia Kristeva's writing to clarify further:

Here is Kristeva: 'Sacrifice is an offering that, out of a substance, creates Meaning for the Other and, consequently, for the social group that is dependent on it' (Kristeva 1987: 142-3). In other words, you obliterate something concrete – a red heifer, a goat, a human being – in order to produce the abstract sense of the group. The most common way in which that happens is to transfer the group's 'sins' symbolically onto

the scapegoat and then cast all this evil out of the community – by banishing the scapegoat – for the wellbeing of the community. (Boer, 2007, p. 165)

The remedy offered by scapegoats is time-limited however, and modern-day rabbles demand regular blood-letting, emulating those before Pontius Pilate's balcony (Matthew 27: 22-24) (The Holy Bible: King James Version, 1769). For example, the death of terrorist Osama bin Laden in 2011 operated as a sacrificial logic, with a United States populace unified in celebration afterwards, reinforcing this theory.

### ***Women as scapegoats***

When searching for a unifying factor in his compilation of sacrificial victims (which included slaves, prisoners of war and children) Girard drew from this disparate group what was common:

What we are dealing with, therefore, are exterior or marginal individuals, incapable of establishing or sharing the social bonds that link the rest of the inhabitants. Their status as foreigners or enemies, their servile condition, or simply their age prevents these future victims from fully integrating themselves into the community. (Girard, 2005, p. 12)

The purpose of a scapegoat is to shift violence onto a victim who does not matter. If the chosen victim mattered to the community, violence could instead escalate through retribution. A dispensable victim – the suffering and death of whom will cause no great reprisal – is what is needed (Girard, 2005). Girard (2005, p. 13) ponders the notion of women as sacrificeable, agreeing that, 'in many cultures women are not considered full-fledged members of their society'. He concludes they were rarely chosen in ritualistic sacrifice, though, probably because of their familial ties and status as 'in some respects 'the property of her husband and his family' (Girard, 2005, p. 13). Yet, the identification of women as excluded 'other' has been well theorised (de Beauvoir, 1983, first published 1949; Kristeva, 1981; Moi, 1986; Weir, 1995) and the dominant religions, too, perceive women as unimportant, even detestable (Onfray, 2007) and not truly human (Dawkins, 2006). As Alison Jasper further notes:

Christian patterns of sex and gender are aligned within a dichotomous, hierarchical relation between masculine divinity and feminized humankind that work out to the

detriment of the latter or even to its exclusion ... all the pain and disorder of human life – is represented in a catastrophic narrative about the putting to death of God, for which Eve, standing in for her whole gender, is regarded as the ultimate cause. (Jasper, 2013, p. 281)

Women as a group indeed provide the necessary qualification for sacrifice – essentially because they are outsiders, and according to accounts including those above, blameworthy.

### ***Renegotiating gender boundaries in disaster***

The founding and all-encompassing sacrifice of women is based on identity, and identity, according to Weir, is ‘the product of a sacrificial logic, a logic of domination’ (1995, p. 3). In assuming an identity based on gendered expectations, the innate identity of a woman is subjugated:

These questions of individual identity are related to questions of women’s identity and of gender identity: what does it mean to ‘be’ a woman, or a man? ... any identity is necessarily repressive of difference, of non-identity, or of connection. (Weir, 1995, pp. 1,3)

Assuming any identity necessarily sacrifices what has not been assumed, and domination ensures ‘members’ of the group comply. Compliance with this foundational social contract, however, does not guarantee acceptance of it. Thirty years ago, Kristeva observed that a new generation of women was unhappy that they were ‘forced to experience this sacrificial contract against their will’ (1981, p. 25). Central to the socio-symbolic contract (and central to their objection) is the universal definition of man and mankind as the absolute human type, with woman merely ‘relative to’ and ‘other than’ (de Beauvoir, 1983, first published 1949; Kristeva, 1981; Weir, 1995).

She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute – she is the Other. (de Beauvoir, 1983, first published 1949, p. 16)

The identity of man and mankind indeed relies on the exclusion of woman. To include women as part of mankind would be to negate the identity men have forged for themselves

as men. The initial sacrificial logic which claims identity by repressing difference is, for women, problematic. Western feminists have taken their struggle against oppression in both pragmatic and ideological directions. On the one hand, demanding equality *within* the current sociosymbolic order, and on the other refusing it entirely because it relies upon the sacrifice of women (Weir, 1995). Kristeva asks:

What can be our place in the symbolic contract? If the social contract ... is based on an essentially sacrificial relationship of separation and articulation of differences ... what is our place in this order of sacrifice and/or of language? No longer wishing to be excluded or no longer content with the function which has always been demanded of us (to maintain, arrange, and perpetuate this sociosymbolic contract as mothers, wives, nurse, doctors, teachers ...), how can we reveal our place, first as it is bequeathed to us by tradition, and then as we want to transform it? (Kristeva, 1981, pp. 23-24)

Keen to overturn the homogeneity the notion of 'woman' evokes in our patriarchal society, Toril Moi points to Kristeva's conclusion that 'the struggle is no longer concerned with the quest for equality but, rather, with difference and specificity' (Moi, 1986, p. 196). Women's identity is to be claimed in its own right, not simply as the complement to a male identity. Women are not the other half to men's first half. Women's identity is irreducible, 'without equal in the opposite sex, and as such, exploded, plural, fluid' (1986, p. 194).

In stark contrast, gender as a simple dichotomy is used as the primary basis of privilege and disadvantage and misinterpreted as 'two internally homogeneous and mutually exclusive categories of individual attributes' (Bolin et al., 1998, p. 30). Interestingly, Condren (1995) draws on the work of Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray and Nancy Jay to explore the significance of sacrificial discourse to political violence in Ireland and the ways in which a gendered social order is produced and reproduced. She writes that, taken together, these theorists 'provide the means of understanding what happens when the social order is up for renegotiation ... and also the chaos upon which men must then impose meaning and civilization' (1995, p. 165). The aftermath of disaster is such a time.

In the private domain – particularly related to domestic violence and acts of hyper-masculinity observed and noted amongst men in the early months after Black Saturday



(Bachelard, 10.5.09; Johnston & Mickelborough, 2010; Parkinson, 2012a; Saeed, 2009; Zara & Parkinson, 2013) – the parallels with Condren’s allegory of the Irish troubles are clear. She writes: ‘Acts of transgression are not gender neutral as some contemporary theorists of transgression might imply or argue but act to renegotiate boundaries on behalf of the dominant group’ (1995, p. 168) and referred to the wartime patriarchal discourses and increased violence against women which directly responded to the suffragist movement (1995). In the public domain, this is evident in the male domination of emergency services and the management of disaster recovery:

Women are relegated to taking care of the corpse, (the abject) and the realm of the “private”, while the public funeral rituals are appropriated by men in ways that reinforce the public private split in favour of a male dominant economy. (Condren, 1995, p. 164)

Men grasped the opportunity for a public presence and women were relegated to the private sphere. As in war and revolution, the post-disaster period reinforces patriarchy and male hegemony. As Condren writes, ‘These are the dream of a “world without women” related to the concern for immortality; male heroism and perfect manhood’ (1995, p. 166). With the patriarchal dividend at stake, why would men *not* use every opportunity to ensure their ongoing privilege?

### ***No windfall for women in disaster***

As women are generally poorer than men, they are more likely to live in areas that are more susceptible to disaster and housing that is poorly constructed (Dasgupta, Siriner, & Partha, 2010; Neumayer & Plümper, 2007b; Scanlon, 1998; Seager, 2006) and are less likely to have the resources to escape if a disaster threatens (Henrici, Helmuth, & Braun, 2010). While women in the developing world are at greater risk of death, women in the developed world have increased risk of economic insecurity; increased workload; increased conflict in the home, the community and the workplace and fewer supports for workforce participation (Enarson, 2000a; Hazeleger, 2013; Phillips & Morrow, 2008; Shaw et al., 2012). Dobson identified a ‘new social order’ operating after the Charleville flood in Queensland – one where demands on women were excessive (1994, p. 11). She observed that women were expected to work harder than men in all arenas – women’s and men’s work, paid and

unpaid work (Dobson, 1994). In the United States context, the situation is worse for women who are outside the 'protection' or 'control' of a man, and as a result, even more vulnerable to financial insecurity: single mothers, widows, divorced women and lesbians were noted to 'conspicuously lack access to male-controlled relief and recovery resources' (Enarson & Phillips, 2008, p. 51).

Economic insecurity and the patriarchal social structure both contribute to increased vulnerability for women in a time of disaster as women's financial situation is frequently hindered further by caring responsibilities and inequitable access to financial aid (Enarson & Phillips, 2008). Women 'are treated differently to men at every step from the initial warning period when women and children are pressured to leave, but men are often allowed to stay behind; through the immediate post-impact period when men may leave their families to assist others ...; to the relief and recovery period when women, especially single parents, may be left out of the relief process' (Scanlon, 1998, p. 46). Economic recovery post-disaster is predominantly directed to employers or projects involving male labour, while women in disaster-prone areas are often employed in low status jobs and in sectors which do not attract support (Enarson, 2006).

Low wage women employed at the lowest rungs of the tourist industry and as beauticians, child care workers, home health aides, servers and temporary office workers will not be helped back on their feet by economic recovery plans geared to major employers in the formal sector. (Enarson, 2006, para. 6)

Other studies confirm that disasters affect women more acutely than men and that men are favoured by recovery efforts and funding allocation (Dasgupta et al., 2010; Molin Valdés, 2009). Elaine Enarson offers a summary:

First, women's economic insecurity increases, as their productive assets are destroyed, they often become sole earners, their household entitlements may decline, their small-businesses are hard-hit, they lose jobs and work time, and gender stereotypes limit their work opportunities. Second, women's workload increases dramatically. They often take on more waged or other forms of income-generating work; engage in a number of new forms of "disaster work," including emergency response and political organizing; and have expanded responsibilities as

caregivers. Third, women's working conditions in the household and paid workplace deteriorate, for example through lack of child-care and increased work and family conflicts. Fourth, women recover more slowly than men from major economic losses, as they are less mobile than male workers, likely to return to paid work later, and often fail to receive equitable financial recovery assistance from the government and/or external donors. (Enarson, 2000a, p. viii)

Women's inferior economic power contributes directly to vulnerability to male violence (True, 2012). VicHealth notes that 'the most significant determinants of violence against women are the unequal distribution of power and resources between men and women [and] an adherence to rigidly defined gender roles', and further, that economic dependence increases barriers to disclosing domestic violence and seeking support (VicHealth, 2007; 2011, p. 1).

## **Gender and violence**

Domestic violence is predominantly that of men's violence against women. It is both gendered and asymmetrical (UN, 1993; VicHealth, 2011) as women's violence is often in self-defence or retaliation, and 'does not equate to men's in terms of frequency, severity, consequences and the victim's sense of safety and well-being' (Dobash & Dobash, 2004, p. 324; Kimmel, 2013). The nomenclature used to describe men's violence against women is extensive. Terms include domestic violence, family violence, relationship violence, intimate partner violence, spousal abuse, wife beating and battery with more complex definitions of 'abusive household gender regime' (Morris, 2009, p. 414), 'control-initiated' and 'conflict-driven' (Ellis & Stuckless, 1996, cited in Wangmann, 2011, p. 3).

Other terms consider motivations or situations identified as 'pathological violence', 'anti-social violence' (Pence & Dasgupta, 2006, pp. 12-13), 'within the perpetrator', 'within couple', and its relation to 'potent stressors' (Johnston & Campbell, 1993, p. 191). Influential theorists Kelly and Johnson sought to categorise different kinds of domestic violence in order to accurately measure it and effectively intervene, and their early terminology included such terms as 'patriarchal terrorism', 'intimate terrorism', 'common-couple violence', 'mutual combat' and 'violent resistance' (2008, pp. 477-478, 485; see also Debbonaire, 2008; Gondolf, 2007; Johnson, 1995). These were refined in 2008 to categories

of ‘coercive controlling violence’, ‘violent resistance’, ‘situational couple violence’, ‘separational couple violence’, ‘separation-instigated violence’ and ‘mutual violent control’ (Kelly & Johnson, 2008, p. 477). One highly influential theory of domestic violence since the early 1990s is the ‘Duluth model’ (see Figure 1) which hypothesises that domestic violence is a pattern – springing from male privilege – of coercion, intimidation, isolation, emotional and financial abuse, and which may involve exploitation of children. The model was conceptualised by a ‘power and control wheel’ – since expanded with different versions, including one on disaster (see Figure 2) (Domestic Abuse Intervention Project, n.d. circa 1993; Florida Coalition Against Domestic Violence, n.d.).



Figure 1: The Duluth Model – Power and Control Wheel (Domestic Abuse Intervention Project, n.d. circa 1993)



Figure 2: Natural Disaster Power and Control Wheel (Florida Coalition Against Domestic Violence, n.d.)

Theorists sought to develop a typology of domestic violence to allow deeper understanding and more targeted interventions, yet the various terms and concepts are controversial and disputed (Wangmann, 2011). Both practitioners and theorists debate the role of confounding factors (such as alcohol abuse or mental illness), gender asymmetry and type of male perpetrators, as well as notions of control, the role of men in prevention, research methodology, and whether a focus on physical violence is misplaced (Dutton & Corvo, 2007; Flood, 2006; Foran & O'Leary, 2008; Gondolf, 1988; Gondolf, 2007; Gottman, 2001;

Jacobson, Gottman, & Shortt, 1995; Johnson, 1995; Pease, 2008; Stark, 2006, 2010; Wangmann, 2011).

The legal status of domestic violence in Victoria, and the legal context within which this research occurred is defined in the *Family Violence Protection Act 2008* ("Family Violence Protection Act ", 2008) as 'behaviour by a person towards a family member of that person if that behaviour — (i) is physically or sexually abusive' (See Definition of Terms). The health promotion approach in Victoria is to view domestic violence as prevalent, serious and preventable:

Too often intimate partner violence is trivialised in our society as somehow being less serious than violence committed in other contexts; as a matter to be resolved in the privacy of the home [yet ... it] is the leading preventable contributor to death, disability and illness in Victorian women aged 15–44, being responsible for more of the disease burden than many well-known risk factors such as high blood pressure, smoking and obesity. (VicHealth, 2004, pp. 8, 10)

## **Gender and disaster**

Disasters magnify both the strengths and the weaknesses in society so the way gender is constructed influences how women and men are affected by disaster (Domeisen, 1998; Seager, 2006).

Disaster phenomena necessarily involve all the basic dimensions and processes of social life. It is after all an old saw in common sayings and philosophical musings that crises lay bare the essence of personal and social life. (Quarantelli, 1994, p. 4)

Internationally, research literature on gender and disaster emerged only in the late 1990s, led by influential disaster and gender scholar, Elaine Enarson (1998) and her colleagues. In 1994, Quarantelli (1994) included gender as one of a number of disaster phenomena that warrant researchers' attention, and in 1998, Fothergill (1998), Domeisen (1998) and Bolin et al. (1998) called for more gendered research into disaster to address its absence in the disaster literature. Scanlon (1998) identifies that gender blindness limits understanding of disaster. Over a decade later, Maureen Fordham (2008) writes that this body of research is still small and mostly located within 'Third World' studies. In an overview of 141 countries,

Eric Neumayer and Thomas Plümpfer (2007b) claim that their research report was ‘the first systematic, quantitative analysis of gender differences in natural disaster mortality’ (Neumayer & Plümpfer, 2007b, p. 4). They describe it as addressing ‘one important, yet hitherto relatively neglected aspect (WHO 2002)’ of disaster scholarship (2007, p. 2).

### ***Higher global female mortality in disasters***

Across the globe, women are at greater risk in disasters than men (Dasgupta et al., 2010; Domeisen, 1998; Neumayer & Plümpfer, 2007b; Phillips, Jenkins & Enarson, 2009), with a higher disaster mortality rate for women than men in developing countries (Domeisen, 1998; Neumayer & Plümpfer, 2007b). The risk exists both during the disaster and in the recovery period that follows (Alston, 2009). The common factor in recent tsunamis, earthquakes, and hurricanes has been that the great majority of victims are women, children and other vulnerable groups (Phillips, Thomas, Fothergill & Blinn-Pike, 2010).

Historically, too, the figures are stacked against women’s and children’s survival. For example, ‘considerable excess mortality occurred amongst adult females’ in both the 1948 and 1966 Russian earthquakes (Rivers, 1982, p. 257). In one, the Ashkabad earthquake, of the 33,000 who died, only 18 per cent were men: 47 per cent were women and 35 per cent were children. In the second, in Tashkent, 20 per cent more women died than men (Beinin, 1981, cited in Rivers, 1982, p. 257). Such differential mortality rates are most probably the result of gender-determined roles with their separate expectations and exposures to risk (Molin Valdés, 2009; Rivers, 1982). One explanation offered was women’s responsibility for children which hampered escape, but Rivers (Rivers, 1982) goes further to question the veracity of the notion of ‘women and children first’, citing that in 1879, when the *Atlantic* steamship sank between Liverpool and New York, all but one of the 295 women on board died, compared to 187 of the 636 men. The disaster literature reveals other examples:

In [one] Indian earthquake, more women and children [than men] died, with women aged 25-29 most affected (Parasuraman 1995). In this disaster, men’s work and schooling had taken them out of the village when the earthquake hit. In an earthquake in Guatemala, more women were injured than men (Glass et al. 1977), and in an earthquake in Cairo, Egypt, more females were killed or injured than males

(Malilay et al. 1995). In the Bangladesh Cyclone of 1991, 42% more females died than males (Chowdhury et al. 1993). (Fothergill, 1998, p. 18).

Two other examples indicate palpable discrimination against women and children. In the Bangladesh cyclone of 1991, 'one desperate father, unable to hold on to both his son and daughter, let go of his daughter, acknowledging that he did so because his son had to carry on the family line (Haider et al., 1991, cited in Fothergill, 1998, p. 18), and Rivers (1982, cited in Phillips & Morrow, 2008, p. 28) reporting on a famine, provided a local man's quote, 'Stop all this rubbish, it is we men who shall have the food, let the children die, we will make new children after the war'.

In the more recent Indian Ocean Tsunami in 2004, 80 per cent of the 300,000 deaths were women and children from 13 nations (Phillips & Morrow, 2008). More recently, a 2012 study of 18 maritime disasters spanning 15,000 people from 30 nationalities over 300 years finds that women have a survival rate of only half that of men, and concludes that 'women have a distinct survival disadvantage compared with men', particularly in British shipwrecks (Elinder & Erixson, 2012, p. 13220). The notion of 'women and children first' has indeed been proved to be a myth and unsupportable as a reason to deny equal opportunity to women.

The effect of disaster on women may be easier to observe and document in developing countries where discrimination is more apparent, yet, the differential effect of disaster on women and men is evident in the developed world too (Domeisen, 1998; Fothergill, 1998; Phillips, Jenkins et al., 2010). For example, there is a contention from the United States to suggest more men than women are killed in disasters caused by severe weather events including lightning, thunderstorms, flash floods and hurricanes (Fothergill, 1998). One explanation is that men take greater risks than women, and are more often involved in outdoor activities (Neumayer & Plümper, 2007b; Tyler & Fairbrother, 2013b).

Contrasting evidence, however, indicates approximately equal mortality rates. Known death rates after Hurricane Katrina were almost the same for males (50.6 per cent) and females (49.3 per cent) (Jonkman, Maaskant, Boyd, & Lloyd Levitan, 2009). In Australia, deaths of females from bushfires was steadily increasing over the three decades leading to Black Saturday, approaching equal mortality rates with males (DeLaine, Probert, Pedler,



Goodman, & Rowe, 2008; Haynes et al., 2008). On Black Saturday, females comprised 42 per cent of deaths (Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission, 2010b).

Ultimately, women are vulnerable because of the power differential that characterises gender relations in every country (True, 2012). Henrici, et al. (2010) outlined the reasons for this differential in disasters:

Women in most regions share a greater responsibility for child care than men and more often than men have the home as their workplace, with residences often of less stable construction than commercial or public buildings. Women who are pregnant or recovering from childbirth have limited mobility and face additional difficulties during disasters. Women also make up a greater proportion of the elderly, typically one of the groups with the highest mortality rates during disasters ... Women also face a high risk of gender-based violence. (Henrici et al., 2010, p. 2)

In Australia, women are often left with the sole responsibility for the family and property because socially determined roles mean that women are likely to be separated from a male partner in a disaster as he defends the home or is an employed or volunteer fire-fighter (Eriksen et al., 2010; Honeycombe, 1994; Raphael, Taylor, & McAndrew, 2008). There are many reasons for women being alone, however, and assumptions that male partners are fighting the fires are themselves gendered, stereotyped and over-estimated. Less than a third of those who died in the Black Saturday fires attempted to defend their property (Handmer, O'Neil, & Killalea, 2010). Analysis of 1314 questionnaire responses from people affected by fires on Black Saturday showed that just half (53 per cent) of respondents attempted to defend properties. Of these:

A greater proportion of men (56%) intended to stay and defend throughout the fire than women (42%), who more often wanted to leave as soon as a fire was threatening than men ... Reflecting the data on intended responses, a greater proportion of men (62%) stayed and defended than women (42%). Most stayed to protect assets from the fires (83%); however, some stayed because they felt it was too late to leave (9%) or because their attempts to leave were unsuccessful (3%). (Whittaker, Haynes, Handmer, & McLennan, 2013, p. 845)

Indeed, the reality is, as Christine Eriksen writes, that '[M]en ... often take control and perform protective roles that many have neither the knowledge nor the ability to safely attempt to fulfil' (Eriksen, 2014, p. 39). Gendered responsibility leaves women to evacuate with dependents in circumstances of high risk. A 2008 Australian report stated that most women perish while sheltering in the house or attempting to flee beyond the time for safe evacuations (Haynes et al., 2008). The worst bushfires on record in Australia before Black Saturday were the Ash Wednesday bushfires in 1983, in which 28 people died in South Australia and 47 in Victoria. Immediately after these fires, Paul Valent (1984) documented his personal observations in two communities over a seven week period, writing that people felt guilty and ashamed at not living up to roles expected of them. Many people, including women alone, thought they were going to die, and '...as fear set in among those at home, intense longing was felt for the absent protectors, which led to frantic telephone calls and more direct calls through tears and screams' (Valent, 1984, p. 293). Decades later, little had changed, as women were found to frequently rely on the knowledge of their partners (Gilbert, 2007), and if household members with more bushfire knowledge and experience are away at the time of a fire, women are left to face the incident not knowing what to do or how to operate equipment (DeLaine et al., 2008).

In her analysis of female mortality in disasters *worldwide*, Fothergill (1998) provides explanations from the literature for their higher mortality than men. Her question as to whether more women died because 'their husbands had the decision-making powers and they did not dare leave without their husband's permission' and that 'women were left responsible for property and [could have been] afraid of blame and punishment' raises issues which might equally apply to the Australian bushfire context. In the study on men's experiences after Black Saturday, two quotations revealed this to be the case:

Look, there are a lot of tough women up here that made brilliant decisions, and are a little bit more logical than a lot of the blokes up here. But in general, the percentage of the women that would have said, 'Right, no, you're not staying, get in the car, we're going, it's only a bloody house', would have been 1 or 2 per cent. Most of the blokes would have said, 'This is my bloody house, I built it, I worked my arse off the last 25 years, I'm not leaving this joint, blah, blah'. And the wife would say, 'Are you

sure we're going to be alright?' 'Yeah, yeah, we'll be alright'. And I know a few families that perished like that. (Zara & Parkinson, 2013, p. 25)

I have first-hand knowledge that there are women, wives, on Black Saturday who wanted to leave town and their husband said, 'No, we're staying to fight this'. And they stayed to fight and they both died. (Zara & Parkinson, 2013, p. 25)

Men's use of domestic violence adds to the risk posed by natural disaster, as women's preparation and evacuations strategies are limited by concessions to controlling partners or more directly by lack of options, such as transport. Where women and children have left violent men, their new visibility and potentially shared emergency accommodation exposes them to danger from their ex-partner in addition to the danger from the impending disaster. Other women may have no choice but to rely on abusive partners to keep a roof over their heads, both during and after disasters (Fothergill, 1999; Fothergill, 2008; Houghton, 2009b; Jenkins & Phillips, 2008a). Ignorance of this vulnerability by community and emergency management endangers women (Fothergill, 2008; Phillips, Jenkins et al., 2010; Wilson, Phillips, & Neal, 1998). As Enarson (2012) notes, evacuation is even more challenging for women who have no freedom to act, and are trapped in unsafe home environments. An Australian domestic violence crisis line worker heard from one woman in this situation the night before Black Saturday. She said this memory continues to haunt her:

I received a call from a woman at around 3 in the morning. She told me the history of abuse from her partner - it is honestly, abuse that is much too gruesome and personal to repeat here ... Then she told me that people in her town were enacting their bushfire plans because it was a bushfire region. She said that her plan was always to leave early, but tonight, after abusing her, her partner took the keys to the car and said, "I hope there IS a bushfire tomorrow and I hope you die in it." And then he took the car and left. She had no other plan for getting away. I suggested she seek help from neighbours, she said they were 2 Ks away, it's the middle of the night, she doesn't want to tell them what's going on ... and she hated the idea of the 'stigma' around staying in a women's refuge. We explored if her mother would come and pick her up and bring her back to Melbourne. This woman wanted none of these things, she said she would just take her chances with the bushfire. And that's actually

how the call ended. (Cooper, 2012, *Identifying the Hidden Disaster Conference*, Melbourne)

### ***Australian context for gender and disaster research***

Perhaps the first foray into Australian gender and disaster research was a 1983 study, which assessed the psychological and physical health of 37 women whose homes had been destroyed in the Macedon Ranges bushfires and considered the association between locus of control and use of social supports (Wallace, 1983). In 1992, Australian researchers were encouraged to look at post-disaster stress in the context of both the individual and the family (Gordon, 1992, p. 15). Then in 1993, as previously noted, there was a spike of interest prompted by the Symposium on Women in Emergencies and Disasters held in Mackay, Queensland, Australia (Fuller, 1994). Calls for disaster research that considers social and gendered aspects followed. One emphasised the need for qualitative research, writing of the potentially significant role that women could play in disaster preparedness and response if more was known about how *everyone* in the community is affected by disaster (Williams, 1994). In 1998, Christine Finlay's chapter on her interviews with 20 women about their experiences of flooding in 1990-1991 in Giru, Northern Queensland was included in Enarson and Morrow's *The Gendered Terrain of Disaster* (Enarson & Morrow, 1998; Finlay, 1998). In this chapter, Finlay considered the notion of women being 'problematic' in floods and the social space women occupy (Finlay, 1998). She writes:

Feminists have argued that women's meanings and experiences have been epistemologically excluded in mainstream literature and a search of disaster literature confirms this claim [...] Disasters have, in the main, been represented as gender-neutral and women have been portrayed rarely and negatively. (Finlay, 1998, pp. 143, 149)

In 2003, DeLaine et al. (2008). reiterated that there was little gendered disaster research in Australia. Few had responded to the call for more research by 2009, when Caruana (2009) wrote that despite a vast literature on the psychosocial effect of disasters on individuals, little was known about the effect on families. Even more broadly, some advocated engaging whole communities in reflecting on their disaster experience, due to its therapeutic value as well as adding to the research base (Camilleri et al., 2007).

Key researchers who were addressing the gap in Australian gender and disaster research prior to Black Saturday include Christine Eriksen, who has made significant contributions to the sparse literature and continues with a 2014 book that compares the gendered dimensions of wildfire in Australia and the west coast of the United States (Eriksen, 2014). In 2008, Mae Proudley (2008) pointed to the lack of research into the role of women in bushfires, the impact of disaster on families, and how decisions are made in emergency situations. The Black Saturday bushfires in 2009 appear to have sparked renewed interest in sociological and gendered aspects of disaster with more published research from Proudley (2013), from Carole Shaw, Judith van Unen and Virginia Lang (2012) Tricia Hazeleger (2013), Meagan Tyler and Peter Fairbrother (Tyler, 2013; Tyler & Fairbrother, 2013a; Tyler & Fairbrother, 2013b; Tyler et al., 2012), and Katharine Haynes and Joshua Whittaker (Whittaker et al., 2013). Research papers are forthcoming from Connie Kellett on anger discourses after Black Saturday, and Lisa Gibbs et al. on the social impacts of disaster, both part of the University of Melbourne-led *Beyond Bushfires: Community Resilience and Recovery* survey. The 5-year study is a mixed methods longitudinal study with surveys in 2012, 2014 and if funds permit, in 2016 (Gibbs et al., 2013).

### **Disaster and domestic violence**

In 2008, research on domestic violence after disaster in the developed world was almost non-existent, leaving the question of whether domestic violence increases post-disaster largely unanswered (Clemens et al., 1999; Fothergill, 1999; Fothergill, 2008; Jenkins & Phillips, 2008b). Such research remains scarce (Caruana, 2009; Forbes & Creamer, 2009; Houghton, 2009a; Houghton, 2009b; Sety, 2012). Qualitative data sourced through women's participation, in particular, is rare. It appears that only Fothergill has published similar research to this thesis (Fothergill, 1999; 2008) with two case studies from a study of 60 women after the Grand Forks flood. Although Helen Cox (1998) conducted qualitative research with 40 women on how women experienced and recovered from bushfire in Australia, there were no findings on violence.

By way of explanation, Rosborough, Chan and Palmer (2009) write that few researchers tackle gender-based violence in disasters because it is difficult to study. Inadequate data and documentation to capture reports to police and services post-disaster mean that

quantifying domestic violence is both methodologically and practically difficult (Jenkins & Phillips, 2008a). To date research has largely focused on domestic violence agency data or domestic violence workers as informants (Houghton, 2009a; Houghton, 2009b; Houghton, 2010; Santa Cruz Commission for the Prevention of Violence Against Women, 1990; Wilson et al., 1998).

Yet evidence to support the hypothesis of increased violence against women after disaster is growing (Dasgupta et al., 2010; Enarson, 2000b; Molin Valdés, 2009; Palinkas, Downs, Petterson, & Russell, 1993; Phillips & Morrow, 2008; Wilson et al., 1998). A 1998 review of approximately 100 studies, situated in both developed and developing countries, addresses gender in disaster scholarship (Fothergill, 1998) and includes several studies that indicate an increase in domestic violence following disaster (see also Dasgupta et al., 2010). For example, after Hurricane Andrew in 1992, analysis of domestic violence helpline statistics showed a 50 per cent increase (Fothergill, 1998). Demand for refuge accommodation increased, and court cases for injunctions increased by 98 per cent and in the first four months following the 1997 earthquake in Dale County, Alabama, reports of domestic violence increased by 600 per cent (Wilson et al., 1998). A study of 77 Canadian and U.S. domestic violence programs echoes these findings, concluding that violence against women increases in the period following disasters (Enarson, 1999). Yet compiling a sound evidence base on rates of violence against women after disaster is not easy:

[T]here is a suggestion that the stress of disaster may lead to increased violence, making battered women greater targets than at other times. However ... it was difficult to acquire empirical data to demonstrate that this was the case, and impossible to document it. (Scanlon, 1997, p. 5)

This was written in 1997 and ten years later, little had changed:

...the research on woman battering in post-disaster communities is still almost non-existent. In the disaster research community, many question whether rates of woman battering increase in a disaster. Thus, although this question has been frequently asked, it remains largely unanswered. (Fothergill, 2008, p. 131)

In Enarson and Morrow's influential text, *The Gendered Terrain of Disaster* (1998) the link between disaster and domestic violence was explored, principally in Wilson, Phillips and

Neal's chapter, 'Domestic Violence after Disaster' (Wilson et al., 1998). The following year, Fothergill's (1999) article, mentioned earlier, comparing two case studies of women who experienced domestic violence after the 1997 Grand Forks flood was published. That same year, another study of the Grand Forks flood, this time by Clemens et al. (1999), reported on their cross-sectional survey of 140 adults. Their sample comprised 73 females and 64 men (with three missing data) and indicates that domestic violence was significantly greater among respondents after the flood (Clemens et al., 1999).

Over the next decade, research on domestic violence after disaster in developed countries was primarily advanced through the work of a core group of disaster researchers, principally Elaine Enarson, Maureen Fordham, Betty Morrow and Brenda Phillips. Between 2008 and 2010, key papers articulating the link between disaster and domestic violence were written in the context of the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina by Jenkins, Phillips and Enarson (Jenkins & Phillips, 2008a, 2008b; Phillips, Jenkins et al., 2010), by Schumacher, et al. (2010) and by Henrici et al. (2010). In 2012, Enarson wrote an overview in her book, *Women Confronting Natural Disaster: From Disaster to Resilience* (2012), in which she notes that 400 per cent more women and children than expected sought shelter from the anti-violence coalition after the 1993 Missouri River Flood. In 2010, it was reported that domestic violence calls from Louisiana to the national hot line increased by 20 per cent in the first two months after the oil spill (US Gender and Disaster Resilience Alliance, 2010). In Haiti, gender based violence 'dramatically escalated' after the earthquake, with an estimated 230 rapes of women and girls in 15 of the camps in Port-au-Prince, and with *Doctors Without Borders* treating 68 rape survivors in one facility in the month of April (Bookey, 2010, pp. 7-8).

A significant finding by Anastario et al. (2009) is that increased gender based violence after Hurricane Katrina remained higher than twice the baseline rate even two years later according to a survey of 420 displaced women. Anastario, et al. describe their findings:

When we sub-classified physical IPV [inter-personal violence] in our random sample, women showed a lifetime prevalence of 34.7% and a post-disaster rate of 7.7% in 2007, suggesting that IPV in this population is particularly high for a disaster-affected population in the United States. Such increases in our sample reflect alarmingly elevated rates of new violence, which did not settle back to baseline during the two

years following displacement, escalating from a lifetime estimate of 3.1/100,000 per day to 9.4/100,000 per day in 2006 and up to 10.1/100,000 per day in 2007.

(Anastario et al., 2009, p. 22)

In another study, Schumacher et al. (2010) sought to determine the prevalence of intimate partner violence, comparing the six month periods before and after Hurricane Katrina. They found a 35 per cent increase in the prevalence of psychological victimisation amongst women and an astounding 98 per cent increase in physical victimisation. For men, there was a 17 per cent increase in psychological violence and, equally astounding, no change in physical violence. They conclude, 'Although this study focused only on residents of Mississippi in the wake of Hurricane Katrina [in 2005], the current study provides compelling evidence that risk of IPV is increased following large-scale disasters' (Schumacher et al., 2010, p. 601). In New Zealand, disaster researcher Rosalind Houghton reports significant increases in domestic violence after disasters, and further endangerment of women already at risk with a doubling and tripling of workload for domestic violence agencies and a doubling of police callouts in New Zealand after the Whakatane flood in 2004 (2009a; 2009b; 2010).

Around the same time, Picardo, Burton, Naponick, and Katrina Reproductive Assessment Team (2010) screened 66 women aged 18-49 for physical and sexual abuse seven to nine months after Hurricane Katrina using a 20 question survey. All respondents resided in Louisiana Federal Emergency Management Agency housing. While 16 of the 20 questions were about demographic or reproductive information, if the participating respondent was alone in the home, she was asked four more questions about physical or sexual abuse. If she reported abuse, further questions were asked about its frequency compared to a year earlier. The report concluded that:

Physical abuse was not uncommon among displaced women following Hurricane Katrina. Increasing and new abuse were the most commonly reported experiences.

(Picardo et al., 2010, p. 282)

A questionnaire survey with 123 post-partum women, all of whom had experienced Hurricane Katrina, found that 'certain experiences of the hurricane are associated with an increased likelihood of violent methods of conflict resolution' (Harville, Taylor, Tesfai, Xiong



& Buerkens, 2011, p. 834). The authors note that the association may be under-estimated as 'those lost to follow-up were more likely to have had a severe experience of the hurricane' (p. 842).

A systematic review of the literature in 2013 (Rezaeian, 2013) affirms the scarcity of studies focusing on exposure to disaster and rates of interpersonal violence and concludes:

The results of these studies reveal that being exposed to natural disasters such as tsunami, hurricane, earthquake, and flood increased the violence against women and girls, e.g. rape and sexual abuse, and inflicted traumatic brain injury. (Rezaeian, 2013, p. 1105)

Despite this body of work, claims as to whether domestic violence increases after disaster continue to be cautious. For example, one study found higher rates of intimate partner violence among blue-collar workers after Hurricane Floyd in North Carolina in the United States in 1999, but disputed a link to their flood experience (Frasier et al., 2004). In 2011, a questionnaire survey with 237 women pre-Hurricane Katrina and 215 afterwards found no evidence of increased sexual assault amongst female students at the University of New Orleans (Fagen, Sorensen & Anderson). Another example is a study in Australia after flooding in 2011 (in the Lockyer Valley and the Somerset Region in Queensland, and the Ballarat to Kerang region in Victoria) which notes reports by research participants of 'perceived' increased violence (Shaw et al., 2012). However, the report states that 'further targeted research would be needed to investigate this aspect of the study' (Shaw et al., 2012, p. 32). The reluctance to unequivocally state that violence against women increases after disaster in developed countries is curious.

### ***Explanations for increased violence against women***

The UN Inter-Agency Standing Committee (2005) notes that 'the most immediate and dangerous type of gender-based violence occurs in acute emergencies' and theorises that the increased risk emerges as personal resilience is compromised by the lack of individual and community protective infrastructure (Inter-Agency Standing Committee, 2005). Indeed, vulnerability in disasters is increased by a range of factors. There is psychological strain resulting from grief and loss for both women and men. A prevailing 'private domain' of domestic violence and sexual violence (Inter-Agency Standing Committee, 2005) is

compounded by empathy for the abuser and excuses of 'out of character' behaviour. This may result in under-recognition of violence against women and lack of validation by service providers.

Natural disasters do not exist in isolation from the social and cultural constructs that marginalize women and place them at risk of violence. In fact, there is evidence that violence against women increases in the wake of colossal disasters and that the increased risk is associated with gender inequality and the limited representation of women in disaster responses. (Rees, Pittaway, & Bartolomei, 2005, para. 1)

Phillips, Jenkins and Enarson (2010) theorise that reasons for the apparent increase of domestic and sexual violence after disasters include threats to the male provider and protector role; loss of control; increased and possibly forced contact between the couple; and loss of options as support services for women are reduced. They write that, following Hurricane Katrina, some women evacuated with their violent partner to ensure the safety of their children while escaping the disaster (Phillips, Jenkins et al., 2010). Enarson suggests that relationships are pressured; disruptions to services mean women cannot call for help or transport is reduced; and women who have violent partners are often isolated (trapped) together with them and disaster exacerbates this (Enarson, 2012). Disaster also diverts resources:

[P]olice and other service providers are usually busy responding to other calls or emergencies that are deemed more pressing, so "domestics" become a much lower priority. It may be possible, then, that the decline in the incidence of domestic violence reports following Sept. 11<sup>th</sup> are a combination of women simply not calling for help because they see their own "personal" problems as unimportant, and the police not responding as they had prior to Sept 11<sup>th</sup>. (Renzetti, 2010, p. 52)

In 2006, Enarson writes of silent men, suicidal men, unemployed men, men feeling 'unmasked and unmanly', concluding that some will turn to some combination of drugs, alcohol and aggression, endangering those around them (Enarson, 2006, para. 4). It is apparent that disasters and their aftermath increase the vulnerability of people – some more than others. A 2009 literature review of the effects of relocation post-disaster on physical and mental health reports that three of the seven studies that considered gender

found women to be at increased risk of adverse outcomes (Uscher-Pines, 2009). Being relocated increases the burden due to 'psychological stressors, healthcare disruption, social network changes and living condition changes' (Uscher-Pines, 2009, p. 17).

Threats to women's safety extend beyond the direct impact of the disaster to 'vulnerability to unchecked male violence and aggression' (Williams, 1994, p. 34). Where researchers *have* noted the link between disaster and increased violence against women (Enarson, 1998; Enarson & Phillips, 2008; Fothergill, 1998; Jenkins & Phillips, 2008a; Morrow, 1999; Palinkas et al., 1993), they hypothesise that this increase is due to a number of factors including heightened stress, alcohol abuse, and lapses in constraints to behaviour offered by legal and societal expectations (Austin, 2008; Neumayer & Plümper, 2007b). After floods in Queensland, Dobson writes, 'It was as if the balancing influences were removed and life became very raw and stark' (Dobson, 1994, p. 11). Homelessness and changed living circumstances would be another factor (Phillips & Morrow, 2008). Enarson and Phillips write that, 'From Peru (Oiver-Smith 1986) to Alaska (Palinkas et al. 1993; Larabee 2000), male "coping strategies" after disasters involve alcohol abuse and interpersonal aggression' (Enarson & Phillips, 2008, p. 51). Duke Austin (2008) observes that disasters temporarily remove the societal institutions that regulate masculinity and can lead to violence:

I argue how a form of hyper-masculinity emerges from the stress and loss created by a natural disaster, which often leads to increased levels of violence and discord in heterosexual relationships. (Austin, 2008, p. 1)

This accompanies a community attitude that minimises such violence. Australian research shows a litany of attitudes that blame women and excuse men in violent situations. In a 2006 report on Australian attitudes to violence against women, a large proportion of the community believed that 'domestic violence can be excused if it results from temporary anger or results in genuine regret' (Taylor & Mouzos, 2006, p. xii). Such violence may even be seen as legitimate, and excused because this is 'the way men behave' (Atkinson, 2002, p. 4). In 2009, only 53 per cent of Australians viewed 'slapping or pushing a partner to cause harm or fear' as 'very serious' (VicHealth, 2009, p. 4) and 18 per cent 'believed that domestic violence can be excused if it results from a temporary loss of control'. Even more (22 per cent) believed domestic violence was excusable 'If a perpetrator truly regrets what they have done' (VicHealth, 2009, p. 36).

Disasters offer a very good excuse for men's violence against women and the deep disinterest in tracking changes to violence against women in Black Saturday's aftermath offers initial substantiation that violence against women after disaster is not seen as important to disaster planning, response or recovery (Parkinson, Lancaster, & Stewart, 2011). It seems men's violent behaviour is excused by embedded cultural and economic factors too, as in every country where violence against women is high, those factors play a critical role in promoting and condoning violence as a legitimate way to resolve conflict (AusAID Office of Development Effectiveness, 2008).

Women who have suffered violence from their partner *before* a disaster may experience increased violence in the aftermath and other women may experience it as a new event or pattern following a disaster. In disaster situations, domestic violence may well be buried even further beneath public consciousness, as attention is focused elsewhere. The women and children subjected to this abuse 'suffer doubly when large-scale catastrophes strike - even as large numbers of volunteers turn out to respond, donors overwhelm local communities, and people open their hearts to those in need' (Jenkins & Phillips, 2008a, p. 49)

The way communities respond, and whether disaster planning and recovery is set up to recognise and address violence against women, too, seem to depend on how well it was addressed before the disaster (Fothergill, 2008). At worker level, too, how individuals perceived violence against women before the event predicted their recognition and response to it in the aftermath (Wilson et al., 1998). Massive disasters like Hurricane Katrina and Black Saturday resulted in widespread psychological distress and 'maladaptive coping strategies' thereby creating 'conditions where violence may emerge as a strategy' (Jenkins & Phillips, 2008b, p. 65). Enarson suggested that, 'Teasing apart the triggers of gender violence in disasters (substance abuse, psychological stress, economic strain) would be a major step towards violence prevention and disaster recovery' (Enarson, 2012, p. 75).

### ***The under-reporting of violence against women in disasters***

For most of the world's history it appears that 'domestic violence' has at best been ignored, and at worst upheld as a man's right to subjugate the women in his household. Current legislation introduced only in 2009 in Afghanistan, permits Shia men 'to deny their wives

food and sustenance if they refuse to obey their husbands' sexual demands' (Boone, 2009). This individual example has its parallels in other cultures and throughout history. For example, in Victoria prior to 1985, it was not a criminal offence for a man to rape his wife.

It was not until 1985 that an amendment to the Crimes Act 1958 saw the inclusion of subsection 62(2) which states that 'marriage does not constitute, or raise any presumption of, consent by a person to an act of sexual penetration with another person or to an indecent assault ...' (Crimes Act 1958 - SECT 62). In Australia, contemporary legislation is now ostensibly free from gendered discrimination as it relates to violence against women. Yet, the letter of the law is not necessarily what is enacted in the judicial system, and, as stated in *Time for Action*, 'Attitudes and beliefs about gender are learned, and society often teaches deeply held sexist views' (Flood, 1998, cited in the National Council to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children, 2009). The 'misogyny speech' delivered by Australia's Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, in 2012 powerfully conveyed the sting and consequence of sexism in current-day Australia (Gillard, 2012).

Any assessment of the levels of violence against women in the aftermath of disasters must begin with an understanding that violence from intimate partners and sexual violence is grossly under-reported at any time. Australian research in 2004 indicates that only 12 per cent of women report sexual violence to police, 19 per cent report physical violence, and 15 per cent report physical or sexual violence from a partner (Mouzos & Makkai, 2004, p. 102). Of the few women who do report, even fewer make it to court or to a conviction. In Australia's Higher Courts,<sup>6</sup> the lowest proportion of all principal offences proven guilty are sexual assault cases (63 per cent), and sexual assault cases have the highest rate of case withdrawal (22 per cent) (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2010, p. 11; see also Victorian Law Reform Commission, 2004).

Denise Lievore (2005, p. 5) in her 2005 study of prosecutorial decision-making in sexual assault cases, also finds a 'relatively large degree of case attrition' with 38 per cent of cases in the sample withdrawn, and only 44 per cent of cases that were prosecuted resulting in a conviction. This figure includes guilty pleas (Lievore, 2005, p. 5). Similarly, a 2007 estimate

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<sup>6</sup> The Higher Courts refers to the grouping of the Intermediate (the District or County Court) and Supreme Court levels. (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2010, p. 11) (This is the most recent year available for this information.)

by the Australian Institute of Criminology suggests that less than 20 per cent of the sexual assaults where women do report to police are investigated and result in charges (Australian Institute of Criminology, 2007). The low level of sexual assault reporting in Australia may reflect community attitudes of women bearing the blame for such violence. Indeed, it seems that '[m]ost societies tend to blame the victim in cases of sexual violence' (Inter-Agency Standing Committee, 2005, p. 4).

Under-reporting after Hurricane Katrina became evident after a survey by Anastario et al. (2009). Officially, 46 cases of sexual assault were reported in New Orleans in the immediate aftermath, and over the following seven month period, sexual assault cases increased by 45 per cent (Austin, 2008). It was calculated that this represented a 95 per cent increase when the lower population after evacuation and displacement was taken into account (Austin, 2008). However, these reports represented only a fraction of sexual assaults as disaster-related barriers to reporting exacerbated the typically low reporting rates. A news report at the time stated that despite evidence of an increase in the number of rapes following Hurricane Katrina, a decreased rate of sexual assault reporting was expected because of the 'unfathomable chaos of Hurricane Katrina', and because of computer difficulties in the police department (Cook Lauer, 2005, para. 17). While formal reporting of sexual assault was low due to these barriers, Anastario et al.'s research in the two years after the Hurricane showed a sharp increase:

Our pooled (2006 and 2007) post-disaster SV [sexual violence] rate was equivalent to 3.04/100,000 per day since Hurricane Katrina, more than 27 times that of the local rate in Mississippi estimated before Hurricane Katrina. (Anastario et al., 2009, p. 22)

The under-reporting of *physical* violence against women, too, is apparent. Theorising that women suffering violence from an intimate partner may seek care for the physical and mental results of the violence against them, but are unlikely to draw attention to the violence itself, Anastario et al. (2009) write that women's reluctance to report violence against them is a further factor compounding gender blindness in times of disaster. This is corroborated by the United Nations Inter-Agency Standing Committee:

One of the characteristics of GBV [gender based violence], and in particular sexual violence, is under-reporting. Survivors/victims generally do not speak of the incident

for many reasons, including self-blame, fear of reprisals, mistrust of authorities, and risk/fear of re-victimization. Acts of GBV evoke shaming and blaming, social stigma, and often rejection by the survivor/victim's family and community. Stigma and rejection can be especially severe when the survivor/ victim speaks about or reports the incident. Any available data, in any setting, about GBV reports from police, legal, health, or other sources will represent only a very small proportion of the actual number of incidents of GBV. (Inter-Agency Standing Committee, 2005, p. 4)

### ***Violence and disaster in Australia***

Disaster research in Australia which takes a sociological perspective focuses on what happened to people in a literal sense: the stresses and challenges they faced; the effects in terms of finances, work, housing; the practical aspects of individual and community recovery; communications and media; and evaluation of system responses. A study of the 1983 Ash Wednesday bushfires published by Paul Valent the following year investigates the human reactions using 'temporal' and 'biopsychosocial' framework (Valent, 1984). While it speaks of tensions and stressors and mentions that '[m]any families, especially those in which relationships were previously strained, suffered badly, and even split up' (Valent, 1984, p. 295), it does not report on violence against women. Research into individual and community recovery from the 2003 Canberra bushfires reports on relationships with family, friends and community, and health and well-being issues, but the survey did not ask respondents about domestic violence or other forms of violence against women. While 22.4 per cent of the 482 respondents said the Canberra bushfire had a lasting effect for the worse on relationships with family, none spoke of domestic violence (Camilleri et al., 2007). The only reported comment that approximates this is:

One person interviewed told of a major and rather frightening family fight about a week after the fire, which they saw as the result of the stress of the whole experience, but also said that after the fight, everyone settled back to being very close and supportive. (Camilleri et al., 2007, p. 48)

This kind of interpretation was predicted in the United States a decade earlier, when Bolin, et al. (1998) wrote that gender is largely absent from concepts of the family in disaster research and how, 'the only hints of post-disaster discord in families are framed as role

strains, suggesting that such occurrences are out of the ordinary' (Bolin et al., 1998, pp. 32-33). This research underscores the assertion that some violence, including domestic violence, is 'unrecognized and unrecorded' in the context of disaster (Phillips, Jenkins et al., 2010, p. 280).

The Australian *Beyond Bushfires: Community Resilience and Recovery* survey in 2012 did not include a question on domestic violence or violence against women or community violence, however, consideration may be given for its inclusion in future questionnaires (Gibbs, 2014). Given the findings in this research that assert women are silenced about the violence against them, questions to capture this information will need to be informed by domestic violence workers and interpreted in the knowledge that disclosure is lower for women still in a relationship with men who have used physical and sexual violence than where separations have occurred (Lievore, 2003). Future surveys must be alert to such barriers as highlighted in a recent Federal Government report on domestic violence:

Women appear to be particularly reluctant to report current partners. According to ABS data, of females who experienced physical assault or sexual assault by a male in the previous 12 months, there was greatest reluctance to report incidents to police when the perpetrator was a current partner. (Mitchell, 2011, p. 17)

Writing about the 'lack of curiosity' about the rapes after Hurricane Katrina, Joni Seager (2006) reminds readers of the profound discrimination inherent in 'natural' disasters, suggesting instead they are 'human disasters' once the event is over. She writes: 'The gendered character of this disaster, and the wilful silence about it, is also more artifice than nature' (Seager, 2006, p. 3).

In 2013, the Australian Government funded development of a manual and kit to help women and communities prepare for and survive natural disasters, and its chapter on 'Relationships' notes the increased possibility of violence (National Rural Women's Coalition, 2013, p. 36). Yet, the specific question of whether violence against women increases in the wake of a disaster in Australia remains controversial and appears not to have been addressed elsewhere in any published Australian research to date (Parkinson et al., 2011). As a result, this research was formulated to address the gap in understanding the



sociological aspects of disasters' impact and aftermath in Australia, particularly focusing on violence against women. The research question was:

'Is there a link between disaster and increased violence against women in the Australian context?'

## **Conclusion**

As outlined in the literature surveyed and analysed above, the impact of disaster — while devastating to all concerned — is gendered. In disasters and their aftermath women are affected differently and in many cases more severely than men. Specifically, women are at greater risk of mortality in a disaster, and increased violence against women is a documented characteristic of a post-disaster recovery. Since the 1990s, a growing body of international research has presented evidence into the gendered impact of catastrophe. However, to date there is no published research with women on the link between disaster and domestic violence in Australia.

Arguably, two blind spots overlap on this issue. Violence against women, particularly within the private domain, has long been a taboo subject, despite work in recent decades to address this issue. It seems that this lack of recognition may be taken to a new level in a post-disaster context where stress levels are high, and where perpetrators may have been 'heroes' in the fires, and where, in the aftermath of disaster, men are often unemployed and sometimes suicidal. The resources of support services are over-burdened with primary and fire-related needs in the aftermath of a disaster and this serves to exacerbate a willingness to overlook violence against women. Theories of male privilege and women's sacrifice illuminate why increased violence against women after Black Saturday was tolerated. As Australian communities have endured one devastating natural disaster after another since February 2009, the need for Australian feminist research in this area is pressing.

The following chapter is the women's exposition of what happened to them on, and as a result of, Black Saturday. It begins with their apprehension as the much-heralded dangerous day became increasingly ominous. They spoke of deciding to stay and defend, or escape the fires, and included their observations of partners' actions and reactions. Their own feelings,

and perceptions of their partners' permeate the narratives. The second part of the chapter illustrates the stressors of the aftermath, stretching over weeks and months and years. This description provides essential context for the later chapters' focus on violence after the disaster.

## CHAPTER 3

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### 3: Methodology

#### Context

When women were asked why they wanted to participate in this research, overwhelmingly they stated they wanted to help others by sharing their experiences. They did not want the knowledge borne through suffering to be lost. Clearly, they shared the aims of this research, which were:

- To document women's experiences in the aftermath of the Black Saturday fires, and
- To contribute to a new knowledge-base and inform post-disaster recovery.

Outcomes sought included documented narratives from women in fire-affected communities about their experiences of bushfire and the recovery period, with a focus on domestic violence and the effect of disaster and the recovery period on women and their communities. The research question was:

'Is there a link between disaster and increased violence against women in the Australian context?'

Subsidiary questions were:

- What were women's experiences of violence against them following the Black Saturday bushfires?
- What was the nature of this violence?
- To what extent did women minimise or ignore the violence against them in the period of post-disaster?
- Why did they do this?
- How did women experience agency and societal responses?

- What actions are needed to recognise and address violence against women in the period of post-disaster?

This research sits within a wider research project conducted from 2009 to 2013 which comprised three overlapping studies. Interviews were conducted through Women's Health Goulburn North East, with ethics approval gained from the North East Health Human Research Ethics Committee. The first study comprised interviews with 47 people involved in a professional or volunteer capacity in the post-disaster recovery and reconstruction period. This was followed by the interviews with 30 women (the subject of this thesis), and the third study comprised interviews with 32 men on their experiences after Black Saturday.

The workers' study and the women's study were part of the same ethics application. I was primary researcher on this application and in this capacity undertook the ethics approval procedure for both North East Health and Monash University Human Research Ethics Committees (Approval number CF10/0448 – 2010000209). More information is provided in the Methodology section. As principal researcher in the women's study – the focus of this thesis – I developed the methodology, participated in each interview with a co-interviewer (Claire Zara) who is noted on the ethics application as associate researcher, and I completed all data analysis, conclusion drawing, and thesis writing. Data collection through interviews was conducted jointly with a co-interviewer on the recommendation of the North East Health Human Research Ethics Committee, however, all other work associated with the women's study was completed by the candidate.

The men's study – a separate research project to this – received ethics approval on 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2013 from Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee (Approval number CF 12/4034-2012001946) in an application in which Emeritus Professor Frank Archer is noted as chief investigator and I am noted as co-investigator. Claire Zara is noted as student researcher.

Figure 3 provides more detail including publications to date from each study.

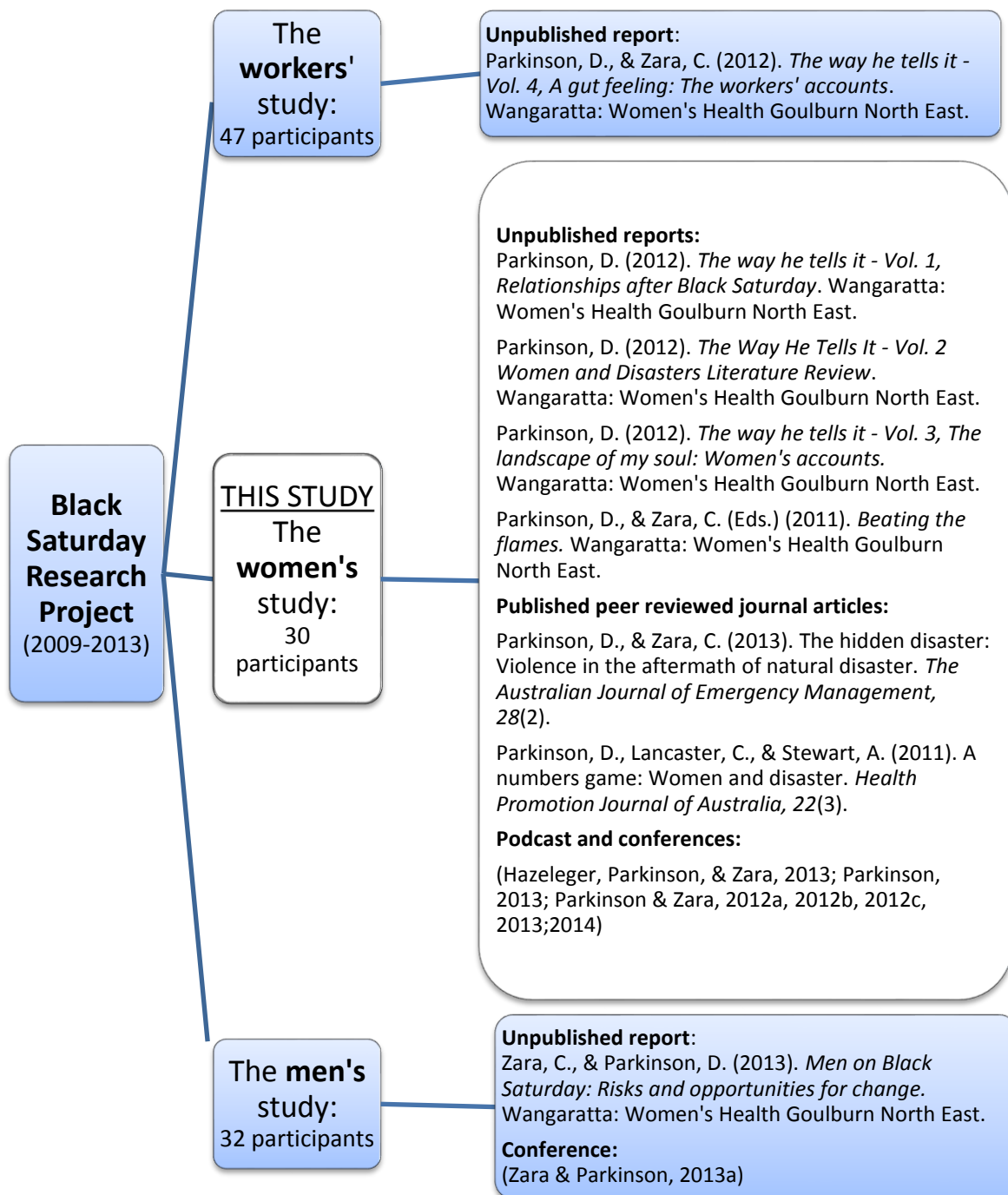


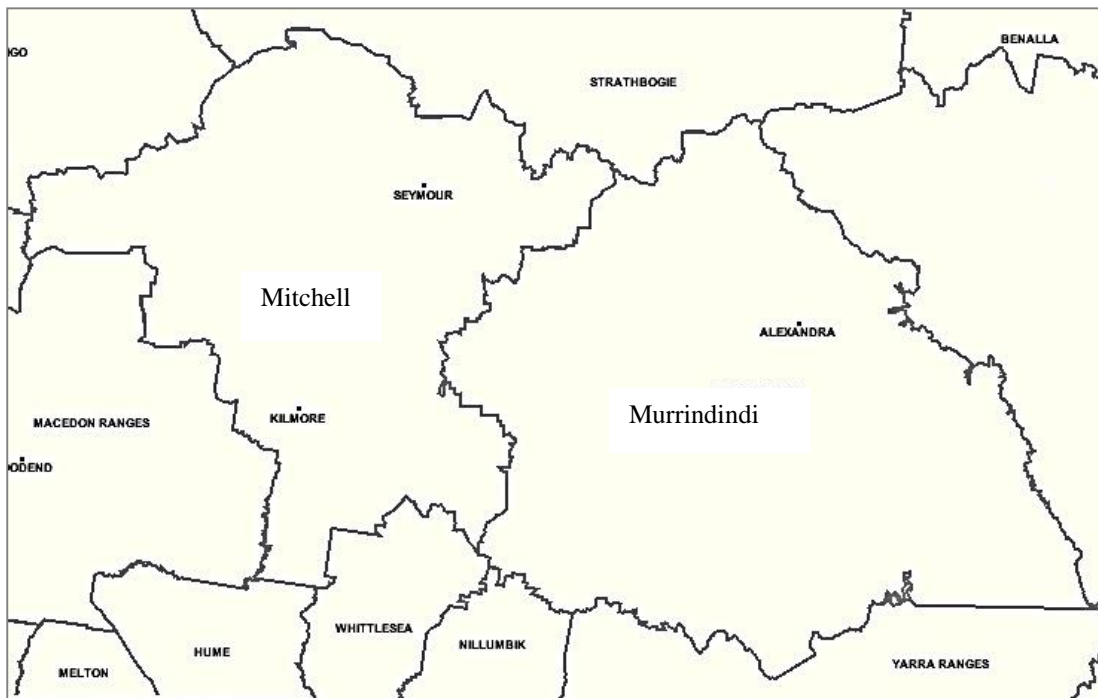
Figure 3: Research context for this thesis and report/ publications relevant to each.

This data collection was conducted over two years from late 2009 to 2011 and geographically confined to the Local Government Areas (LGAs) of Mitchell and Murrindindi in Victoria's North-East region. These LGAs were selected for study as they were the worst affected on Black Saturday with 159 of the 173 deaths in the shires of Mitchell and Murrindindi (Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission, 2010b). Established researcher

networks contributed to the decision to select this region for the study. Maps 1 and 2, below, show Mitchell shire on the left and Murrindindi shire on the right.

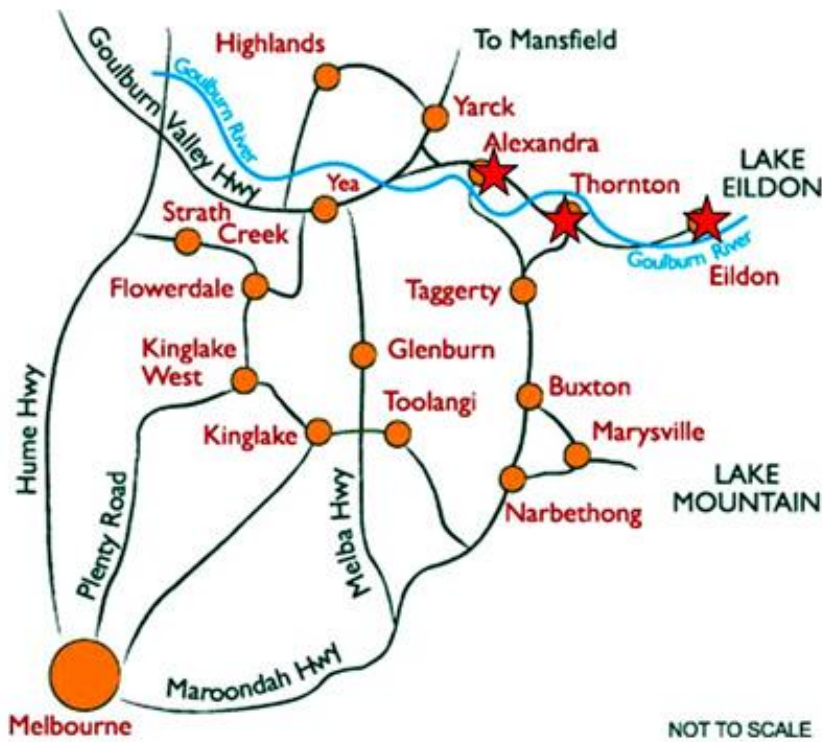


Map 1: Mitchell and Murrindindi shires in Victoria (Adapted from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shire\\_of\\_Mitchell#mediaviewer/File:Australia\\_Victoria\\_Mitchell\\_Shire.svg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shire_of_Mitchell#mediaviewer/File:Australia_Victoria_Mitchell_Shire.svg))



Map 2: Shires of Mitchell and Murrindindi (State Government of Victoria. <http://services.land.vic.gov.au/maps/lassi.jsp>)

Maps 3 and 4 show the location of badly affected Victorian towns within this region.



Map 3: Area showing towns ([http://www.murrindindi.vic.gov.au/files/f3166cab-cc2a-44d2-86ce-a0c900a01262/Murrindindi\\_Map.jpg](http://www.murrindindi.vic.gov.au/files/f3166cab-cc2a-44d2-86ce-a0c900a01262/Murrindindi_Map.jpg))



Map 4: Locations of deaths on Black Saturday ([http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/b/ba/Feb\\_7\\_09\\_vic\\_bushfires\\_map.PNG/800px-Feb\\_7\\_09\\_vic\\_bushfires\\_map.PNG](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/b/ba/Feb_7_09_vic_bushfires_map.PNG/800px-Feb_7_09_vic_bushfires_map.PNG))

### **The research approach**

This research methodology, like feminism itself, seeks to 'explain patterns of injustice in organizations, behaviour, and normative values that systematically manifest themselves in gender-differentiated ways' (Ackerly & True, 2010, p. 464). It is feminist and qualitative in approach, based primarily on in-depth individual interviews which offer an effective technique to encourage women to speak of their experiences (Chatzifotiou, 2000). Such an approach is particularly apt for this research. In the very act of agreeing to an interview despite the enormous barriers, women claimed their power.

The first act of power people can take in managing their own lives is 'speaking the world', naming their experiences in their own words under conditions where their stories are listened to and respected by others. (Freire & Macedo, 1987, cited in Labonte, Feather, & Hills, 1999, p. 40)

In offering advice to new researchers, Spradley alerts them to the concept of 'naive realism', defined as 'the almost universal belief that all people define the real world of objects, events, and living creatures in pretty much the same way' (Spradley, 1980, p. 4). Of course, as Spradley suggests, this is not the case. Qualitative research theorists refute the positivist premise of objectivity, and rather than prescribe particular methods, instead challenge researchers to identify their own subjectivity. In qualitative research, the researcher's values are influential, and therefore 'plenty of care and self-awareness' is required (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 10) Cultural values – both explicit and tacit – must be identified by each researcher and attempts made to put them aside in order to venture, in 'almost complete ignorance' into the field to be studied (Spradley, 1980, p. 4). Margarete Sandelowski (2010) helps researchers understand how to do this and explains that:

There is a vast difference between being open-minded yet mindful of the preconceptions (including theoretical leanings) one has entering a field of study and being empty-headed, an impossibility for any human being with a fully functioning brain. (Sandelowski, 2010, p. 80)

This reiterates Glaser and Strauss's acknowledgement that a Grounded Theory researcher is not a 'tabula rasa' and that perspective is needed to help identify relevant data and subsequent categories (1967). Once in the field, and when immersed in data analysis,



ethnographic and other qualitative researchers must constantly ask, check, and re-check the meaning participants attach to actions, events and communication. The theory of Symbolic Interactionism, which has been drawn on in qualitative research to assist in this task, has substantial roots in the work of John Dewey and Margaret Mead in the 1930s (Berg, 1989).

[T]he general purpose of qualitative research derives from a symbolic interactionist perspective which is central to the conception of qualitative methodology ... The theme that unites the diverse elements of symbolic interaction is the focus on subjective understandings, as well as perceptions of and about people, symbols, and objects. (Berg, 1989, pp. 6-7)

Herbert Blumer names and expands this theory in his foundational 1969 work, 'Symbolic Interactionism: Perspective and Method' (Berg, 1989; Blumer, 1969; Spradley, 1980). Here, Blumer describes its three premises as: firstly, that human interactions are based on ascribing meanings to other's actions to inform reactions; secondly, that the meanings themselves are a product of social interaction; and thirdly, meanings are moderated by the individual (Spradley, 1980). Grounded theory offers rules for data collection and analysis that minimise ethnocentrism in the attribution of meaning (Spradley, 1980). Although Glaser and Strauss point to experience, deduction and induction all playing a role in Grounded Theory (1967), its great strength is the technique it offers for inductive reasoning. As Berg notes, 'in order to present the perceptions of others ... in the most forthright manner, a greater reliance upon induction is necessary' (1989, p. 112).

Grounded Theory provided the conceptual basis for this research. First elaborated in 1967 by Glaser and Strauss, it is a combination of theoretical sampling and thematic analysis. Theoretical sampling is where participants are selected to be part of the sample on the basis of the need to fill out particular concepts or theoretical points. Thematic analysis is the identification of themes through a careful reading and rereading of the data. The methodology is inductive, building up concepts and theories from the data.

As I have conducted qualitative research into domestic violence in the past, some may argue that I would be more likely to find an increase in domestic violence after Black Saturday than other researchers. However, checks and balances were built in to the research methodology, whereby women were asked broadly about their experiences of Black

Saturday and its aftermath, and violence was just one component. This allowed women to focus on events, experiences and perceptions that were important to them. The semi-structured nature of the interviews resulted in some data being unavailable as a standard set of responses was not required. (This is reflected by 'not stated' in some cells in Tables 2 and 3.) In recording and transcribing the interviews, the women's narratives are accurate, and emphasis has been placed in this thesis on providing enough of their quotations for the reader to be satisfied that the women spoke of increased violence and the context in which it was reported. Essentially, the data speaks for itself through qualitative research that is presented with the force of 'thick description' (Geertz, 1973, cited in Berg, 1989, p. 52). The actual words of women, vetted by them after some weeks 'cooling off', cannot be denied, and the meanings ascribed to their words – by way of categorisation and ordering – to present a coherent narrative has also been verified by the women (Parkinson, 2012b). These methods mitigate against researcher bias.

The assumption is that to do feminist research is to use qualitative methods (Hughes & Cohen, 2010), and indeed, this is the approach taken in this research. Yet, choosing a methodology to guide social research is fraught, as there are no clear boundaries.

Analytic distinctions are made to distinguish entities that in real life resist efforts to distinguish them ... Are such studies to be named ethnography, grounded theory, or hermeneutics? ... In actual practice any one or more of these names, or even no name at all, might be acceptable. (Sandelowski, 2010, p. 81)

Terms like *ethnography*, *critical theory*, *transcendental realism*, *social phenomenology* and *interpretivism* cannot be defined as referring to entirely distinctive practices. The techniques are often shared and the nomenclature overlaps. Interviews, focus groups, case studies, participant-observation, literature reviews, content analysis can be a part of a number of methodologies (Berg, 1989; Miles & Huberman, 1994). In practice, Miles and Huberman observe, 'it seems hard to find researchers encamped in one fixed place along a stereotyped continuum between "relativism" and "postpositivism"' (1994, p. 4).

Taking just one position on the continuum, and one theorist, illustrates the complexities of qualitative methodology. In 2010, Sandelowski revisited her controversial and much cited

‘Whatever happened to qualitative description’ article a decade earlier (2000) where she writes:

Researchers conducting qualitative descriptive studies stay closer to their data and to the surface of words and events than researchers conducting grounded theory, phenomenologic, ethnographic, or narrative studies ... Qualitative description is especially amenable to obtaining straight and largely unadorned ... answers to questions of special relevance to practitioners and policy makers. (Sandelowski, 2000, pp. 336-337)

In the 2010 article, ‘What’s in a name’, she explores the nomenclature of qualitative research methodologies. She lists the ways her original thesis was misunderstood by qualitative researchers and reviewers, importantly stating that she had never really developed a new method of qualitative description at all:

[I]t is appropriate for researchers to refer to the method they used as, for example, ‘qualitative description as Sandelowski (2000) described it,’ it is inappropriate to refer to qualitative description as ‘Sandelowski’s method.’ (Sandelowski, 2010, p. 78)

Even within a particular methodology, polemics erupt about right and wrong ways of implementing it (Sandelowski, 2010). Tensions within Grounded Theory, too, were identified between the ‘theoretical sensitivity’ required of researchers to sort relevant from irrelevant data and the requirement to enter the field without a hypothesis and allow findings to emerge (Kelle, 2005). Explaining this apparent contradiction resulted in a divergence in opinion between Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss as each emphasises a different way to operationalise the theory. In a 1978 monograph, Glaser stresses the concept of ‘coding families’ and the ‘emergence’ of data (Kelle, 2005). Strauss on the other hand, in his 1987 book, *Qualitative Analysis for Social Scientists* stresses the researcher’s role in identifying relevant data (theoretical sensitivity) and the use of axial coding and a coding paradigm (Kelle, 2005). This disagreement reached a pinnacle after Strauss co-wrote (with Juliet Corbin) *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques* in 1990 (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). As Udo Kelle notes:

In the year 1992 Glaser turned against Strauss’ and Corbin’s version of Grounded Theory in a monograph titled ‘Emergence vs. Forcing: Basics of Grounded Theory

Analysis', published in his private publishing venture and written in an exceptionally polemic style. In this book he accuses Strauss and Corbin for having betrayed the common cause of Grounded theory. The charge ... is that by using concepts such as 'axial coding' and 'coding paradigms' researchers would 'force' categories on the data instead of allowing the categories to 'emerge'. (Kelle, 2005, 3. para 1)

The approach used in this thesis in employing Grounded Theory has been to err on the side of Glaser's interpretation while nevertheless formulating a research question and taking up Strauss's invitation to conduct a literature review before entering the field. In her 2011 article, Sandelowski suggests that such a mix and match approach across qualitative research methods may, in fact, produce a more balanced result, and she warns against 'religious' dedication to one method or theory of inquiry.

Research practice is arguably more usefully depicted not in terms of staying inside the lines but rather as constant movement between the 'special sensitivities' (Gubrium & Holstein, 1997, p. 101) afforded by various approaches to inquiry and by theories from across the sciences and humanities. Taking a view of inquiry as movement rather than as stationary might make it less likely that researchers will succumb to the excesses of preoccupation with methods and to the extremes to which methods themselves can too easily be taken. Alvesson and Skoldberg (2009) described these extremes ironically as the 'dataism' (p. 283) of grounded theory, 'narcissism' of hermeneutics, and 'social and linguistic reductionism' of critical theory and postmodernism (p. 269). (Sandelowski, 2011, p. 8)

She suggests, instead, that inquiry is differentiated more by the attitude taken towards data rather than the method used (Sandelowski, 2011), therein reiterating Millen's take on feminist research – that it is characterised more by the values that inform it rather than the methods used (1997). Even in 1994, moves were afoot as social researchers were increasingly seeing the world 'with more pragmatic, ecumenical eyes' (Miles & Huberman, p. 5). Saville Kushner captures the reality of doing qualitative research:

Methodology is, I think, something that is crafted as a form of expression. It is a personal construct. This does, of course, make naturalistic enquiry a highly uncertain and risky activity. It says that there are few guides – until and unless, that is, you

have discovered enough about yourself to know why you are investigating and what your personal limits are. Until then, the most common experience of enquiry is of confusion and uncertainty – and methodological texts rarely teach how to cope with these. (Kushner, 2000, p. 77)

It was essential that the methodology adopted for this research be well thought out in order to present credible research findings. To do less would be to disrespect the women's accounts and the risks taken by the women in participating in this sensitive research. The insights from the leading qualitative researchers and theorists cited here offered sound guidance.

### ***Ethics and recruitment procedures***

A Human Ethics Certificate of Approval was provided by Monash Human Research Ethics Committee (MUHREC) on 5<sup>th</sup> March, 2010 (Approval number CF10/0448 – 2010000209). MUHREC accepted the ethical review already given by North East Health Human Research Ethics Committee (NEHREC) in their letter of approval on 14<sup>th</sup> October 2009. (See Appendix 2.)

Women were invited to be interviewed in-depth about their experience and subsequent reflections. Criteria for inclusion were that women were living in the Shires of Mitchell or Murrindindi during the Black Saturday bushfires and were aged over 18. (See Appendix 3 for Recruitment Flyer.)

Recruitment notices were placed in community newspapers, newsletters and electronic publications at the Kinglake, Flowerdale and Marysville hubs and temporary villages, and at key community centres in Seymour, Alexandra, Yea and Whittlesea. Facilitators of women's groups were asked to display the flyer in their usual meeting places.

The recruitment flyer invited women to contact the researcher to arrange an interview at a time and place of their choosing. When women made contact to arrange an interview, they were asked for their email or postal address so the explanatory statement and consent form could be posted to them before the interview. (See Appendix 2 for explanatory statement and consent form.) Consent procedures were outlined, including that they were free to withdraw from the project at any stage. They were then advised they would receive a \$100

voucher (funded by Women's Health Goulburn North East) to cover related expenses such as travel costs and childcare. Interview venues were chosen by the participants with few choosing their own home. Venues chosen were mostly community-based and included private rooms in libraries, council buildings, hospitals and community health centres and one woman chose her local store which provided a private space.

At the beginning of the interview, the participant was handed another copy of the explanatory statement and consent form. After the participant read (or had read to her) the explanatory statement, each was asked if she understood and was happy to go ahead with the interview. Each woman agreed and was then asked to sign and date the consent form. Each was reminded that she had the right to stop the interview at any time or to refuse to answer any particular question, and that she had the right to withdraw from the project, and later could amend or withdraw the transcript of her interview.

Safeguards in place included women having access within a day or so to professional counsellors from the regional domestic violence service and from the Bushfire Grief and Bereavement Team in order to debrief. This offer was available to women at any time after the interviews. Three (free of cost) counsellors were fully appraised about this research and advised that they may be contacted by participants. The three counsellors offered to prioritise the women involved in this research. Participants were given the contact details of these counsellors along with an information sheet with the contacts of a broad range of appropriately trained and free or low cost local counsellors was distributed to all participants.

Although all the women were given pseudonyms, absolute anonymity was not possible in this research due to its location within small communities. The explanatory statement that accompanied the consent form stated:

The data will be anonymous, nobody will be named and you will not be identified in any way. Please keep in mind that it is sometimes impossible to make an absolute guarantee of confidentiality/anonymity.

Rural communities, at any time, present challenges for qualitative researchers who aspire to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. After disaster, the challenge of confidentiality is exacerbated because people who survived were immediately thrown together – for better

or worse – and most shared their stories of survival. As time went on, those left in the communities were, in a sense, ‘under the microscope’ with research and media attention and ongoing community meetings and consultations. As a direct consequence of frequent news of suicides, residents too were more alert to the wellbeing of their neighbours and friends.

The real risk of identification of research participants affirms the courage of the women who took part of this research and who approved their transcripts as data to unveil this ‘hidden disaster’ of violence against them after Black Saturday. Those who did take part understood this risk. Clearly, the difficulty in recruiting women reflects the reality that researching small communities in a post-disaster context requires careful consent – both before the interviews and when transcripts are analysed as women once more have the opportunity to review their participation.

#### ***Data recording and analysis***

Two interviewers (including the candidate) attended the interviews, as required by the initial ethics approval conditions, to allow for researcher debrief and to allow for care of the women. The interviews were semi-structured so that women were free to speak on the aspects of their experience of Black Saturday and its aftermath that were most significant to them. (See Interview Schedules in Appendix 4). As a result of the semi-structured and participant-led nature of the interviews, the tables that summarise key aspects of the women’s experience do not always account for all 30 women. In these cases, ‘Not stated’ is noted in the Table. Interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed in full. All transcripts were returned for women to approve — except for two women, who were concerned that their husbands may find out about their involvement in this research, and asked not to be contacted for further approval.

The validity of coding and interpretation was enhanced by the process whereby participants firstly received a copy of their own transcript and were invited to correct any mistakes or remove information they wanted excluded. Some women withdrew key sections of their interview in order to protect their partner or ex-partner and often, themselves. These were usually the more graphic and damning accounts of their partner’s abusive behaviour. Others

chose to remove quotations, fearing reaction from others. This affirmed the sensitivities still at work in these communities.

***The sample***

A total of 30 interviews with women were conducted. Women were aged from early 20s to 60s. In February 2009, 16 of the 30 women were living in or near Kinglake or Kinglake West. The other 14 came from Marysville and six other small towns in the Murrindindi and Mitchell shires. Their length of residence in the fire-affected region ranged from six to 51 years, with a median of 20 years and average of 22 years. Two of the women had separated from their partners before the fires and the other 28 were married or in defacto relationships at the time of the fires. The women held managerial, administrative, professional and service occupations in the health, community, agriculture, retail, education and transport sectors and some worked in a voluntary capacity. (See Table 1 below.)

**Table 1: Summary of the research sample**

<b>Age</b>	From early 20s to 60s
<b>Location</b>	16 from Kinglake and Kinglake West; 14 from Marysville and six other small towns in the Mitchell and Murrindindi shires.
<b>Years of residence</b>	Six to 51 years. Median 20 years, Average 22 years.
<b>Marital status</b>	28 married or in defacto relationships and 2 separated as of 7.2.2009
<b>Occupations</b>	Managerial, administrative, professional and service occupations in the health, community, agriculture, retail, education and transport sectors, and voluntary work.

Nvivo Versions 9 and 10 of the Qualitative Software Analysis Package were used to assist in coding the data. The coding unit was the sentence, and the purpose was to ascribe meaning. The result was a series of inter-related categories and sub-categories through which the meanings – and the argument of this thesis – emerged.

There is little ethnic diversity within the two shires — 83 per cent of women in the Mitchell shire and 82 per cent of Murrindindi shire women were Australian born, with 89 per cent and 92 per cent respectively speaking English only in the home. Those born in other countries were mainly from the UK, New Zealand, Germany, the Netherlands and Italy (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011a). The sample reflected this.

Twelve women actively fought the fire and 13 escaped, with all the danger that entailed. Two women spoke of doing both. (Three women did not choose to speak about this aspect



of their experience.) Twelve women lost their homes. For those who still had homes, many were damaged and unliveable for some period. Only six of the 30 women felt they would survive the Black Saturday bushfires. Thirteen women were alone for at least part of this experience, seven of them with dependent children. Another woman had small children and left early.

In this research, 17 women spoke about violence — 15 in their own relationship, one spoke about the violence in her close sister's relationship and one regarding her daughter's relationships. Nine of 17 relationships affected by violence in this study had no violence before the fires, and seven of these were stable, non-violent relationships. (See Appendix 5). These women spoke of settled and happy relationships that were disrupted by the fires.

For seven women, the violence had escalated sharply or had been an isolated incident many years earlier. For one woman, the violence had been severe and she had left the relationship before the fires. Her husband returned after the fires and resumed his level of violence towards her. Of the 17 women who experienced violence since the fires, 16 women stated they were afraid of their partner. Nine of the 17 women had separated from their partners since the Black Saturday bushfires at the time of interview, and two had separated prior.

(Table 2 in this thesis includes further details about the 30 women in the sample. Names, places of residence and age are removed to maintain confidentiality. Appendix 5 provides further information regarding the 17 relationships where domestic violence was present.)

### ***Difficulty in recruiting women***

A notable feature of this research was the difficulty in recruiting women to participate. One obvious explanation for the slow recruitment of women was the diminished population in fire-affected regions as many people moved away, either temporarily or permanently.

Several health professionals suggested that the timing of this research was perhaps too soon. Indeed, the question of when to conduct this research had been a critical consideration. As outlined earlier in Figure 3, the first stage of the research, conducted through Women's Health Goulburn North East (WHGNE), was to consult workers and ascertain from them the best time to interview women. The great majority of the

consultations with workers were held between October 2009 and January 2010. Their advice was consistent — to wait until after the first anniversary and until the fire season was over. Consequently, the first interviews with women were in May 2010, some 15 months after Black Saturday, through until March 2011, with one final interview in October 2011.

It is doubtful that the timing was too soon as data from two separate worker interviews through the WHGNE research implied that much would have been lost by waiting longer. Interviews in late 2009 with two key workers provided rich data about the increase in domestic violence. Yet, when these same workers were re-interviewed a year later, things had improved generally for the fire-affected areas, the problems their clients were presenting with were less directly attributed to the disaster, and there was a sense that it had all blown over and perhaps it was not really that bad before. This was the perception of some workers and not a universal experience – the passage of time has not resolved the turbulence created by Black Saturday for many in the fire-affected communities.

A further complicating factor for this research was that 17 women were interviewed while they were still living with their partners and persisting with efforts to make the relationship work. In relationships where domestic violence was present, eight of the women were still in the relationship at the time of the interviews. For women who remained with their partners, future attempts to interview them would doubtless yield less information. Where couples stayed together, data gathered some years into the future would lose the immediacy of the experience captured in this research. In accepting that the timing was optimum, the more complex explanation for the difficulty in recruiting women emerges as a key theme in this thesis – that women were prevented from speaking about the violence against them. The context of disaster, in this case the aftermath of Black Saturday, magnifies the taboo and shame that still characterises domestic violence. The women's narratives revealed the pressure they felt to put their own needs last in the chaos after Black Saturday, so it is perhaps extraordinary that any women took the risk of participating. As Spradley notes, research can empower or it can harm:

No matter how unobtrusive, ethnographic research ... reveals information that can be used to *affirm* their rights, interests, and sensitivities or to *violate* them.

(Spradley, 1980, p. 22)

Yet, the women experiencing domestic violence took this chance – aware that complete anonymity was not possible, and aware of potential risks. The trade-off was their belief and hope that their suffering could inform better services and that other women would not have to go through what they had. Perhaps seeing the possibility of change after reading the draft of this report, one research participant said, ‘When I walked away from the interview, I thought, “Why did I do that?”. ‘Now’, she said, ‘I know why I did it’.

## CHAPTER 4

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### 4: Surviving Black Saturday

#### Introduction

In a reflective piece published after a suburban house fire destroyed her home in the United States, Karen Lollar (2010) describes the struggle she and her husband faced in coming to terms with its loss. Beyond practical and financial concerns, she wrote about fear and dependence and a new sense of ineptitude. She wrote of others' expectations that she would have 'gotten over it' and of pretending to be coping but feeling fragmented. While holding a senior academic position and being in a position in which her competence ought not to have been in question, Lollar nonetheless writes of the erosion of her sense of her own competence, 'I feel fear ... an irrational, overwhelming fear that I cannot manage on my own. I am suddenly dependent and it feels odd' (Lollar, 2010, p. 267). Imagine then, the assault on individuals and communities that was wrought by Black Saturday in 2009 and by Hurricane Katrina in 2005. Lives changed forever with trauma, near-death experiences, homelessness, unemployment, financial distress and associated stresses of disruption to infrastructure: transport, roads, schools, childcare, public institutions (Borrell, 2011; Jenkins & Phillips, 2008a; Phillips & Morrow, 2008; Sety, 2012). Even the landscape changed, leaving people to face 'sudden absence of both physical place and place-in-the-world' (Borrell, p. 19; Proudley, 2013). Increased contact between couples, sometimes in accommodation shared with others, increases tension. Role divisions change and loss of control threatens the male provider and protector role (Phillips, Jenkins et al., 2010).

Each woman who informed this research located the men's increased violence within a rich description of her experiences of Black Saturday and its aftermath. It is essential to understand the layers of challenge and complication that face survivors of disasters. It is this context that presents a fertile environment for violence. This chapter relies on the women's own words to portray their experiences and observations, along with the connection of violence to the bushfires as ascribed by them.

Disaster researchers point to the importance of hearing from women if this information is then used to inform and improve disaster planning, response and recovery (Fothergill, 2008; Jenkins & Phillips, 2008a):

Listening to the voices of victims in a catastrophic, postdisaster context provides new insights into how to make all women safer during a disaster. (Jenkins & Phillips, 2008a, p. 62)

In speaking of their lived experience of Black Saturday and its aftermath, the women allow this overlooked aspect of disaster in Australia to be revealed.

### **Prepare, Stay and Defend or Leave Early policy**

Australia has had a bushfire preparation policy of 'Prepare, Stay and Defend or Leave Early' – commonly known as 'stay or go' – for decades (Haynes et al., 2008). It was well researched and based on evidence. Black Saturday changed the Australian understanding of bushfires. Its rage was impenetrable. Even those who had a firm fire plan and were exceptionally well prepared to stay and defend, and with decades of experience of living in fire prone areas, reflected on misplaced confidence, which was never meant for a fire with the ferocity of the Black Saturday bushfire.

I was quite confident, almost cocky. We were prepared, but I never thought ...  
(Natasha)

One participant experienced Ash Wednesday as a child, and was urged to leave early by her mother. Others wanted their children out of danger early. For those who did not evacuate early, decisions to stay or go on Black Saturday were made in the context of little or no formal information. They were made by intuition, or through fear:

I started to feel panicky ... so I ran up and got my stuff in the car and tried to get the dog, and then I just left. There was nothing to say what was happening but there was something that was just wrong. (Bess)

For those who understood the fire fighting system, deceptively ordinary words expressed powerfully the extent of the impending disaster:

When he'd said to me that Edward [a CFA volunteer] had to leave the [fire observation] tower, that's when I knew, 'Shit, we've got to go'. (Jess)

For many who left, the impetus often came when the power went off, and the phones with it. And for some, the incentive was more direct — they could see flames.

All of a sudden that wind change had happened and black smoke just came rolling down our hill ... and at that point it was full on 'go'. (Carmen)

A common reason to stay was fear of inadvertently driving into the fire.

'We'll stay and defend the house'. That had always been our plan [but] I had this flee instinct, and said, 'Maybe I'll take the kids and we'll go', and we both looked at each other and thought, 'No, it's too late'. (Marcie)

I said, 'I'm just going to get the kids and get out of here'. He said, 'Where are you going to go?' Good point. We didn't know which way to go. ... We heard there were fires [in all directions] so really there was nowhere left to drive. (Becky)

The women lamented the absence of official warnings about the approaching bushfires. Most turned to the radio or the internet, in particular, Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) radio and the Country Fire Authority (CFA) website, only to find no current or accurate information (Muller, Gawenda, & Bitto, 2009). Even when the information was correct, it was posted or broadcast too late to be of use. Power outages forced reliance on batteries or car radios and iPods:

We had been listening to the internet and radio and, truth is, everything we heard was the wrong information. (Elena)

The media didn't know what was going on. We were getting calls from our friends saying Marysville was gone. We knew before the ABC even said it was under threat. (Dana)

The first idea that we got that we might be under threat was my son's then girlfriend ... rang screaming over the phone, 'Get out, get out, it's coming, it's coming, we've got to get out'. (Caitlyn)

It seemed that even police, fire-fighters and other emergency service workers were not informed, and were not in place to assist people trying to escape the fire.

There were other tourists standing in the middle of the road when I was leaving, looking at the smoke coming, just standing there, and there were no cars driving around, no police, no SES [State Emergency Service], there was no one. It was dead, it was like a ghost town. (Hailey)

At times, warnings did get through, via Department of Sustainability and Environment (now Department of Environment and Primary Industries) or fire brigade workers phoning or calling into properties. Some were able to access expert information through social connections. One woman's neighbour was a fire ranger who showed them a map and suggested they had about two hours before the fires hit and should go. Another had a sister in the Country Fire Authority command centre. Sometimes, friends and neighbours living far away heard before the locals of the approach of the fire and its enormity. One had access to a scanner and phoned to warn her daughter. Another's neighbour had a 'mate from the CFA who radioed through the CB'.

Mobile phones provided an essential, although unreliable, communication method when landlines were not available or the power was down. Many women sent and received texts and calls warning of threats, passing on advice, and checking on each others' safety. The capricious nature of mobile phone connections in mountainous areas was frustrating as the signal came in and out. Battery levels depleted and unreliable electricity supply meant it was difficult to charge them. For some, the incoming texts and missed calls were another source of stress.

The mobile networks were jamming so we were not getting much reception. Every now and again when we did, the frantic messages and phone calls were crazy. (Caitlyn)

I could get range on the mobile but then there was no power and I had 246 missed calls and messages from people. (Bess)

Ultimately, decisions were made hastily, taking any option, as roads were found to be blocked or in the fire path. Police, too, were not in possession of accurate fire information

and, following the only advice they had, unwittingly turned people back towards the danger (Muller et al., 2009).

The kids saw the fire coming down the hill in Yarra Glen, and with [the only] direction from the police [to] 'Turn around and head back' ... I stopped at the intersection heading back to Kinglake and a few people pulled over as well and said, 'Where do we go, what do we do?' So I rang some friends in Healesville and they said, 'You can't get through, the road's blocked'. I couldn't get through to my husband and so I went back towards Kinglake and didn't make it into Kinglake. I'm sure you've heard the story about people just not knowing where the fire front was. They thought it was coming up the hill, but it was already through the National Park and going into Kinglake, so we were driving into it. (Megan)

The women described complete confusion and uncertainty. There was nowhere to turn for reliable information and the reality of the fire threat was immediate and inescapable:

It went pitch black, everywhere you looked there were flames, and I said, 'This is what hell would be like'. (Jill)

It just went dark, really dark and the noise, it sounded like a jumbo was landing on you. (Caitlyn)

It was chaotic. I saw a guy run a cop over because he was trying to get through and they wouldn't let him through ... It was just madness. (Virginia)

Natasha spoke of the terror in the blackness and in seeing what was revealed after:

If you've ever been to a war zone you'd understand what it was like. Not just the mental and chaotic energy of everybody, but you're driving along and there's powerlines down everywhere, trees everywhere, people, so many cars just banged into trees ... a car up a ditch — most of them still had bodies in them — people were having accidents in places where you'd think, 'How did they have an accident?' They're five feet from a house and six cars all banged into each other all burnt, and bodies, and you think, 'There's a house there'. And then you know why, because you couldn't find your house which was two feet away ... and that was the scene all the



way into Kinglake. And then you get into Kinglake and it was crazy town, just crazy ... The chaos in town of course was like what you'd see in people fleeing wars, not just sitting quietly in refugee camps, but running away from the war with bombs going off behind them. It had that kind of feeling about it. (Natasha)

One woman spoke of carrying her camera tucked into her bra strap so she could take photographs every few minutes. She felt the need to document her extraordinary experience because she didn't think anyone would believe her. She was not alone. Many spoke of disbelief at the enormity of the fire and tragically bizarre sights — flames like skyscrapers, familiar neighbourhoods destroyed in minutes, 'bonfires' everywhere, neighbours' houses exploding, blueberry orchards alight, animals on fire, birds dropping from the sky. And tragic sounds:

It was like an atomic bomb had gone off here. The clouds were like orange mushroom formations and it was getting lower by the minute. (Ruby)

You didn't know what was going on with your neighbours ... you could hear them yelling, you knew while they were yelling they were alive, but this massive old gum tree not far from the bloody house exploded, and I'm thinking how the hell are they going to bloody save themselves in there? (Jill)

We had known for hours that we had fire on three sides. At one point we heard the ... tanker crew screaming that they were on fire. We thought they had died, as we didn't hear anything more. (Amanda)

Women who left in convoys spoke of enduring regret at not being able to stop for people walking at the side of the road choking from smoke and assailed by falling embers. The bumper to bumper traffic had to forge on as one with the firestorm close behind. If one car stopped, it would endanger all behind. Such logic, however, barely dented the anguish of driving past adults and children, unable to help.

You've got to flee. And we see people — their car has broken down on the side of the road and you just feel, 'Oh, should we stop? No-one is stopping and we have to keep going in the traffic and what's going to happen to them?' You could see from the side there was fire and smoke and flame and it was dark. (Carmen)

The drive out was fraught with times of zero visibility — smoke so thick that women spoke of driving by memory – or terrifying visibility, with enormous fireballs catching up in the rear vision mirror. Blocked roads forced some of the women to take roads they knew to be dangerous at the best of times — winding, flanked by sheer drops or solid bush. And Black Saturday was the worst of times. Powerlines were down, trees on fire, cars forced to drive over burning logs, sometimes overheating and sometimes, too, with little petrol in the tank.

I'm in a Commodore and it was overheating because I was driving over burning logs and burning both sides of the road and the alarm was going off saying, 'Engine hot, engine hot'. 'Oh, shit, I hope it doesn't burst into flames.' (Caitlyn)

Ruby captured her life-threatening escape as she drove with two of her small children in the back seat and leading her female friend from overseas driving a second car with Ruby's third child:

It was terrible. There were horses stuck on fences, there were animals over the road, there were people in the cars, there were houses upon houses upon houses that we knew, friends. We recognised cars from friends who had crashed and didn't know whether they were alive or dead ... I couldn't even get out onto the road, there were so many cars that were fleeing. This woman just put her head out the window and said, 'Get out of here!' We looked over and the fire was there. All of a sudden I had four lives that I was responsible for, and my own. I shook uncontrollably ... I drove with the masses – 140 kilometres per hour ... It was windy. We had our high-beam on, hazard lights. We had the air conditioner on because we couldn't breathe the air, it was just too thick with smoke. Everyone was running for their own life. You didn't get time to stop and think. We got to Yea. It was like entering the twilight zone. People had already set up on the nature strips. There were horses, cows, dogs, sheep, goats. Cars were a kilometre down the road queued up for fuel. The Red Cross was set up — how they knew I've got no idea — it was just like walking into the twilight zone ... They were talking about building containment lines around Yea. It was terrifying. Once the full front of the fire hit here in Kinglake and St Andrews and Hazeldene and that area, the sky turned black. We were all in the clubrooms and

the blackness was upon us very quickly. We couldn't breathe ... it was too hot and it was too smoky. (Ruby)

When women made it to relief camps, sometimes with children, sometimes with partners and sometimes alone, they found another version of chaos. Relief workers were coping with people needing food, water, bedding and shelter, as well as medical supplies and access to toilets. The Red Cross centre was initially established to feed the fire-fighters and suddenly had a more urgent and unanticipated influx. The CFA, too, found their task had expanded, as CFA sheds necessarily and informally took on the role of refuge centres. The scenes were of unreality and distress. People were in shock, often separated from family, seeking safety, and news of loved ones.

### ***Those who stayed***

For the women who stayed, through their own choice or not, their survival seemed miraculous. Three vignettes encapsulate the desperation of the hours spent trying to stay alive, and trying to save others. In each, the germs of future relationship problems are evident in expectations unmet, demands issued, perceptions of uncaring neglect, even abandonment, all preceded by hours of increasingly ominous circumstances. Some women described personal inadequacy in a time of life and death – both felt and alleged by their partner. Even when couples seem to have worked well together, outcomes of homes destroyed re-wrote the narrative, suffering children a constant reminder of what may have been avoided.

#### **Vignette 1: Recriminations**

I drove over a hundred Ks an hour, and kept looking in my rear view mirror. The black ball was behind me – the whole blackness was behind me. I was going so fast and it was catching up to me. Two seconds earlier it was a kilometre back and then it was not far behind my car with a sense of it chasing me ... I wasn't scared ... but it was bewildering, like a crazy dream you can't make sense of ... Many others said how loud it was and my husband lost half his hearing from fighting it up close, but I didn't hear it, I did not feel it, I did not know embers were going down my back. I didn't know for ten days that I had spot burns all the way down my back ... I kept running inside every five or 10 minutes to the kids and so did my daughter. We'd

take it in turns so they weren't panicking ... At one stage, when I'd gone inside, my husband came running in through the back door.

[He said], 'I can't, I can't do it anymore. We have to let it go, I can't do it.'

I think he was having an asthma attack. I could see there was really nowhere else to run to safely, so I pushed him back out. For months later, he was angry at me for doing that but I think without him going back to it things would have turned out far worse for us all.

I went, 'No, no, no! Of course we can!' ...He'd said, 'I can't do this.' And I said, 'You can, you can, you can! You have to! [Our grandchild] is on the couch. You have to!' That's when I thought we might all die. (Kristin)

#### **Vignette 2: Regrets**

We'd prepared for the fire during the week knowing it was going to be a terrible day. We were up at five o'clock that morning. I was out on the mower, just compelled to get out of bed, on the ride-on mower and mowed the back lawn to dirt ... Our house is positioned such that we've a 360-degree view. With the first fires in the morning we watched them from Wallan and Wandong, so we were in a high state of alert from whatever time they started in the morning ... it was just the whole day of escalating anticipation. We had all our fire stuff ready, the baths were filled, the towels, all that kind of stuff. We were listening to the radio and then the power goes off. It started to become, what I would say, is real, because you're listening to the radio going, 'Oh, it's at Wallan. It's at here. It's at there.' Then all of a sudden they were saying, 'The fire's at Whittlesea! The fire's at Strathewen!' And you think, 'Shit!' We don't have any children. [My husband and I] were just watching and waiting and watching and waiting. And then you started to hear reports, 'Six people have been killed in Kinglake' ... And then you're hearing reports of more people being killed and the news is becoming more chaotic and the skies are becoming filled with smoke. Then the sense of uncontrolled panic sets in, but it's a calm panic ... Everybody's in deep shit and nobody's going to come and help. You couldn't contact anyone, and we're quite isolated on our property. Gradually, gradually you realise the fire's not going to pass you by. You're going to be in it ... By this time 28 people are dead and the level of chaos has risen. I don't know what time it was but then we were

watching this just enormous — I reckon it was going to 38,000 feet — this *huge* cloud. Literally, you're a small person and the cloud's just going like this over you and you can see flames up into it. Gradually you start to hear explosions. You hear that sound of the train. We were standing out looking south, probably five or six metres from our back door, and all the birds come that are dying! We can hear our neighbours screaming. It's just terrible! The smoke hit and we couldn't find the back door. Neither of us had taken a breath. I thought we were going to die before we got to the back door, it was that quick. You could not see your own hand. You run blindly and you don't know where the house is. We did get to the back door; it was only five metres. Had everything shut to that side of the house. By this time, the bush is all on fire ... We stayed inside long enough — I don't even know how long it was — until my husband was ready to go outside. We had fire-fighting equipment and stuff and he went out to fight the fire, there were trees near the house. I was just frozen. I sat in my chair like a dog in a car watching him, expecting him to drop dead from the smoke. Or be burnt. I was just frozen. I couldn't do anything other than just go from room to room and watch him. I couldn't help. (Natasha)

**Vignette 3: Responsibilities**

Everything went still. It was blowing a gale before and really noisy and it was suddenly still and dauntingly silent. Then it started blowing directly over us — grey smoke and black smoke and you could hear this noise like an engine, and you could see a glow through the trees. It was so noisy. He said, 'Right, go inside,' while he finished off [the preparation]. My daughter and I were putting towels in the bath and under the doors and windows. We could see comets of fire shooting off into the bush and going off where they landed. My son, who was five, was a bit nervous of course. It was before we saw the flames, but he was worried. I said, 'Why don't you draw a picture?' He said, 'Yes, that's a good idea.' He drew grey smoke and black smoke and orange flames and he started screaming because he was too scared ... The kids were sheltering downstairs, which is the most safe and stable part of the house. [My husband] and I were rushing up and downstairs each carrying a bucket and mop. We had to do a tag team. It was to sprinkle water around to make everything damp. Quite a lot of the windows cracked and some of the windows

shattered. One in my daughter's room shattered and there were embers coming in and he was calling me to help him. In our room the window flew open and I couldn't shut it. I was calling him to come and help me. You had to wet everything as soon as it came in, and there were a couple of points downstairs too, and through the bathroom. After a while it became really difficult to breathe. The kids were sheltering under wet towels and we had to hold a wet towel on our face when we went upstairs. We could take it in turns; one would go upstairs and the other would go under the wet towel with the kids for a bit and have a sip out of the water bottle. My son was screaming, 'Mummy I need you! Mummy, are we going to be dead?' [He] has since told me that when we weren't in the room with him, he thought we were burning to death. (Marcie)

### ***The day after***

For those who had stayed to defend properties, the next day was ominously silent. The immense loss of wildlife and absence of traffic intensified the isolation. Venturing out, survivors faced another dimension of trauma as they viewed evidence of the death and destruction wrought by the fire.

On the Sunday morning we drove up into Kinglake to see. It was like a set of where a nuclear war happened. You couldn't believe what you were seeing. (Caitlyn)

Having physically endured Black Saturday, the days and weeks that followed were characterised by seeking out friends, family and neighbours - telling and hearing of tragic deaths and of survival.

Afterwards there was no power, you couldn't get around easily, you were in daze and in complete shock finding out every hour of the day about other people who had died, who couldn't be found. (Lauren)

People died. And every day was a new revelation of people who had died ... My experience is that everybody just wanted to greet you, nobody could take on any more stories, they'd had enough of their own. You know, 'G'day but don't tell me really'. (Christina)

## **Expectations of masculinity**

The first three days after the fires were spent in isolation from the rest of the world as emergency services were unable to get through. Then the long recovery and reconstruction period began, with all the attendant pressures this brought. Some local residents speak of the aftermath as causing equal trauma. After recounting what happened and what they did on the day of the fire, the women spoke in fragments of the state of their relationship. Their memories of conversations, interactions and misunderstandings between themselves and their partners on the day and in the aftermath were vivid.

Almost without exception, at some stage, the women and those around them had believed that death was imminent. In our collective imagining of disasters like Black Saturday, we see men as capable, defending vulnerable women and children, and saving property, and women as passive and protected. This was not the reality. The accounts speak of courage, persistence, and selflessness. In equal measure they speak of uncertainty, regret and terror – from both men and women.

When husbands and partners were present, some women found great solace, inspiration and practical support. Some women described the protective measures taken by their partners, calmly guiding and monitoring women, children and others in the house while frantically putting out fires outside. One woman was amazed at her husband's ability to think fast and plan with uncanny awareness of what would be needed. He prepared the property so they could leave, packed the chainsaw and locked up in case of looters. In contrast, she spoke about her own panic, her ability to think clouded by urgency.

I'm wandering up and down the house, it's only a very small house, thinking, 'What to take, what to take, what do I take?' So he came in every now and again and gave me directions, 'Pack an esky, put the bottles of water in the fridge, take what's important to you'. (Carmen)

Another woman told how her husband worked 'madly' to save the property, interrupting his staggering efforts in moving cattle and putting out spot fires in choking, blinding smoke, to come back to the house to reassure and advise her and the others sheltering there. A third woman said that her husband had obsessively prepared the south-east of their property

having accurately predicted the fire's direction. He came back inside at just the right time as the fire did indeed come from the south-east and 'jumped the house'. Some men shielded their wives and partners from seeing bodies or other distressing scenes, and some held the horror of what they had experienced and witnessed inside, not wanting to burden others. Sometimes it was weeks or months before the men even told their partners about the anguish caused by what they had seen.

What he saw made him throw up ...He wouldn't let me go into our old place because he knew there were bodies there. So he didn't tell me still. (Carmen)

[He] went down and they actually found a couple of bodies. That's not something he has told many people. Remains anyway, not identifiable. He didn't tell me that for a while either. (Marcie)

In contrast, other women found their men an additional burden. Some women spoke of being shocked by their partner's response in the life threatening Black Saturday fires. Some were frustrated by their partner's inaction during the fires and dismayed by the need to take action themselves.

I don't know what the hell he was doing, but he wasn't bloody doing anything ...  
In the end, I got sick of it and said, 'Well, I'll go', so that's what I did ... He should have gone out there, but I don't think he had the guts to be honest with you.  
(Jill)

One woman had a brace following a major operation and was not meant to lift, yet was left to prepare for the fire with her teenage son. She described her husband leaving their property to drive off the mountain even though the fire threat was high. Others, too, told how their husbands denied that there was any danger, and continued on with plans for the day which involved them leaving the family home despite pleas for them to stay. The women faced accusations that they were over-reacting in asking for men to stay home, or asking them to prepare fire fighting clothes and equipment.

I called him all day and asked him to come home and he's like, 'Don't be silly' ... He made it home I think ten minutes before they actually shut the road. (Vanessa)



He said, 'You're being stupid' and I said, 'Okay, could you just get [the pump] out?' ... I had everything ready and he was a bit, 'Oh you're being this, you're being that' ... I said, 'Go to the front gate ... leave the gate open for me, I'm going to the garage' [to get petrol for the fire pump] and he was standing at the front gate with it shut, just standing, and he was like he had no input from anything, it was like he was frozen or something. And I swore at him, and I think I said, 'Is there something fucking wrong with you?' which was really cruel I know but I had to snap him out of it. (Kristin)

Another woman recounted that her partner took her young son (his step son) with him in his car — without her knowledge or permission — as he drove back up the mountain that afternoon and into the fires.

Poor Tom still can't go in a car that hasn't got a lot of petrol in it cos he freaked out on the day. He thought [they] was going to run out of fuel ... And at the same time, that's what gets me, it's not the fact that they literally nearly died three or four times just by getting caught up in stuff and making split second decisions, it's the fact that he didn't even have to go there and didn't have to do it that makes me cross ... They tried to save a few people and couldn't, and they pulled over and tried to get a guy out of his car but they couldn't, it exploded and caught on fire, and it was all a bit traumatic. (Kelly)

Some women sadly reflected that their partners seemed to relive the danger of saving, or attempting to save, others and blamed themselves for not doing enough. Neighbours who perished were sources of great pain to men and a constant reminder of their own perceived 'failures'. Regrets haunted men regardless of how they measured up to expectations of masculinity — whether externally or internally imposed. For some, no matter what they did, it was not enough. Some men were hurt by the thought of what could have happened and how close they and their families were to dying in the fires. Again, the pressure to 'measure up' to expected and prescribed masculine behaviours was not restricted to self-imposed reflection, but a community and media judgement about what they did on the day, with the capricious and sometimes mistaken proclamation of heroic status for some men.

There were the decisions he made that night, that were life and death decisions and he struggles with [ ... ] how he could have made the wrong decision and we could have all perished. (Becky)

My husband had that feeling of he should have helped them. But the bush before was fairly impenetrable because it had blackberries and scrub that was 10ft high to get through. So he had a lot of remorse ... it was a husband and wife and two young children that would have died less than 200-300m away from our house. (Teresa)

Oh yes, the lack of acknowledgement. They are the professional firefighters, it was their job to stop the unstoppable. They bear the grief and the loss and the guilt and they had all those people die, and we knew them all... I went to ... funerals for 24 people, two of them were triple funerals ... The whole community is traumatised, but the DSE boys silently bear the guilt of it because they were the professionals. This is their mindset ... they feel they failed, and they feel their friends died because of it and I could see [my husband] reliving those moments, where he could have done something differently and saved a life. (Miranda)

While some women reflected on their own reactions to Black Saturday as inadequate, concluding they were ultimately unable to function effectively, most accounts revealed their clarity of thought in the most life-threatening situations. They planned ahead, anticipated problems and solutions, and drew on implicit knowledge to get around seemingly insurmountable problems.

The only thing I could think of was that in 2006 the fires came through the Glenburn area and there were bare paddocks where it had burnt out, plus they put in the pipeline so I knew there had to be a flat spot, maybe even a tunnel ditch, which we could shelter in, so we drove there. (Ruby)

I checked on that plume of smoke every 10 minutes, I took photos of it and all our photos we used in the Royal Commission – my husband gave evidence there. (Kristin)

He got to the fire station and rang me ... 'Liv, there's hundreds of people here' and I could hear [a friend] screaming, 'We're going to die, we're going to die.' [My husband's] saying, 'Liv, we're dead, we're dead. We're gone.' I said, 'No you're not. [There's a] generator. They've got a bore out the back, Go and find it. There's tanks out the back. Go there and find it. Tell me when you've found it.' (Liv)

Incredibly, anticipating their own deaths in the bushfire, two women thought to advise police.

I thought 'I don't know who knows we're here and I thought someone needs to know'. So I tried to ring triple 0 and I couldn't get through and so I rang a police number ... I wasn't saying to her send someone to come and get us, I was saying I just wanted her to note that we were there and how many were there. (Caitlyn)

When finally she got through to someone on triple 0, my daughter who was now in [organising] mode had said on the phone to them ... 'All right, no, no, that's alright, I know you can't get to us.' There was something she said that let me know that they couldn't do anything - 'they' meaning Emergency Services. She said, 'We just need to let you know to look for six people', and I thought, 'She thinks we're going to die'. (Kristin)

## **Women alone**

Thirteen women in the sample were left alone to care for children and bring them to safety. Even when men were physically present, sometimes women were left alone with this responsibility.

When the car stalled, he just collapsed. He got out of the car and sort of went into the foetal position ... I just looked at him and I said, 'We've got four kids, we don't have time for this, get up' ... I had one kid not breathing properly and his sister was trying to take care of him and she had broken her collar bone and I don't know whether she reinjured it by carrying him. My husband ... was just in too much shock or whatever...then he just went totally into like he was in control and knows better

and went in the lead and actually didn't see anything else happening around him... He didn't see that Bobbie wasn't breathing. He didn't compute at all, but he had to be in the lead and about fifty paces ahead of everyone. (Vanessa)

Some women drove out alone.

I'm driving about 30km an hour because you can't see, I've got the pup, four gallons of water and a woollen blanket and [before I left my husband] had said, 'Now if you get in a wall of flames on the road drive through the bush'.  
(Christina)

Even when not forced into fight or flight, women alone were both vigilant and frightened of what was to come, acutely aware of their responsibility to protect their children's young lives. One woman told of a friend who hitched the caravan to the car and put the children to sleep in the caravan then sat up all night watching. Women whose husbands or partners worked for council or emergency services were definitely on their own as these services struggled to cope.

Some women felt quite betrayed with their husbands off helping other people. Not one person in the CFA in [one town] went home to their own house, they all lost their own homes. (Christina)

A lot of families are hurt that they weren't there to help, even though it's a big responsibility for us. The women had a big job that day ... [My partner] and I have never spoken about if this happened, what would I do? It was never an issue. We never had a fire plan. You thought he'd be here. My fire plan was him ... I thought I would have his help. (Jess)

### **Pressures after the fires**

The immediate and primary reaction to the bushfire was shock from its intensity and the reality of all that had happened. Then awareness grew of the depth of loss and the extent of damage to the landscape. For some, the 'high alert' stage continued for days and weeks, all through a veil of exhaustion.

For the next five days the sheep remained in the stable as fires continued to rage on three sides of us. We had no power and no telephones and the radio was filled with stories of hopelessness, death and destruction. (Amanda)

You couldn't even leave because you had to keep putting stuff out literally, for a month. (Vanessa)

It was 8 weeks after the fires that I got woken up at in the morning by my local fire brigade because my creek was burning again. Tree stumps burn underground for months ... Everyone was under constant threat. There were houses burnt down a week later. Because people had gone out and all of a sudden the house was gone. It was constantly burning. (Liv)

Coexisting with the long period of being on alert, people heard of friends, neighbours and children who died. For some, the first reports came with the approaching fire, and seemed incredible. But the reports kept coming. In the days after, the women spoke of learning who had survived, who was missing and who had died in the fires.

[My friend's] pager constantly went off, 'Mother, two kids, trapped in home.' All these addresses — we knew where all these people lived. 'Elderly lady, looking after grandkids trapped in home.' 'This person trapped, can't get out. Needs assistance.' But there's no one up there to help. The last page came through at 5.30 that morning. (Liv)

Funerals were held, bringing more sadness, and more guilt when women couldn't go, or couldn't face it. All of the women in this research lost friends, relatives, neighbours or clients. One spoke of the sad death of a loved child carer and the effect on her children.<sup>7</sup> Women spoke of hierarchies of loss. There was a sense that people's experiences and losses were being ranked. Some felt that differentiation had resonance.

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<sup>7</sup> No women who lost immediate family elected to participate in this research.

All I saw was my place burn and that's nothing, that's nothing. But to know when I'm sitting there watching my place burn, that my friends were dying is another thing ... I know I've lost the house, I know what it feels like to not be able to go home, but I tell you what ... I just think, 'Oh my God, suck it up, suck it up. It's a house, some people have lost people, that doesn't even compare'. (Vanessa)

Although survivor guilt has lost its pre-eminence in formal trauma studies since its removal from the DSM-III in 1987, it retains its currency in post-disaster support and reporting (Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement; Leys, 2006). Participants in this research reported guilt if they still had a house, if they still had an income, and if all their children survived. Survivor guilt, however, is not limited to self-reflection. Some women felt they were expected to rank – and sometimes deny – their personal sense of loss.

[My husband] was here but he never understood what it was like for me or some of the people dealing with it, and a lot of his group thought [unless] you lived there and you lost your house and family [...then] you should not be affected by it. But people are. (Hailey)

Some of the things that have been said to me subsequently, 'It's alright for you. You weren't burnt out'. (Amanda)

Some women found losing their home a source of great sadness — a loss of memories, family history, even identity. Their bricks and mortar were bound up with values and relationships. They remembered why they settled there and the plans and dreams that led them there. They had built the homes themselves or with partners, they spoke of solar panels and ideals, and gardens lovingly created and tended. For some, the family home had absolutely vanished.

It wasn't the Taj Mahal but it kept the cold and the rain out for 25 years ... Whatever else went wrong in your life you could come home and look around and think, 'I built this'. (Jill)

When we got to our property [after the fires] we had space suits on and it was 34 degrees — it was very hot. There was nothing left, nothing left at all ... and the kids

would search for something but there was just nothing. Nothing for us to salvage.

(Dana)

For these women the destruction of their home meant loss of the lifestyle they valued. The fires — at least temporarily — took away their purpose and future dreams. Some spoke of why they decided to live in Kinglake or Marysville or Flowerdale or any of the small towns in the region. Country life allowed freedoms like walking dogs without leads, pushing prams without cars speeding by, family recreation opportunities — caravans, boats, pools, horses. Some had history, some had plans, at varying stages of fruition, all stalled or stopped by the fires.

I can still picture everything as it was, and I know growing up I spent heaps of time there, just roller-blading around and doing what kids do, playing footy and things like that. I just picture everything as it was. (Hailey)

A great sorrow for most of the women was the loss of the landscape they loved. Whether the forested mountainous landscape or their own small gardens, the landscape had changed. Women spoke of resenting the vistas or houses or lights that they did not see before the fires burnt their treed landscape. The once familiar landscape was now foreign and an unwelcome reminder, reiterating the importance of place.

The trees. The trees just don't go away. They just don't go away. I don't know how long till we can't see the black trees and I know that reminder, that constant reminder, has moved people off the mountain. (Vanessa)

There are parts of the landscape now that are changed forever and I can't bear to look at those. There are places I don't like to go because people died there .... I can't believe it all happened. (Lauren)

The landscapes traversed in the daily commute from home to work was a constant reminder of all that had happened.

You would be in Yea looking at semi-green 'cos we got a bit of rain, and then you'd drive through all the burnt bush, and then you get into the burbs, and it was like you

went through three headspaces by the time you got to work. And you knew on the way back you had to go through that bloody head space again. (Jill)

The 'headspace' was all that happened from February 9th. Although they had survived, there was a mental and emotional toll.

### ***Stressors***

Even an event such as Black Saturday does not alleviate the demands on people to keep up with their responsibilities. They are expected to keep on going despite urgent demands in every direction. Financial distress was foremost for many disaster survivors. Borrell (2011) writes that after disaster people face immediate loss of status, and estimates that 80 per cent of welfare recipients would not previously have relied on it. Money problems not only added to the multiple stressors and potential triggers which increased the likelihood and severity of domestic violence (Jenkins & Phillips, 2008b), it effectively prevented escape for women and children experiencing violence from husbands and fathers.

The result of the economic difficulty is that victims may find themselves unable to leave a situation or take legal action to keep themselves and their children safe. In other words, the disruption caused by the disaster can exacerbate potentially violent situations. (Phillips, Jenkins et al., 2010, p. 288)

For many men and women, whether employed or self-employed, their financial circumstances had been affected by the fires. Income was affected in the short term through workplaces burning down. Farms, businesses, hotels, offices, health premises and industries were all affected. In the longer term, employment security was tenuous as survivors often could not simply resume their former employment as if nothing had happened. Table 2 shows that five women lost their jobs as a result of the fires and a further six were unable to continue in previous jobs for a range of reasons. Eleven lost their home and two lost businesses or premises. Mental health issues slowly emerged, preventing a stable return to work for many and affecting relationships. Those who had been employed casually found it harder to pick up work after extended periods away. Both lack of interest in work, and overwork emerged as symptoms of distress.



**Table 2: Job loss, occupation, and lost home**

<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Lost job after fires</b>	<b>Lost home</b>
Health professional	No	Yes
Natural therapist	Self employed - OK	No
Hospitality worker	Not reported	No
Unpaid community work	Not applicable	No
Paid community worker	No	Not stated <sup>8</sup>
Self employed	Placed her (own) business on market	No
Para-professional	Yes	No
Professional	Not reported	Yes, rented
Family business	No	No
Senior health professional	Stress leave then lesser position	Yes
Transport industry	No	Yes
Studying and part time work in allied health	No	Yes
Family business and now new job	Not applicable	No
Disability worker	No	No
No paid work	Not applicable	No
Not reported	Studio burnt, had to hire office	No, lost home office
Administration	Workplace burnt, some delay in resuming	Yes
Health professional	No	No, lost business
Retired, farmer	No, retired and now farmer	No
Childcare	Yes	Yes
Therapist	No	No
Farmer	Yes, lost farm income	No
Therapist	Yes, employer's place of business burnt	Yes, forced to move from rented house
No paid work	Unable to continue study	Yes
Senior health administrator	Yes, used leave until forced to resign — unable to resume high level job	Yes
Shop supervisor	No	No
Unpaid community worker	Not applicable	No
Health professional	No	No
Para-professional	Needed to resign to emotionally support children	Yes

<sup>8</sup> As noted in the methodology section, the semi-structured nature of the interviews allowed women to speak of what was important to them, and no standardised data-set was sought. As a result, some data is unavailable as reflected in this table.

With fractured employment and income, finances were further stretched as people were forced to find accommodation, sometimes paying the mortgage on damaged houses while paying rent on a habitable house. Eleven of the women spoke of the burden of rent or mortgage payments to them and their partners. The immediate focus was necessarily on re-establishing where they would live and replacing cars. Shared accommodation was fraught as survivors, although thankful for the kindness of others in offering their homes, experienced it as a further pressure. Overcrowding was unavoidable, and small children and adults alike were unsettled.

My brother at the time had a one-year old and a four-year old and we stayed there until May, and lived with him in his living room. (Megan)

We ended up with family and friends, it was very crowded and very hard because everyone had their ups and downs. (Jess)

And see the pressure is on him as well because we just want our house back because our daughter and son-in-law and the grandkids have lived with us for over a year now. They're still there.

*[How's that going?]*

It's terrible. (Kristin)

A further demand was income production while trying to repair homes or restore fences or shedding to properties, or help neighbours re-establish. Claiming insurance was fraught with difficulties, with some having to settle in court, and payouts not always covering the costs of rebuilding or repairing. Overlapping bureaucratic requirements of grant and insurance claims, federal, state and local government regulations and processes, together with understanding the acceptance criteria of individual support services all had to be navigated. Case managers were not always allocated in a timely manner, if at all, and were not equally valuable. Perceived and actual inequities in insurance, grant payments and provision of goods and equipment compounded the emotional strain. Bureaucratic requirements for grants, insurance and council permits, too, were onerous and time-consuming. The regulatory process associated with re-building was exacerbated by new standards after the bushfire and a cause of intense stress to survivors.

Those with children had to re-arrange their children's schooling as schools had burnt down and bus routes were no longer feasible. Lack of childcare sometimes prevented return to work, especially as children were in a vulnerable state after experiencing the disaster or its effects. Decision making in this sensitive time was often fraught with conflict and disagreement. Everything changed for survivors. The immediate bonding after disaster is known to be followed by cleavage (Borrell, 2011) and turmoil in personal circumstances was reflected at the community level. Teresa spoke of everyone being 'on edge' with raw emotions. In an email following her interview, Kristin provided a powerful and detailed description of the community violence:

There have been really awful confrontations, threats, arguments and extreme bullying as many men bore a heightened compulsion for power/dominance. Most of these men were 'smile and nod' acquaintances pre-fire, but they were now met with regularly. We (other women and myself) experienced direct personal bullying and threats on far too many occasions. I have personally witnessed other women become the dart boards for such violence. I have had screaming, frothing bullies inches from my face or thumping a meeting table where I thought they'd hit me while I stood my ground. I have intervened on a number of occasions where a female friend (or two) have been *literally* backed up against a wall, or cornered, with a grossly threatening local man verbally assaulting them. I cannot believe I did not go immediately to the local police at the time. On one night after Feb 7 - Sunday 8th Feb - I was savagely (verbally) abused by a neighbour - one of the worst instances I've experienced. That was definitely reportable but being that emergency vehicles were like a lather of chaos all over the main street, and being in what I now know was shock, it was difficult to report abuse and threats. It didn't seem the right time to report it, I think. How you can ask a member of the police force to help you when they are midst lifting tin off dead people? ... So, the question of, 'Have you experienced violence since the fires?' Yep. En masse! In the street, in public, in private. (Kristin, email 7.1.12)

Anger emerged within communities with conflicting views of residents leading to factions as to what the 'new normal' might look like. Communities struggled to imagine a shared future. While some people retreated to heal, others came forward to take lead roles in the

community. Yet others claimed bad behaviour as their right as survivors — a right that was often accepted by others. The community unravelled to the extent that one resident, a year later, said: ‘I hardly recognise the place now. I look around and I don’t know what ethos it is we hold on to’ (Parkinson, 2012a, p. 17).

### ***Increased alcohol and drug abuse***

A number of studies have found that there is greater use of alcohol and drugs in the aftermath of disasters (Enarson, 2012; Fothergill, 2008; Palinkas et al., 1993). This research indicated that a convergence of factors led to a sudden and apparently widespread reliance on alcohol and drugs in the aftermath of the fires.

A lot of heavy drinking went on with men early on ... The socialising happened around the pub and that’s where you console yourself. Especially in winter, with delays in building, you’re stuck in a small space, with a lot of relationship problems. (Case Manager, cited in Parkinson & Zara, 2012d, p. 131)

Such alcohol abuse is unsurprising given the societal acceptance of alcohol in Australia, particularly in times of stress (Allsop, 2013). Recovery workers spoke about perceptions of alcohol as self-medication and a legitimate response to stresses in the aftermath of Black Saturday, with one asking, ‘The people that say they shouldn’t do that, well who are they to say they shouldn’t be doing it? ... that’s what blokes do’ (Parkinson & Zara, 2012d, p. 130). It was seen as a valid way to cope with stress - and as an alternative to legally prescribed medication or counselling. Workers spoke of alcohol as an effective way to encourage men to talk of their experiences and problems. A consultant in the Canberra bushfire reconstruction said, ‘We put on special events which often involved a slab of beer in which the men would talk about that stuff’, and a local worker said, ‘The blokes get a few drinks into them and they talk about shit and that’s their form of counselling. That’s what they do’ (Parkinson & Zara, 2012d, p. 131). Alcohol was generally included in community dinners, and initial recovery meetings were held in the local pub in one town each morning – with alcohol service. A community leader noticed grant monies being spent on such self-medication:

You don’t go [to] people who’ve just gone through a disaster and say, ‘Here’s a couple of grand mate, go and get pissed and you’ll feel all right’ because quite

frankly, that's what they did. (Community Leader cited in Parkinson & Zara, 2012d, p. 131)

The way alcohol presented as a problem changed as time progressed. In the week after the fire, more men than women remained, or returned early, to fire-affected areas. Without the tempering effect of women, some men were getting together and drinking to excess. Two women spoke of returning to their homes to find them turned into impromptu pubs, complete with drinking men.

My house was turned into a pub, it was a mess, there were things everywhere, not just ash stuff but cans of food stuff and things that were just being handed out ... there were five guys ... all pissed as newts ... There was a lot of free booze. (Carmen)

After this initial time, when women and children had returned, both men and women were self-medicating with alcohol and drugs. One woman said drug and alcohol abuse was widespread in households in the first six months amongst groups of men, and for some women.

[A] lot of men who were really, really traumatised ... really started to drink ... I do know a couple of times after drinking, a few of the blokes would cry. There are a lot of women drinking too, including me. I got to a stage where sometimes I was having to drink to go to sleep. (Brigit)

Our place was a refuge. And so everyone who'd lost their homes would come, and pretty much most afternoons and evenings I'd be cooking ... I just remember cooking, cooking, nurture, nurture, and you know wine and cigarettes and dope and everything just became the evening afternoon pattern for quite a long time. But for [my husband] it became very much earlier in the morning and a lot more reliant and a lot more a coping mechanism. (Becky)

Carmen spoke of her husband admitting to being 'a closet alcoholic [and drinking] sometimes at 10 in the morning'. When asked if he did that before the fires, she said, 'Oh hell no, hell no'. Other women, too, noticed their husband's self-medication becoming problematic:

And he just started drinking a lot more, a lot more. I thought he drank a lot before [the fires], I think it doubled ... it just went out of control, and I think it peaked around December or January, just every single day and night. (Lauren)

Everybody could see that he changed, they could see he changed at work and that he was not coping, that he was drinking and that he shut down. (Miranda)

So he was drinking, throwing himself into work, but being completely ineffectual ... then they eventually pushed him out and it was all very acrimonious and in the meantime he was angry and irritable, drinking. (Audrey)

A strong association between alcohol and violence has been identified in the domestic violence literature (Abramsky et al., 2011; Braaf, 2012; Foran & O'Leary, 2008; Livingston, 2011). This was apparent to some women in this study who observed alcohol changed their partner's personality, endangering those close to them.

I mean he has his good moments and he can take one mouthful of alcohol and that's it, he changes ... Probably the worst [times] are when he's been with other guys, yeah, it's like a drinking session. (Lauren)

The women observed other community members, too, grief-stricken with no strategies to cope, 'deteriorating' through their substance abuse and resulting in volatility in the community and the home. Where there was a history of drug abuse, it re-emerged, apparently in response to Black Saturday.

Pre-fires everything was going really, really well and he was determined never to be on drugs again ... Everything was happy ... And then the fire hit. (Becky)

### ***Psychological effects of disaster***

What is clear is that Black Saturday was disturbing to those who lived through the fires. For some – perhaps many — survivors, it will remain raw and traumatic.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Terms like 'depression' and 'anxiety' were used in a colloquial, conversational sense rather than as diagnoses and are repeated here in the same way.

Yeah, it was a day. But I know that for people who are traumatised from this, that have lost their friends or even seen horrific stuff, that's going to feel like yesterday to them, for the next ten years. People don't get that. They think that they're going to get over it and its going to be ok. But it's not. You learn to live with it, you don't get over it. (Louise)

Some of the women interviewed had been diagnosed with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder or depression as a result of the fires and most spoke of feelings of anxiety, panic, hopelessness, lost interest or inability to function at some stage. They conveyed a sense of inevitability about 'falling in a heap' and knew they had to live through these bad times.

You can't happy yourself up, you've just got to go through all the crap ... Nothing's going to be good for a while. (Jill)

I was low. Very low. Nearly every woman I spoke to said the same thing. (Audrey)

After a week I went, 'Oh, I should go back to work' and I just sort of started like nothing had happened and I went back to work ... But then things just unravelled. (Natasha)

At times, some questioned their own sanity:

I felt at one stage it was a psychotic thing where I asked this of the counsellor, 'Sometimes I think I did die and I think we all did die and is this is a whole different reality where we don't know we died?' (Kristin)

I had terrible nightmares, and we woke up one night and I said, 'I don't know if I'm dead or alive' and for months couldn't really assess whether I had died and whether this is death, or whether I was alive or it was a dream. (Ruby)

One woman spoke of barely sleeping, instead reliving the whole experience over and over in her head. Another's husband slept only two hours a night for months. Understandably, ability to concentrate was very low and even remembering small tasks was challenging. There was no capacity for complexity. This affected partners and children too.

Last year was a wasted year for her, school wise, she couldn't concentrate ... the teacher wrote she didn't complete the year but it was understandable after what happened. (Dana)

He could not take any other thing other than what he had to concentrate on. If it was something as simple as washing his hands, all other input was too much. (Kristin)

Women related how they changed after the fires, some becoming more and more introverted from society and from their partners.

I became deeply, deeply introverted in the period after the fire. More and more and more avoided things, avoided talking about the fire, basically it just didn't happen. And that made me sick eventually, but that was my response and it probably suited [my partner] too ... Anything emotional he will just shut it out. It's too overwhelming to him, can't deal with it so it just doesn't exist ... It makes it impossible to relate to another human ... We just became more and more and more this isolated little couple, and our property's isolated so that helps. (Natasha)

I feel like I've got chains wrapped around me at the moment. I've got all this stuff in my head but I don't know how to process it or put it into action ... I used to be quite a social bee, but I prefer to be by myself a bit now. It's just nice and quiet. I just want to be alone. (Jess)

One woman described the concept of de-bonding, explained to her by her psychologist.

A de-bonding experience, that's how it was explained to me, is where you face your death and you reconcile to your death, and in the process of doing that de-bond ... from close emotional ties, like your wife and children. It's a way of becoming OK with imminent death. (Miranda)

Nineteen women felt close to death and 18 believed their partners thought death was imminent. Some women stated that this would inevitably have had a negative effect on their relationship.



Even if you don't admit it to yourself intellectually, in a way you've kind of said goodbye to everything. And it's just occurred to me that actually one of those things is that you say goodbye to one another ...[and that] is certainly going to be having an impact on how we feel about one another. (Amanda)

One woman felt her husband became less patient and quicker to judge because he had to face his mortality, and suggested his thinking became distorted.

It's because' they're' against him, because he's done something and they've found out about it and they're getting back at him ... It's really paranoid. (Lauren)

Another spoke of her husband's behaviour after the fires as very different from before. His moods ranged from being in total control to complete withdrawal. In rebuilding their house, builders would contact her, saying he was having a bad day. His loss of memory, for example, of conversations, led to feelings of paranoia. He accused his step-child of trying to poison him and his wife of having an affair. He wanted to involve police with what he thought were suspicious telephone calls. He became obsessive, running at all times of the day, then cycling day and night, then fanatically going to the gym.

It's like living with three different people, you know, you just can't tell on any given day, is he going to be angry today? Is he going to be solemn today? Where he normally had been a fairly balanced person. (Courtney)

Two women spoke of being very fearful that their partners would commit suicide, based on innuendo and statements of life not being worth living.

He had said, 'I might top myself', but never, 'This is how I would do it' ... he didn't have a true suicide plan, just suicidal thoughts. (Audrey)

Another two women called the police when their husbands actually attempted suicide. One woman knew of three suicide attempts amongst the fire crew her husband was part of, and suggested it was commonplace.

Every time you hear about somebody, it's a man, it's always men, ready to check out rather than face another day. Something's got to change. (Miranda)

According to Western definitions of masculine behaviour, anger is more acceptable than tears (Connell, 2005; Pease, 2010b). Women made the connection between the men's experience of Black Saturday, and the way they channelled their grief and distress into anger. Many of the women spoke of their partners' anger and the seemingly uncensored way they expressed it. The danger for women with violent partners or ex-partners is both direct and indirect in the aftermath of disasters. Anastario et al. (2009) found that women who experienced domestic violence after Hurricane Katrina were 10.4 times more likely to report symptoms of Major Depressive Disorder than other women, and Frasier et al. (2004) found consistently higher reports of stress, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and other psychological problems amongst victims of domestic violence.

### ***Re-emergence of past trauma***

Where people had a history of trauma, Black Saturday brought it all back. The fires woke up and exacerbated what had seemed to be resolved. Previous traumas and long-buried fears, believed to be overcome, emerged again.

I noticed he was volatile. He always had issues of possibly depression or ... even borderline personality disorder which we were discovering because all these things had been exacerbated. So there were times of emotional issues before, quite significant ones, but they were more manageable. Post-fire they became unbearable. (Becky)

It's not just the issue of the fire, it's a hundred things. The fire has just triggered a hundred things. (Bess)

Some women spoke of their own or their partner's experience of trauma before Black Saturday, suggesting it was implicated in ongoing struggles in recovering from the fires. They spoke of layer upon layer of assault to one's being. If people appeared to be functioning well and seemed to have overcome previous trauma, the fires disturbed any semblance of recovery. The women referred to their partners' histories of traumatic upbringings or tragic incidents in childhood, or childhood sexual assault. Some had felt helpless as a child, some with abusive alcoholic fathers. One had wartime trauma as an adult in the military. Each woman fearfully and sympathetically made the link between her partner's behaviour, the previous trauma and the fires.

The aggression in that family reached the point where my husband's brother at 12 or 13 years of age took his father by the throat and was going to stab him over a game ... This is the fear I have because of the anger my husband has in him. He had a very traumatic childhood. (Tanya)

He's had a history, got a bit better but never really dealt with anything and it all just got worse after the fires and after repeated losses. (Audrey)

The women, too, had suffered in the past. Christina spoke movingly of the death of her baby, and Louise of her mother's murder. Trauma from previous bushfire experiences was a further stress.

When I was 14 our house burnt down so it's triggered a lot of stuff from then, the smell's triggered a lot of stuff. And then my Mum. So I know what that feels like, to be totally shattered. [The fire has] triggered me where I couldn't even think. (Louise)

The interviews presented a strong picture of counselling either not sought or not successful and a resurfacing of previous, unresolved trauma.

Various experiences from the past that had been traumatic and that we'd dealt with before all sort of came in together, and suddenly you're finding yourself immersed in this background of traumas from the past, not necessarily shared ones either ... It's almost as though you revisit previous emotions where you felt out of your depth. (Amanda)

Past trauma lay under the surface, ready to be revived and exacerbated by the bushfires. For some, the new trauma led to introversion, withdrawal, isolation, and denial of any problem, and for others, to increased aggression or symptoms of mental ill health.

There is now a post traumatic stress issue on top of whatever there might have been before the fires. I feel that because he is harbouring so much that it all becomes too much and his [violent] responses are now more dramatic. (Lauren)

[My husband] was a reasonably fragile character before, but he was a whole egg. Whatever happened to him through the fires smashed him. Whereas a stronger shell might have held, he was smashed and his moral compass was decimated. (Miranda)

## Relationships in crisis

Disaster researchers have lamented the lack of research with intimate partners during and after natural disasters, noting that existing research examines individuals – often with little recognition of constructed gender roles – or more rarely, examines ‘the family unit’ – again omitting consideration of gender roles (Bolin et al., 1998; Cohan & Cole, 2002; Enarson & Scanlon, 1999; Tyler & Fairbrother, 2013a). Bolin, et al. (1998) point out that that the family unit is assumed to be in unison, homogenous, stable and equitable. They remind us that this approach ‘is at considerable odds with recent research that analyses families and households as arenas in which gender relations can reflect, different, even opposing interests, and one in which exploitation of women is common, even endemic’ (Bolin et al., 1998, p. 33).

In their report three and a half years after the Canberra bushfires, Camilleri et al. found that 22.4 per cent of survey respondents said the bushfire had a lasting detrimental effect on family relationships (2007, pp. 47-48). The focus of this research is on intimate partners. The findings reveal profound relationship stress that the women believed was brought on or seriously exacerbated by Black Saturday.

Most interviews were held close to the second anniversary of Black Saturday. Of the 30 women, nine had separated from their partner since the fires and most of those still together were struggling. Some were working on reviving their relationship, and others were biding time while the children were still at home. The reasons given for relationship breakdown varied and were sometimes ostensibly unconnected to the bushfire. Yet women explicitly made the connection to the underlying trauma wrought by the fires and to the huge stresses people were carrying as a result of Black Saturday as reasons for relationship difficulties.

It’s the biggest thing I’ve ever been through, the biggest challenge to our marriage we’ve ever been through. I knew we were fighting about everything, and we never used to fight. Everything was just so hard ... I was angry because he wouldn’t address the problems and I couldn’t live with them. (Kristin)

The women reflected on the extent of relationship breakdown amongst people they knew.

Marriages are just breaking up like you wouldn't believe. And the thing is even my friends who had very grounded relationships have struggled. (Ruby)

The more you talk to other friends, they say, 'Oh, so and so's husband, they had trouble too and he flipped out and took off'. So I know that there's quite a few others. (Caitlyn)

Most of the mountain is divorced now. Or if they're not separated they're nearly there ... We could easily start a dating agency up here. It would be huge! Yeah, or a singles night or taking a singles bus trip off the mountain once a month with everyone that's separated. You'd need about 20 busses. (Liv)

Research shows the 'routes through which such disaster might affect couples' (Cohan & Cole, 2002, p. 15) either by compounding existing strains or by introducing new conflict. Cohan and Cole (2002) identify these routes as stressful events, economic circumstances, mental health, and communication. In particular, they point to Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder which affects communication and potentially reduces the support spouses provide to each other, particularly when coping with overwhelming feelings. They write that 'spouses were less effective at soliciting and providing support to their partners when they reported more negative events' (Cohan & Cole, 2002, p. 15). Their research following Hurricane Hugo in the United States in 1989 found that gravity of injury, life threat and economic impact predicted level of marital stress (Cohan & Cole, 2002).

When undertaking this research, some health professionals and community members asserted that if there was an increase in marriage breakdowns in the aftermath of Black Saturday, it was only in troubled relationships. However, this research shows that to be inaccurate, echoing other published observations following disasters. Writing after the 1991 Oakland Berkeley Firestorm in the United States, Hoffman (1998, p. 58) wrote that 'many unions, long and short, broke apart', and following the 2003 Canberra bushfire, Camilleri et al. noted it caused 'a very negative effect on the family by compounding problems or difficulties that the family was already facing' (Camilleri et al., 2007, p. 48). After Black Saturday, too, even secure partnerships suffered under the weight of so many pressures post-bushfires.

It's a huge, huge percentage of relationship break downs ... because it strips back all the perceptions and all the things that we put around us. Any relationships that were having trouble were hugely exacerbated but ... there are certainly relationships that I know directly, that were doing quite well but are hitting rocky ground because of the fact of being stripped back bare. People are questioning who they are, where they're going and their place in the world. (Becky)

An important text by Kai Erikson nearly four decades ago (1976) still resonates in its insight into the suffering of individuals and communities after disaster. Importantly, this inquiry extended to include couples:

Wives and husbands discovered that they did not know how to nourish one another, make decisions, or even to engage in satisfactory conversations when the community was no longer there to provide a context and set a rhythm. There has been a sharp increase in the divorce rate, but that statistical index does not begin to express the difficulties the survivors have relating to their spouses. (Erikson, 1976, p. 304)

Erikson's analysis articulated the layers of trauma suffered by survivors of the 1972 Buffalo Creek flood disaster in the U.S. – both individual trauma, which he defined as 'a blow to the psyche that breaks through one's defences so suddenly and with such force that one cannot respond effectively' and collective trauma, defined as 'a blow to the tissues of social life that damages the bonds linking people together and impairs the prevailing sense of communality' (Erikson, 1976, p. 302). Hoffman (1998) encapsulated this from her own first-person experience:

While standing amid the rubble of my home, I also stood amid the rubble of a social and cultural system. An entire community and its trappings, both physical and metaphysical, had been dismantled, and I was seared as close as any anthropologist ever comes into a cultural void. (Hoffman, 1998, p. 56)

Disasters see the concurrence of traumas, complicating recovery for individuals as the relationship and the community they relied upon are equally fragile. Echoing Erikson's findings (1976), in this research women spoke of wanting 'him' to be there at some level –

and he wasn't. As individuals, people were not travelling well, not coping with the trauma or the daily pressures. It seemed that, barely able to keep their own heads above water, they could not emotionally support their partner.

Our fuses are very short. A lot of what we say is unedited ... You've got all the responsibilities, and you can't handle anybody else's needs. You know, if [my partner] would start whinging to me about something, 'I can't deal with your problems, if you're feeling unwell with your injury or whatever, I can't handle that'. I've just managed to tread water myself. (Amanda)

The first ... weeks after were really hard. Everything just fell apart. It seemed like we couldn't really talk to each other about it. It was like my feelings were burdening him because he had his own feelings. (Marcie)

The urgency for action during the fires and in the recovery period meant practical matters took precedence over emotional needs.

I think it's been over nearly two and a half months since we've been together. There's nothing. I feel like there's a wall between us ... We're not close anymore like we used to be, that might be me as well, but we're just always tired and busy with the house. (Jess)

Women spoke of not talking together as a couple about their reactions and feelings, of being tense and uptight with each other, and of conversations getting 'quite rough' because neither one was balanced. One woman spoke of feeling tearful and overwhelmed and being told by her husband, 'No, don't cry, you have to be strong'. She stated that he could not tolerate her feelings of devastation. Another woman suggested her partner would not let her talk about the fires because it reminded him of his own experience which he did not want to face. For many couples, neither partner had the resources to help the other.

People are going to say more stuff than they normally would because they're tired, exhausted, traumatised. (Louise)

Those who faced the fires together inevitably reflected on that and drew conclusions about how they had worked together. One woman looked back with pride, seeing their work as a

team, while her female partner looked back with anger, feeling abandoned. Yet the anger did not come easily. It festered under the surface while she struggled to understand what she was feeling. For many survivors of Black Saturday, feelings that emerged in the time immediately after were un-named and unaddressed. For women, anger is not an acceptable emotion, so angry women sometimes repressed this emotion.

After Black Saturday, accusations went both ways as partners blamed each other for action or inaction, courage or cowardice, competence or ineptitude. One example of this is given by Christina, who spoke of being unfavourably compared to other women who physically helped with fighting flames, while her contributions in the home and on the property were not recognised. She said she was considered 'worthless with the fires' by her partner. In contrast, where women were visibly and energetically working at the community level, criticisms were levelled at their lack of attention within the home and the relationship.

There's a bit of resentment with him thinking I should have been more helpful to him [but] I knew that he was there and I had to do my job. (Brigit)

But it was all my fault. If I wasn't such a bitch he wouldn't need to take drugs. And he wouldn't need to do bad things to support his drug habit if I was more supportive. (Liv)

As Hoffman observed after the Oakland Berkeley Firestorm, 'women retreated in silence and acquiesced' (1998, p. 57). Sometimes, retreat from a partner resulted from deeply felt disappointment in his behaviour in the fire and then subsequent guilt as women acknowledged the horror of what he, too, had been through and his continuing pain. Valent, too, writes of this:

Unfulfilled desires to be protected led to a sense of wilful personal abandonment and betrayal by trusted protectors. Anger, disillusionment, and despair were felt towards such people. Guilt for such feelings was felt subsequently, as the loved protectors had also experienced great distress. (1984, p. 293)

It seemed the demands to be everything to everyone after the fires were felt by men, too. Women spoke of feeling neglected as their partners attended to community needs, resulting in greater fragility in the relationship.



He'd say that he was doing everything for everyone and he would go off and it would almost be a relief to me that he left. (Marcie)

Perhaps inevitably, people drifted apart, solidifying into their own disquiet.

I could feel him going down the tube and I could just feel us becoming more and more isolated within ourselves, but not even a pair of isolated people, *two* isolated people, and I just thought I could get on with things. (Natasha)

He'd just sit there and it was sort of like, 'Now it's my time watching TV' so I wasn't supposed to talk, and then he'd go to sleep in the chair most nights. And I just thought, 'Well stuff it, I might as well go and sleep down in the bloody shed with the dogs 'cos this isn't really a relationship any more'. (Jill)

For many women, it was a conscious decision to put aside any attention to emotion simply to survive day to day, a decision encouraged by their partners. A strong theme was the reluctance of men to acknowledge any kind of problem.

He was sort of in denial and he would say, 'Just get over it, just get on with it, don't talk about it' ... So it got to the point where I would just clam up ... I was tired all the time, I would come home from work and there would be tension and then he would just announce, 'I'm going to bed' and he would go and then I would feel more relaxed ... So I felt like we were growing apart. (Caitlyn)

Ultimately, however, this lack of attention damaged relationships.

[You think you will] deal with the emotional side later. Well the later didn't happen for a long time and we were actually, at one point, beginning to get a bit panicky, saying, 'Well these chemical pathways, are they permanent chemical pathways? Because we're tired of being fucked up, let's just get back some normality'. (Amanda)

Well my husband said that the fire just didn't affect him. I don't think that's true. *Why not?*

Because we're getting divorced. I don't see how any human being could have that

experience and be unaffected, emotionally unaffected, by it. He just said, 'I was fine, I just got on with it' ... I think that he's just completely shut down. (Natasha)

While the sense of not coping at all did not allow for sensitivity to others' needs, a lack of routine added to the strain. Some looked outside the relationship for emotional support or for diversion from reality through flirtations and affairs — both real and on the internet. It was simpler to seek emotional support and sympathy from new people, particularly people who did not have the weight of their own struggles with an experience of Black Saturday.

By that night I was convinced there was an affair happening and I was totally devastated ... He said later on, 'We weren't getting along and she's just so easy to talk to'. (Caitlyn)

He was incredibly distant and unresponsive the whole time. He began to communicate with a woman on line during this time, and proceeded to have an affair with her. (Miranda)

Natasha told of her husband's interest in his virtual life on the computer. Conversations were about the life events of people neither of them had ever met. Real life interactions were neglected to attend to the internet. It emerged that his interest developed during the period she was struggling with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder as a direct result of the fires. She concluded by saying, 'He just let me go off, basically'.

### ***Closer to divorce***

Divorce rates, together with child abuse, increase after disasters, as noted by other disaster researchers (Curtis, Miller, & Berry, 2000; Fothergill, 1998). Cohen and Cole's study of marriage, birth and divorce rates in all counties in South Carolina after Hurricane Hugo in 1989 showed all rates increased the following year in the 24 disaster-affected counties compared to the 22 not affected.

A life-threatening stressor appeared to be the catalyst for some to take significant and relatively quick action in their personal lives that altered their life course. For some, natural disaster may have hastened a transition they were already moving toward, but at a slower pace. For others, natural disaster may have led to a

transition that might not have occurred if not for the disaster. (Cohan & Cole, 2002, p. 21)

Chasms widened between couples as they re-evaluated their priorities in the light of their near-death experience. The sense of mortality and their 'new reality of danger and randomness' (Cohan & Cole, 2002, p. 21) inspired survivors to take action in order to find meaning or establish some sense of control. In this research, for some women, relationships had broken down, and others wondered about the point of staying together. The holiday that families could access through the Bushfire fund allowed for reflection, and some spoke of this as a critical time for deciding about the future. Three women described the forthcoming holiday almost as a light at the end of the tunnel, but when it actually happened, their partners' behaviour confirmed ongoing problems and for many, was the time for decisions about future family life.

It was supposed to be the biggest holiday we ever had, and pretty much the moment we landed ... he just started flipping, doing strange things ... He kept getting really cranky with [our son] ... He was raging, hassling him, pushing him, yelling at him.  
(Becky)

It probably would have gone on forever the ways it was. [And at another stage] I think that finished us, but we were going to break up one day or another. I think the fires made us so tired and angry at each other. We couldn't think straight and just got really angry and that finished it. (Louise)

## **Conclusion**

The women starkly portrayed the terror and exhaustion of Black Saturday, overlaid as it was with all the complexity and fragility of human relationships. In the wake of the fires, both partners – and no doubt, children too – tried to deal with the unimaginable burden of what they remembered. Their words reveal what is often forgotten – that it was not just men who experienced Black Saturday. Women and children were there too and their right to safety is paramount.

In this chapter, the circumstances and pressures are confronted, not to excuse the men's violence but instead to expose and address the link between natural disaster and domestic

violence. Previous traumas re-emerged and survivors tried to regain their sense of self in whatever ways they could. Individual recovery was compromised by the unrelenting physical, mental and emotional demands of re-establishing lives. In describing their own responses to the disaster and that of their partners, the women spoke of abuse of alcohol and drugs and suicidal thoughts. They spoke of changed behaviours in their partners – mood swings, suicide ideation and, above all, denial of any problem. Amongst the great toll of the fire, there was a mass loss of security and selfhood. What had been certain was no longer so. People were on ‘short fuses’ and stress meant the care normally taken to *not* offend was absent.

The next chapter examines relationship violence experienced by the women in the post-Black Saturday context.

## CHAPTER 5

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### 5: Violence against women after disaster

#### Introduction

A critical first step in filling the research gap on violence against women after disaster is our willingness to hear women when they speak of violence against them. Instead, the notion of domestic violence after disaster can evoke hostility towards those who speak of it.

Researching the phenomenon is met with resistance because disasters create a different context for domestic violence. Suddenly, the concept of community is brought to the fore as a spotlight is shone on disaster-affected regions from media, government, and the health and community sector. The attention of the whole country is momentarily focused on previously anonymous communities. There is a thirst for stories of courage and resilience as mainstream media attention remains on the great national ethos, the indomitable human spirit and the kindness of others. Reports of domestic violence or sexual assault are refuted – either subtly or explicitly – as evidenced by the denial of rapes of women in the Louisiana Superdome and elsewhere after Hurricane Katrina (Seager, 2006). Austin concluded that ‘the real-number increase in sexual assaults [after Hurricane Katrina] corresponds to a 95% per capita increase in reported cases’ (Austin, 2008, p. 1). Enarson (2012), too, stated the violence there was real and explained that anti-social behaviour is minimised in disaster analysis. After disaster, it seems, everyone must pull together and accounts of violence against women and children must remain un-named. After interviews with 47 residents of two rural communities in British Columbia, Canada, Cox and Perry (2011) conclude:

The dominant discourse of recovery tended to reinstate the status quo and prescribe a preferred version of recovery in which suffering was privatized and individualized and positioned as something to be managed effectively and moved beyond as quickly as possible. A failure or inability to conform to this construction was construed as a character flaw or pathology. (Cox & Perry, 2011, p. 401)

This chapter begins with a summary of the findings from this research of increased domestic violence after Black Saturday, and examines the absence of reliable officially-recorded quantitative data – a finding in its own right. It then teases out the ways in which disaster un.masks existing domestic violence and may escalate both women’s vulnerability and men’s violence. Reflecting on the dominant discourse of recovery in the aftermath of Black Saturday, it was one that, disturbingly, tended to reveal a culture of denial, despite 17 women’s accounts of their experiences of violence. A range of explanations for what happened in relation to domestic violence after Black Saturday are then identified – drawn from empirical findings from the field together with the research literature. The central line of inquiry here is to explore the relationship between domestic violence and disaster.

### **Findings of increased violence against women after Black Saturday**

As noted in Chapter 1, most of the 30 women interviewed spoke of increased violence within relationships they knew about, and 17 women spoke of their experience of violence from partners since the fires — 15 in their own relationship, one in regard to a close sister’s relationship, and another concerning her daughter’s relationship. (See Appendix 5 for summary details.) All except one woman stated they were frightened of their partner. For nine women, this was a new and disturbing trend, and seven of these described previously stable relationships. For a further eight women who had experienced some level of violence before the fires — sometimes many years earlier or as a once only occurrence — the violence sharply escalated in the aftermath of the Black Saturday bushfires. (Only one woman reported a similar level of violence before and after. At the time of the fires they were separated. See Table 3.)

Table 3: Characteristics of the 17 Relationships with domestic violence (DV) present

<b>DV present after fires</b>	<b>DV before fires</b>	<b>Woman frightened of partner?</b>	<b>Stable non-violent relationship before</b>
17 Yes	1 Yes* 9 No 7 escalated	16 Yes 1 Not stated	7 Yes 7 No 2 Separated 1 Not stated
	17	17	17

\*Violence caused separation before fires, partner returned after fires when woman was vulnerable.

The 17 women in the sample who spoke of violence against them directly related the violence to the fires as a *catalyst for* the new or increased violence against them.<sup>10</sup> Consistent with international research showing that violence against women increases in the aftermath of disasters, the data collected in this qualitative study points to the existence of links between increases in domestic violence and disaster, both from first-hand experiences and through observations and disclosures.

There are so many people who are being affected after the fires with domestic violence, and so many women who aren't able to seek help. (Lauren)

One girl, I ran into her, I think it was between Christmas and New Year, and she had a big black eye. (Virginia)

I have women coming here who have been abused physically. And my friend — they've been married 20 years, and he assaulted her and she had to get a restraining order on him. (Brigit)

### ***The link between domestic violence and disaster***

There is no claim in the disaster literature that disasters 'cause' domestic violence.

[I]t is important to refute wrong-headed ideas based on stereotyping or misinformation. The most significant of these is the notion that stress causes violence, and that both simply increase in disasters. (Enarson, 2012, p. 79)

Instead, the relationship between stress and violence is complex, and disaster researchers suggest that disaster may 'trigger' violence rather than 'cause' it (Houghton, 2009b). As Fothergill reports, 'Experts in the field maintain that perpetrators are very much in control, stating that crisis conditions do not cause the abuse nor do they cause men to lose control' (Fothergill, 1999, pp. 82-83). Indeed, some men purposely use such situational factors as disaster to excuse or justify their own behaviour (Fothergill, 2008). It is, after all, men not disasters inflicting domestic violence. In her summation of the key literature, Sety (2012)

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<sup>10</sup> This is a conservative number as, since the fires, a woman not included in the 17 emailed to say she had called the police to intervene in a domestic violence incident, and continuing work in the fire-affected regions reveals widespread domestic violence.

acknowledges anecdotal evidence of an increase and reiterated that the question of attribution remains unanswered:

Relying on anecdotal reports and limited research, it is difficult to determine what the increase in domestic violence can be attributed to. (Sety, 2012, p. 3)

The same discourse on attribution is held about the role of alcohol in domestic violence 'due to concerns about misconstruing alcohol as a cause of partner abuse, thereby reducing perpetrator responsibility for their violence and failing to target its real causes' (Braaf, 2012, p. 1). As Rosalind Houghton noted, 'Clearly, the root causes of abuse are deep and complex', and stress is more a rationale or aggravating factor in domestic violence rather than a cause:

While 'stress' is often cited as the cause of abuse, and post-disaster stress in turn in disaster contexts, this is more likely a rationale or aggravating factor than a cogent explanation of why this stress leads to violence against spouses and not others, such as colleagues and friends. (Houghton, 2009b, p. 101)

In the everyday, domestic violence is under-recognised and women experiencing it are largely unsupported (Jenkins & Phillips, 2008a). Although other studies report increases to service demand (Enarson, 1999; Houghton, 2009a), authors are reticent to claim this as evidence for an increase in the actual incidence of domestic violence, perhaps in the absence of direct research with women. The literature points to the imperative to ask women directly and sensitively about increased violence (Fothergill, 2008; Jenkins & Phillips, 2008a; Picardo et al., 2010) and this is essential to capture the experiences of the great majority of women, as few women use formal domestic violence services and even fewer report (Mouzos & Makkai, 2004).

#### ***No data on domestic violence after Black Saturday***

The implications from international research are that rates of domestic violence *would have* increased in the aftermath of the Black Saturday bushfires in Victoria on 7 February 2009. Yet there was no comprehensive data collected to confirm or refute increased domestic violence. The humanitarian response to this 2009 disaster was remarkable, and evaluation efforts in the years since have sought to assess its success in regard to different aspects of the recovery and reconstruction. In the aftermath of Black Saturday, the demands on



services were overwhelming. A record amount of \$391 million was donated in response to Black Saturday (Ferguson, 2010). Across the Victorian fire-affected regions, key structures to assist the recovery were established, notably:

- the Victorian Bushfire Reconstruction and Recovery Authority (VBRRA), charged to coordinate all levels of government and work with community recovery committees
- the Victorian Bushfire Case Management Service which provided services to 5,500 households
- Community Service Hubs, including in Flowerdale, Marysville and Kinglake
- the Department of Human Services Bushfire Housing Services Unit with services to 1,300 households — 500 of these were housed in temporary accommodation, and
- the Victorian Bushfire Appeal Fund, which managed the \$391 million donation fund and allocated \$43 million to 219 community projects.

On the ground, a range of services were quickly established or expanded, and workers were seconded from organisations Australia-wide. Temporary villages and community hubs were set up to house and inform survivors. Churches and the army augmented essential services in the early days and weeks. The response was immense in order to meet the equally immense needs of those affected.

In the months after the fires, with ongoing grief and bereavement, homelessness, impassable roads and lost infrastructure, domestic violence was not prioritised at a systems level. Discussion of priority groups in the evaluation of the service pointed to the need to identify groups 'likely to be at risk of particular trauma in the context of the event' and the subsequent need for adequate, targeted response, but omitted mention of domestic violence. Children and the aged are mentioned, along with those who had 'high exposure' or 'losses events' (Urbis, 2011, p. 14).

The three key sources to provide statistics on domestic violence incidence in the aftermath of Black Saturday were the existing domestic violence services in the two shires; Victoria Police; and the Victorian Bushfire Case Management System. None, however, could provide conclusive data, leaving domestic violence neither recorded nor addressed at a broader

systems level across existing and new services. The lack of data was the first of many silences about domestic violence.

In a case study several months after Black Saturday, Lancaster (2009) sought to draw attention to this failure to compile accurate domestic violence statistics after the disaster. The case study was conducted by Women's Health In the North (WHIN), a non-government organisation serving the northern suburbs of Melbourne. It reported that there were early indications of an increase in domestic violence linked to the disaster, as funded domestic violence agencies soon began to raise concerns. Workers spoke of a gendered impact as men and women reacted differently to the trauma. Importantly, they spoke of domestic violence in this context (Lancaster, 2009). In April and June of 2009, reports of increased domestic violence were made at two meetings of the Counselling and Support Alliance – a network of the 13 funded women's and children's domestic violence counselling services in the northern metropolitan region (Women's Health In the North, 2009). The following month, a presentation from Nillumbik Community Health Service to the Bushfire Agency Review reported '[i]ncreasing violence resulting from frustration, anger, grief and bereavement leading to family conflict and affecting family relationships' (Murphy, 2009).

Outside the domestic violence sector, concerns were also raised. Local newspapers ran articles indicating the rise in domestic violence and linked this increase directly with the bushfires. Sources included those in the most senior positions – the Victorian Bushfire Recovery and Reconstruction Authority Chairperson (Bachelard, 10.5.09), a Church leader (Saeed, 2009) and the Clinical Psychologist Consultant to the Victorian Disaster Recovery Plan (Johnston & Mickelborough, 2010).

The anecdotal evidence was clear, yet all attempts to quantify an increase in domestic violence from official sources were unsuccessful. The final attempt in 2011 resulted in advice from the Australian Government Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FAHCSIA) that they were unable to provide any relevant data related to the incidence of domestic violence and the correlation to Crisis Payment in the fire-affected regions of Mitchell and Murrindindi, and further that they were unable to identify any alternative sources of data to assist with the information required (Personal communication, 2011e). Four months later, in response to an article in the local newspaper

on this research (7.3.2012) (Wilson, 2012),<sup>11</sup> a letter to the Diamond Valley Leader (21.3.2012) read:

As a survivor and active bushfire recovery volunteer, no community policing unit or family violence organisation has come near the Kinglake Ranges since the fires. The police, dealing with myriad matters since the fires, have done their best with the basic resources they have ... Where is the duty of care? In the meantime, it is primarily local bushfire-affected and traumatised women on the front line trying to do the best they can to help others in the community, with nil resources and support. (Ruhr, 2012, para. 3)

Three months later, it was reported in *The Age* (Victorian state-wide newspaper) that '[I]ocal welfare agencies [in the Kinglake region] have now revealed increased domestic violence, marriage breakdown and alcohol and drug abuse' (Johnston, 2012). The anecdotal evidence was clear, and markedly different to the available formal statistics on domestic violence.

A range of bodies were charged with various aspects of the bushfire recovery effort, or had information pertaining to it. These included FaHCSIA, Victoria Police, VBRRA, the Victorian Bushfire Case Management Service, the Parliamentary Secretary for Bushfire Recovery, and the existing domestic violence service system. Yet none was allocated responsibility for monitoring domestic violence after Black Saturday. Clearly, in the disaster response after Black Saturday, domestic violence was not central in anyone's purview. The role of Parliamentary Secretary for Bushfire Reconstruction was established a year after the disaster, but the incumbent was not briefed on the need for domestic violence to be identified, investigated and responded to effectively by trained professionals. He, and other key disaster recovery leaders, believed that the surfeit of generalist support would address domestic violence.

There are counsellors and medical centres along with the hub set up at Kinglake and Marysville with supports for people. As well, there are the case managers to direct people to what they need. There are counselling vouchers, which have had varying degrees of success, and there's also a huge volunteer army that are still there in part.

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<sup>11</sup> This article by Raelene Wilson and Jason Edwards, 'Special Report: Silent Scars of Bushfire Women', was a recipient of a 2013 EVA Media Awards for Excellence in the Reporting of Violence Against Women. <http://www.evas.org.au/index.php/evas-winners/2013>

But, have I seen a violence strategy as such? No, I can't say I've seen that.

(Parliamentary Secretary for Bushfire Reconstruction cited in, Parkinson, 2012a)

Responsibility for domestic violence was not part of VBBRA's role either and the extent to which the Victorian Bushfire Case Management Service was responsible is unclear as it was not explicitly part of their charter. Despite this, other key players in the disaster response structure relied on the Victorian Bushfire Case Management Service to monitor and respond to domestic violence. A senior VBBRA leader, for example, was alert to the possibility of increased domestic violence, asked relevant workers about its incidence, and believed the case management system – combined with the availability of domestic violence information in community hubs – would provide good support.

I think we were sort of relying on the case workers as part of that, to identify and then to look to provide people with support ... There's still 200 there dealing with about 5000 cases, maybe a few less, but the point is that they were to be obviously aware of the issues and then look to find the support service for people. (cited in Parkinson & Zara, 2012d, pp. 136-137).

In theory, the overlay of emergency response – in particular the long-term influx of case-managers – meant fire-affected individuals would be supported through the challenges of the aftermath. In practice, this worked only where individuals were less challenged or more resourced, and where case managers were highly skilled. The result is a disaster recovery effort that, if it considered domestic violence at all, assumed the case management system would support those struggling with violence in the home. Yet case managers were not trained to identify domestic violence and the disaster recovery effort did not include monitoring domestic violence in the reconstruction period.

The confusion in responsibilities perhaps led to the lack of training to ensure the Victorian Bushfire Case Management Service case managers had the required skills to identify and address domestic violence. And still, it is rare that emergency management identifies violence against women as worthy of mention. The National Strategy for Disaster Resilience, for example, although it focuses on community resilience, the need for changed behaviours and whilst it mentions vulnerable people, omits any reference to violence against women (Council of Australian Governments, 2011b). A 2012 paper from the Australian Institute of

Family Studies on 'Natural Disaster and Community Resilience' notes gender as a social indicator of increased vulnerability but neglects any mention of the possibility of increased violence, instead noting working for the 'the greater good' as 'particularly important in the aftermath of disaster' (Price-Robertson & Knight, 2012, p. 9).

Examination of each of the key potential sources of domestic violence data follows and reveals the constraints and complexity that resulted in the lack of conclusive data.

#### **What was in place to respond to domestic violence?**

Very few domestic violence and sexual assault services existed prior to Black Saturday in Mitchell and Murrindindi shires, and for the two years following the fires, no change was made to funded domestic violence services (Personal communication, 2011d). A strong theme in the literature is that disaster magnifies whatever was happening in a community beforehand (Domeisen, 1998; Quarantelli, 1994). Specific domestic violence services offer the best response to women, yet where specialist services did exist in Mitchell and Murrindindi shires – through Mitchell Community Health Service – they were poorly resourced. A case manager noted the constraints:

[Where would a woman with FV issues go?] She'd walk into the old Berry Street office. Other than that, I really think they wouldn't know where to go. They wouldn't go to GPs. They wouldn't get far. We'd still promote the number for the Women's DV Crisis Service and [we] had training in referrals. Yes, there's a service and a name, but it doesn't necessarily mean that service will be available. It's, 'No we can't do it that day', or similar. (Cited in Parkinson & Zara, 2012d, p. 138)

Domestic violence services were not well resourced in Murrindindi Shire before the fires, and as anticipated in the literature, there were few alternatives for women in the two years post-fires either. The result is three-fold: unvoiced needs, where women are silenced; unmet needs, where women's reports of domestic violence are ignored; and undocumented demand, where even if action is taken, no formal record is made.

#### **Absence of records from key domestic violence agencies**

In response to anecdotal data, Women's Health In the North attempted to quantify the increase, but gathering data on domestic violence and the bushfires proved difficult. Some partial data were obtained from funded domestic violence services, but the task was

complicated by the multifaceted recovery effort. Multiple regions, areas and catchments of the numerous services were involved in the recovery and reconstruction. A brief example of this complexity, relating only to emotional recovery, illustrates the intricacy of responsibilities. Fire-affected towns sought assistance from different shires, resulting in the involvement of four shires (the City of Whittlesea, the Shires of Murrindindi, Nillumbik and Mitchell), with informal involvement of a fifth shire (Yarra Ranges) because residents of three towns naturally drew on services there. One town, Kinglake West, is served to some extent from two shires and two Department of Health (DH) and Department of Human Services regions. The fire-affected towns were served by Hume and Northern Metropolitan Department of Health regions and two women's health services. Three GP division regions, two major hospitals, and many other services were offered, including formal, informal, public and private community support.

Many local town-based action groups had women's committees, or social and emotional recovery committees. Women's support groups were established by communities and many churches and volunteers offered emotional support. A weekend retreat for women affected by bushfire in July 2009 offered a support session on domestic violence which addressed gendered responses to family conflict, disaster and distress (Berry Street Unpublished, 2010).

Given this density and complexity, obtaining domestic violence data was overwhelmingly complicated. Teasing out numbers of responses and even making 'guesstimates' about domestic violence and bushfire trauma was complex due to staff data-recording practices and inadequate data. It appeared that the data collation method utilised by staff for those affected by domestic violence depended on which type of response was being discussed. For example, when recording their assistance to women as part of data collection, common practice was to code 'relationship issues' rather than 'domestic violence'. If women received a counselling response, data could be collected through formal data collection software or through no data system at all if informal options were used.

It seems the immediate demands of the recovery together with workers' heightened sense of protecting their vulnerable and traumatised clients meant that even when workers were aware of domestic violence, they often chose not to record it. The apparent reluctance of workers to record domestic violence occurred amongst those without professional

experience of domestic violence — but, astoundingly, it also occurred with highly experienced workers and police.

#### Absence of police records

Victoria Police statistics, too, are inconclusive. Table 4 shows Victoria Police statistics for 2007-2011 for the worst affected Local Government Area (LGA), Murrindindi Shire Council, on the number of domestic violence (referred to as ‘family violence’) incidents recorded, the number where charges were laid and the number where intervention orders or safety notices<sup>12</sup> were involved.

**Table 4: VicPol Family violence (FV) statistics 2007 — 2011 Murrindindi Shire and Victoria**

Rate per 100,000	FV Incidents	Where charges laid	Where IVO applied for or Safety Notice issued
Murrindindi 2006/7	473.3	162.5	183.7
Victoria 2006/7	539.1	138.6	126.2
Murrindindi 2007/8	610.3	203.4	196.4
Victoria 2007/8	572.8	141.2	127.6
Murrindindi 2008/9	499.8	187.4	166.6
Victoria 2008/9	611.1	155.8	147.8
Murrindindi 2009/10	485.6	119.5	97.1
Victoria 2009/10	641.1	168.3	165.7
Murrindindi 2010/11	370.2	111.1	133.3
Victoria 2010/11	732.1	209.8	185.3

Source: (Victoria Police, 2011)

These statistics were publicly available at Local Government Area level, yet it is not possible to tell whether domestic violence increased amongst fire-affected people after Black Saturday for a number of reasons:

- Figures at LGA level captured a much broader population than the fire affected populations, yet purchased postcode data would have been so small as to be identifiable and therefore would have had privacy implications.

<sup>12</sup> While attending a family violence incident, a police officer can seek approval from a sergeant or higher ranking officer to issue a Family Violence Safety Notice (FVSN). The Safety Notice can protect affected family members before an intervention order application is able to be heard in court. It allows a police officer to require the respondent to stop using violence and may require the respondent to leave the family home. A breach of the conditions of the FVSN is an offence. (Victoria Legal Aid, 2014)

- The community populations changed as people left to find housing or employment. Many had not returned almost three years later. At the time of interviews, community workers described a population reduced by two-thirds with three-quarters of housing lost (Parkinson, 2012a)
- Rural LGA rates of domestic violence incidents per 100,000 are generally higher than metropolitan or Victorian rates at any time, not only after disasters.

The complexity is evident in the example of Murrindindi Shire, which contains Kinglake, Flowerdale and Marysville and many other fire-affected communities. Examination of Victoria Police statistics for this LGA over the past five years in Table 4 indicates varying rates of domestic violence incidents — highest in the year before Black Saturday (610.3 in 2007/8) and lowest in the most recent year's figures (370.2 in 2010/11). It is unclear if the drop in incidents may be due to reduced populations, reduced call-outs or reduced recording.

A discernible pattern is that charges laid were higher than the State average in the three years to 2008/9 and then much lower in each of the two years after Black Saturday. The same trend is apparent for Intervention Orders (IVOs) and Safety Notices. However, these broad, LGA-wide statistics must be considered in the light of the complexity discussed and as a result, are inconclusive.

It must be remembered, too, that these statistics show only the cases where police recorded the call-out. In addition to ethics approval received from North East Health and Monash University, application was made for research approval from the Victoria Police Research Coordinating Committee (RCC) and the Victorian Police Human Research Ethics Committee (VPHREC) in order to include Victoria Police in this research. The RCC declined to approve the application to include Victoria Police, stating there were 'a number of reasons for the decision, including that the participation of members was not supported by local and regional managers'. The RCC suggested that a revised application be submitted addressing a number of issues including: 'The Committee suggests the recruitment draft flyer for women be altered to be neutral, to allow for a more representative sample of participants. [The Committee suggests:] [s]pecifically removing or altering Question 3: "Have you experienced violence since the Black Saturday bushfires"'. Resubmission, therefore, would have meant



omitting the two key features of the research which is that it was about women and about violence.

#### **Absence of records by the Victorian Bushfire Case Management Service**

The Victorian Bushfire Case Management System began only days after Black Saturday, on 13 February 2009 and involved the coordination of 74 Federal, State and Local Government and non-government agencies. It was overseen by the Department of Human Services and aimed to provide a case manager for up to two years to every fire-affected household. The Department of Human Services evaluation of the system reported that by June 2010, 5506 households had been allocated a case manager — 2,211 of these in Murrindindi and 379 in Mitchell Shires (Urbis, 2011, pp. 28,30). The Victorian Bushfire Case Management Service stated its objective was ‘to ease access to the plethora of services, grants and information available to people; to strengthen the capacity of traumatised people over time; and to contribute to a reduction in the stressors affecting people through their recovery’ (Urbis, 2011, p. 2).

In the two years since the Black Saturday bushfires, Department of Human Services case management statistics from the Victorian Bushfire Case Management Service show that in the Hume region there were only nine cases of domestic violence recorded by case managers (Parkinson, 2012a, p. 12). The Hume region covers a fifth of the State and includes 12 Local Government Areas including Mitchell and Murrindindi and the fire-affected shire of Alpine. A possible explanation was suggested by the Deputy Director of the Health and Human Services Emergency Management Branch for this incredible figure of nine cases of domestic violence in two years of case management. The suggestion was that case managers may have recorded just the main issue and would have been ‘sensitive’ in how they chose to record presenting issues, and that women themselves would have been reluctant to report.

The case management system purposely drew on people with a diverse range of backgrounds. There were strengths in this approach and, indeed, some case managers were experienced and dealt capably with families experiencing violence. However, it is evident that case managers were rarely qualified to work with domestic violence and therefore had

no ability to identify it, record it or address it with referrals to specialist agencies (Parkinson et al., 2011).

The lack of clear guidelines for recording domestic violence by case managers contributed to the absence of credible statistics. Workers were left to make their own assessments on how to record the presenting issue, often preferring to record 'relationship issues' or 'drug and alcohol' or other – more acceptable – descriptors (Parkinson, 2012a; Parkinson et al., 2011). These subjective responses to domestic violence prevented accurate recording. There was, at least for some workers, a conscious decision not to record domestic violence as a way of being 'respectful' to clients who were suffering as a result of the fires (Parkinson, 2012a). One case manager said:

A lot of people struggled with putting that sort of information down ... and you know, somebody might have disclosed something to them ... it's just about how do you define that and how do you report that in your case notes ... I think the difference is getting through it and knowing what it is but actually respecting the client and recording it in their words. (Parkinson, 2012a, p. 25)

In the absence of use of agreed terminology and mandated reporting of agencies recording domestic violence, workers could choose *which* presenting issues to record and which to omit. With nine recorded cases of domestic violence by the 2,211 case managers working in Mitchell and the 379 working in Murrindindi over a period of two years after Black Saturday (Urbis, 2011, pp. 29-30) most clearly preferred euphemisms in their recording.

The Department of Human Services evaluation of the Victorian Bushfire Case Management Service reported that the 510 respondents were asked how satisfied they were with assistance from their case manager in 27 different areas from counselling to mental health to accommodation, banking and childcare. There was no item for domestic violence which is confirmation of the lack of attention to domestic violence by the Victorian Bushfire Case Management Service. Further, the report includes a section on the special needs of vulnerable groups but women experiencing, or at risk of, violence are not mentioned (Urbis, 2011, p. 65).

The Department of Human Services evaluation noted the recommended qualification level for all case managers in a massive disaster is a Bachelor degree in a health or human services or related field. The qualifications of case managers fell well short of this target:

A survey of case managers in June 2009 found that just over half (53%) had completed study in a relevant area. Some 36% of case managers were qualified social workers, nurses, occupational therapists and psychologists; another 18% had qualifications in fields such as community, welfare, family and youth studies. Of the case managers who had not completed study in a relevant area, 20% had qualifications in a range of other areas including law, science and arts. (Urbis, 2011, p. 50)

The orientation provided to them by the Victorian Bushfire Case Management Service covered needs assessments and working with suicidal people and those affected by trauma, but no specific domestic violence training. It did not include a component such as CRAF (Common Risk Assessment Framework).

[CRAF] was developed in consultation with Victorian family violence service providers, police and courts and based upon international research. It is the linchpin of the integrated domestic violence service system in Victoria. It provides a common language for all agencies to talk about risk assessment and promotes a shared understanding of the issues underpinning domestic violence [...] and a common approach to the assessment and management of risk as a critical aspect of a new, integrated approach to domestic violence in Victoria. (Swinburne University of Technology, 2013, p. n.p.)

Without this orientation component, most case managers lacked the skills to identify, record and address domestic violence. Women's Health In the North, as the key regional non-government organisation coordinating domestic violence, offered to train bushfire case managers from April 2009 as part of broader regional initiative about responding to domestic violence. The Victorian Bushfire Case Management Service did not accept offers to train case managers in CRAF to identify domestic violence until November 2009, because domestic violence 'never at any point stood out to be strong enough to need a stand-alone training program' – it was not until nine months after the fires that some case managers did

undertake CRAF training and the catalyst was that a case manager witnessed an incident of domestic violence during a home visit (Parkinson, 2012a, p. 176).

Even then, the training was not taken up by all case managers. Mitchell and Murrindindi shires and the North and West Metropolitan Region were allocated most of the 300 Victorian case managers working in November 2009 (Urbis, 2011, p. 31), yet only 46 case managers attended the CRAF training. Prior to the session, just 13 of the 46 self-assessed that they had experience with, or a sound understanding of, domestic violence (Parkinson et al., 2011).<sup>13</sup> Case managers who lacked these skills could choose not to draw out intimations of violence from clients, as confirmed by two informants to this research.

The case managers didn't even ask about it [domestic violence]. All they wanted to know is what people needed. (Natasha)

They didn't all have the exact same training. The case managers [were not] asking the question about domestic violence at any point ... The same with children who've been abused, no-one asks. People are suspicious but they don't ask. (Bess)

### ***'No data, no problem'***

Acceptance of domestic violence as a phenomenon post-disaster is complicated by those who fear it will unseat notions of cohesive communities and heroic yet vulnerable men. The absence of accurate domestic violence data after Black Saturday allowed some leaders in the emergency management sector to deny it as a factor, assuming that no data means no problem (Kershaw, 2009). Why would police and workers be reluctant to document domestic violence? There was immense pressure on women to show understanding and loyalty to 'their' men and their communities. Workers who were very much part of the fire-affected communities — either long-term residents or those arriving immediately after the disaster to help restore lives — were less likely to recognise increased domestic violence. Those with state-wide responsibilities and an overview of communities were in agreement — they stated their belief that domestic violence *had* increased. Whilst confidentiality

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<sup>13</sup> The Berry Street Eglemont Domestic Violence Case work and Counselling Team is funded to provide domestic violence services for women and children. The team provided feedback data on their February and April Identifying Domestic Violence 2010 sessions for bushfire case workers. These sessions offered Common Risk Assessment Framework (CRAF) domestic violence assessment tools, using Practice Guide 1. This training aimed to support staff to identify and respond to domestic violence. More detail on the CRAF assessment guide can be found at <http://www.dpcd.vic.gov.au/women/family-violence/risk-factors-and-family-violence>.

prevents the naming of their professional titles, this group included three of the highest level managers in the post-Black Saturday reconstruction and a senior regional manager.

This contrasts with the reluctance of community members to speak out about people they know and care about. Their shared understanding of the depth of trauma experienced by survivors of Black Saturday may have led to reluctance to act in any way that would further add to their daily burdens and pressures. This was so, even when the action was as simple as recording domestic violence and even when it meant leaving women and children vulnerable. This apparent self-censoring by workers extended to silencing others.

Silences around this research began at the outset, as workers and professionals 'on-the-ground' in the fire-affected Mitchell and Murrindindi shires were approached for their advice as to the best time to approach women for interviews. It was striking that much discussion focused on whether it was even appropriate to investigate women's experience of violence post-disaster at all. Some workers suggested removing the word 'violence' from the recruitment flyer, and others agreed to posting it in their workplaces but warned that women would not respond to it. The research had to be justified and workers persuaded of its value. Some workers vehemently rejected the idea of increased domestic violence and one worker after another spoke of the heightened sensitivities. Many warned against adding to the burden on vulnerable communities, arguing that relationships that broke up were only those that had been troubled beforehand, and rejected the notion that there was a problem at all.

The opposition to the possibility of increased violence against women after this disaster was curious. While Victoria Police were transparent that they did not support the participation of police members, several workers who did participate in the interviews echoed the belief that this research was unnecessary. It became clear that this reluctance came from a desire to protect a vulnerable community. One health professional said:

There was a sense of tragedy. The world was not a safe place anymore. My response was different to the work I'd done before, even in hospitals — in all sorts of hospital situations. It's very different when it's happening at your back door. (Parkinson, 2012a, p. 22)

Denial continued as these initial research findings were released in the report, 'The Way He Tells It' (Parkinson, 2012a). In asking for feedback on report drafts, trauma counsellors rejected the initial findings, arguing the men were traumatised and that current definitions of domestic violence were inadequate for post-disaster situations. As media sought comment on the report's findings from local domestic violence providers, few accepted the offer – one who did then suggested the women who participated would have been critical of the service system and that is why they participated. The protection of home-grown men, now suffering in disaster's aftermath, sits alongside the protection of white men in hiding their violence against women. Compare this to the multitude of reports on Indigenous men's violence (Pease, 2010a).

These are unwelcome findings, after all. It is largely accepted that violence against women increased after earthquakes in Haiti and cyclones in Bangladesh, but nobody wants to hear that men who embody the spirit of resilient and heroic Australia are violent towards their families. The silencing of women was necessary to protect this myth. As one health professional said:

There was a lot of domestic violence ... It was interesting because workers in another service were saying there's lots of domestic violence in Kinglake and the cops were saying they were not getting reports ....The local police are part of the community. It was that enmeshment in community of, 'They are the good guys who helped out with the fire even though things might be happening [like domestic violence]'

(Parkinson & Zara, 2012d, p. 140)

### **Possible explanations for post-disaster domestic violence**

The widespread resistance to acknowledging increased domestic violence after disaster springs from a culture of denial as well as from a lack of awareness of its relevance to disaster and emergency management. This section of the chapter outlines three broad theories – apparent from the research literature and from the perceptions of survivors of Black Saturday – that may serve to explain domestic violence in the aftermath of disasters. The first refutes any increase in incidence but claims that disaster unmasks domestic violence that pre-existed the fires. The second is that domestic violence may increase but only in relationships where men used violence before the fires and only amongst certain

groups of people. The third is that not only did violence increase including in relationships where men had not used violence before, but that the complicity of society silenced women, leading to no increase in reporting. It suggests that a culture of denial of domestic violence prevails after disaster. Each theory has a sub-set of explanations as shown in Figure 4 and is discussed further below:

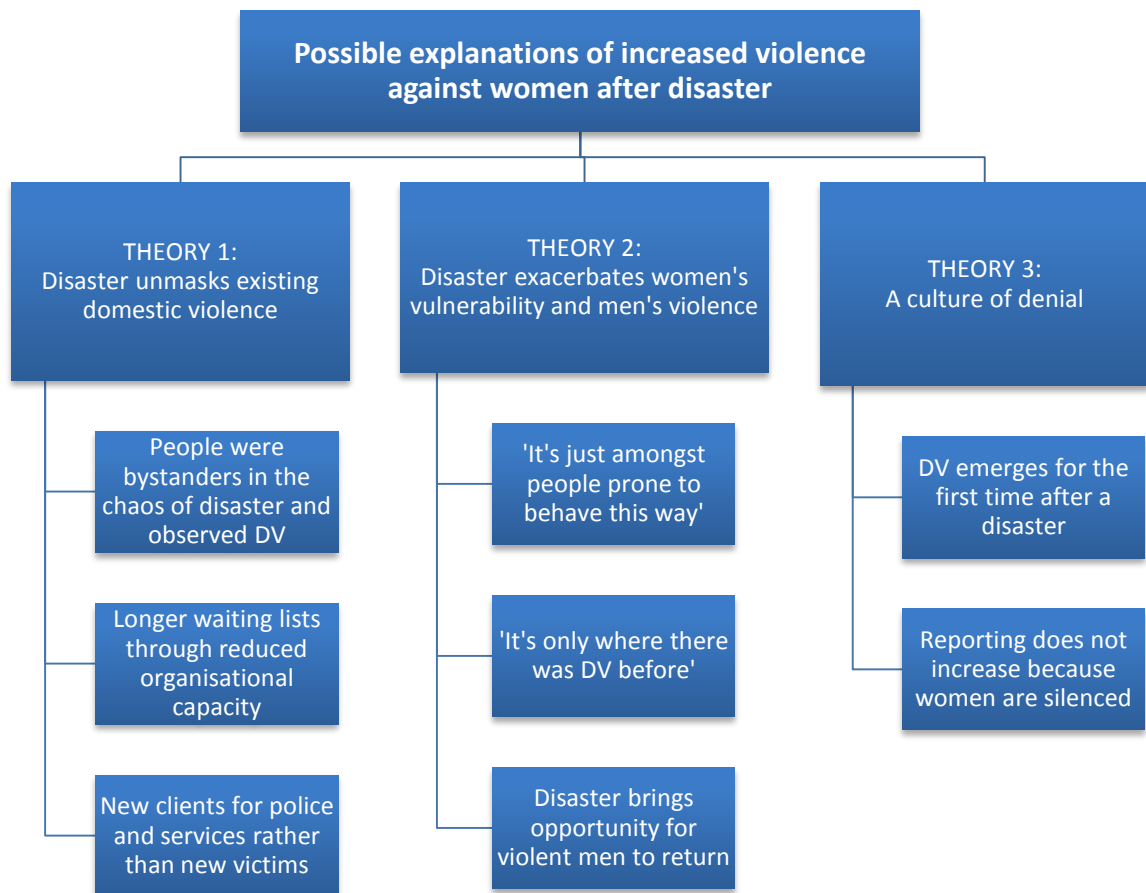


Figure 4: Three theories to explain observations of increased violence against women after disasters

**Theory 1: Disaster unmasks existing domestic violence**

This theory suggests that the domestic violence observed after disaster is symptomatic not of an actual increase in the incidence of men’s violence against women, but of an unveiling of the problem. Researchers writing about disaster and domestic violence investigate a number of possible explanations for observations of the phenomenon. Fothergill, for example, considers whether increased demand on domestic violence services may be mostly from existing clients (Fothergill, 2008). The chaos of disaster’s aftermath means community members are thrown together in refuges, in temporary community information

and service hubs, in centres for donated goods, in community meetings, and in community dining or social occasions, thereby increasing risk (Brown, 2012). Formerly private relationship interactions were public. Support services for domestic violence such as police, domestic violence workers and counsellors were no longer available as demands of the post-disaster period took priority and waiting lists for help with domestic violence grew (Jenkins & Phillips, 2008a; Renzetti, 2010). Such waiting lists and organisational data that counted services provided may have included new clients rather than new victims – women who were no longer prepared to tolerate violence from partners. Elaboration of each follows.

#### **In the post-disaster chaos people were bystanders to domestic violence**

The first explanation under this theory is that domestic violence incidence, prevalence and reporting was unchanged after disaster but simply more visible. In recovery periods after disaster, people are often displaced, having to move in with friends, family or strangers. Life in temporary villages and makeshift camps is cheek by jowl, and little is private. Community meetings and dinners are commonplace. The usual legal and societal constraints are diminished by the extreme events (Austin, 2008; Neumayer & Plümper, 2007b) and changed living conditions may leave relationships exposed (Phillips & Morrow, 2008).

A participant in this research, Lauren, told of an incident where her husband's previously controlling behaviour escalated to the extent that other community members feared for her safety during a community event:

That night I had about half a dozen people running interference between him and me because they were very concerned about my physical wellbeing if he got close.

(Lauren)

There were overlapping factors at work in the account she gave of her circumstances.<sup>14</sup> While the domestic violence was apparent to others in the exposure caused by Black Saturday, it was also exacerbated by the changes brought about by the disaster. Lauren had taken up new opportunities for community involvement that emerged in the aftermath of

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<sup>14</sup> For most of the 17 women who experienced domestic violence after Black Saturday, several of the putative explanations coincide. In these cases, the most evident explanation is used in order to reflect on the violence experienced by the women.



the fires. As Enarson (2012) observed, some women's new-found confidence may have led controlling husbands and partners to attempt to increase their level of power to maintain dominance in the household. Lauren drew new confidence from her valued role in the recovery period and was willing to pursue this despite the cost of retribution from her husband. Accordingly, he increased his use of power and control to the extent that it was more evident, even to others. The necessity for the community to come together in the recovery period provided opportunities for others outside the family to notice her husband's behaviour, and state their fear for her safety.

#### **Longer waiting lists through reduced organisational capacity**

Organisational capacity to respond may be reduced *because of* the disaster. This manifests in a number of ways. There may be fewer or no resources for existing domestic violence clients in the immediate aftermath of disaster, leading to no services and growing waiting lists. This may result from damage to premises of service providers or staff members' absence through relocation or death or inability to sustain employment as well as the demands of the post-disaster period in re-establishing home and family. The organisational capacity of police and domestic violence services may be reduced as their organisations' resources, infrastructure and staffing may have been affected by the disaster, leading to a period of no service (or reduced service) and then a queue of clients (Jenkins & Phillips, 2008b).

At a time when women's freedom from domestic violence depended most heavily on legal and social services, every aspect of the New Orleans criminal/civil legal system was disrupted and slowed by the displacement of personnel and by damage of the physical structures, courtrooms and offices. (Jenkins & Phillips, 2008b, p. 66)

In generalist organisations such as community health services, capacity to respond to domestic violence may be limited due to inundation of disaster-related needs and they may no longer have resources for domestic violence (Enarson, 1999; Houghton, 2009b).

Another possible explanation for apparent increased demand may be coincidence in the timing of women needing support. *Existing* clients all needed support during the same time periods as a consequence of their own disaster experience or their partners' violence following the disaster, or because normal support networks including friends and family

were no longer there. If formal services were the only support available post-disaster, this may have manifested as simply a temporary spike in demand rather than a real increase (Fothergill, 2008; Jenkins & Phillips, 2008b). The demand, therefore, is only from women who had previously been clients of services or police.

This explanation was not relevant to this research. Domestic violence services were not adequate before the disaster, particularly in Murrindindi shire, and remained so after Black Saturday. The domestic violence organisation serving the two shires did not officially acknowledge an increase in demand, and was largely unaffected (in damage or resourcing) by the fires.

#### **New *clients* for police and services rather than new victims**

The final suggestion in this first theory is that domestic violence incidence and prevalence was unchanged after disaster but formal reporting by new *clients* to police and domestic violence services increased. As noted by Fothergill (1999) in the United States context, 'Even though we do not know if domestic violence rates increase in a disaster, we do have evidence that the demand for domestic violence services increases during disaster times' (Fothergill, 1999, p. 79). An increase in women's apparent willingness to report the violence against them may have emerged as they could not cope with violence as well as the trauma from the disaster or the immense pressures of the recovery and reconstruction period (Jenkins & Phillips, 2008b). For some women in this research, their experience of Black Saturday was a catalyst to consider taking the risk of leaving:

The bushfires made me realise I didn't want to put up with it anymore. It was a near death experience. I thought I was going to die, I couldn't breathe. I thought, 'If I get out of this, I'm not going to put up with it any more'. (Kylie)

Suddenly, women could no longer tolerate the violence (Houghton R, 2010; Jenkins & Phillips, 2008a) and displacement after the disaster may have removed the support from family and friends they previously relied upon (Enarson, 2012) (Hoffman, 1998). According to this explanation, women were new *clients* rather than new victims – reporting was new while their partner's violence was not (Fothergill, 1999). Although men may have been violent towards their wives and partners prior to the disaster, the women's experiences of the disaster, or their partner's responses to it, acted as a catalyst to report for the first time.

The demands of the post-disaster period may have given women new opportunities in the community and affirmed their strengths and abilities, again leading to a greater willingness to report. Women's awareness of their right to live free from violence may have increased, with some finding the strength to leave abusive partners (Enarson, 1999; Fothergill, 1998, 2008; Jenkins & Phillips, 2008b). For Liz, one of Fothergill's case studies, the 1997 Grand Forks flood was a catalyst for her new life, whereby access to financial resources afforded her an opportunity to leave (Fothergill, 1998). As Enarson wrote, 'researchers also hear from women who see the door wide open and walk right out' (2012, p. 84). It is plausible that when women have options that include leaving violent relationships, their willingness to seek services to help them do this is increased. The extent of this may be under-counted, as narratives from women in this sample indicated that they, indeed, sought help where they had not before the disaster but were not counted in official data collection as their reporting rarely found an adequate response.

***Theory 2: Disaster exacerbates women's vulnerability and men's use of violence***

In this theory, increased incidence of men's violence against women is acknowledged, but the argument only extends to accepting an exacerbation of violence where it previously existed or amongst particular groups.

***It's just amongst people 'prone to behave this way'***

This explanation takes up the misconception of domestic violence occurring only amongst certain classes – the inference that 'it's just amongst people who are not like us'. The idea that domestic violence is the preserve of a certain section of society allows easier dismissal of its importance. After disaster, more people rely on government grants or funds, and therefore fit the stereotypical myth that it is only people from lower socio-economic levels who perpetrate domestic violence and who are victims of it. The magnifying effect of disasters works at every level of marginalisation, so a person's likelihood of becoming a disaster victim is influenced by their place in society (Wilson et al., 1998). Fordham (2008) writes that disaster is actually *not* the great leveller, with the concept of community involving both exclusion and inclusion.

In this research, there were stated prejudices by emergency management and health professionals that if domestic violence had increased in the aftermath of Black Saturday, it

was only in some problematic towns and amongst some (low socio-economic status) sections of the community. As Phillips, Jenkins et al. (2009, p. 285) keenly observed, 'Income also obscures the realities of violence'. Enarson (2012) agreed that violence is not a function of poverty, and the increased rates of violence against women and children after the 1989 Exxon Valdez oil spill in Prince William Sound, Alaska, could not be conveniently put aside as such, even if 'Absorbing these statistics in a largely indigenous community may reaffirm convenient stereotypes about Native Alaskans' (Enarson, 2012, p. 73). The expedience of ascribing violence against women to 'others' was equally apparent in the United States in 2006 after Hurricane Katrina, when perpetrators of sexual assault against several white women, volunteers at the grassroots relief organization, the Common Ground Collective, were assumed to be black (Luft, 2008). In fact, Luft (2008) states, seven of eight reports were of white perpetrators. Staff from refuges in New Orleans reported that middle-class and professional people sought help for domestic violence and they were 'new faces' to the service after Hurricane Katrina (Jenkins & Phillips, 2008a).

#### **It's only where there was domestic violence before**

In the aftermath of disaster, men who were previously violent may have escalated their violence to a frequency or severity that women were no longer prepared to accept. What appeared to be new domestic violence was, in fact, an extension of pre-existing power and control behaviour (Enarson, 2012). Houghton (2009b) suggests that men's use of domestic violence can change from psychological and economic to physical for the first time when trying to regain a sense of control after disaster. Supporting this theory, through post-disaster counselling some of the women interviewed became aware that there had always been elements of power and control in the relationship. It was easier to recognise this after the disaster:

To be completely honest, I didn't realise the level of domestic violence that I had experienced until really recently. It was this year actually, when I was in a counselling session with a woman and I saw the 'Power and Control Wheel' ... on the back of a door and I took a photo of it and I just went, 'Oh my God, every one of these sections applies to me'. (Ruby)

While this explanation asserts that increases in domestic violence only occurred where there was pre-existing domestic violence, many examples in this research refute this. Some women did describe having previously endured violence from their (same) partner, and in some accounts, there were suggestions of ongoing power and control issues, however, each woman stated that the level of domestic violence had escalated sharply, sometimes from an isolated incident many years earlier. For example:

Once he smacked my face when I'd come home late from shopping and once he got physically rough with me after we had a major discussion about certain silly experiments we were doing at the time and so there was more [of] a context ... [S]ince the fires ... it's like all the lines are blurred in his life ... it's kind of all in together in one big pile of anger ... And being alone with him, I was fearful. (Becky)

One woman described a shift from psychological power and control to physicality:

He would shake with rage and you could see that he was struggling to hold it. He would talk a lot about punching people, not me, but violent speak ... We were carrying a sleeper because we were trying to make my son's sand pit, and he was verbally abusive and I got very angry and I just dropped the sleeper and it bounced and hit him and I was like, 'Oh my goodness, I'm so sorry' because I didn't mean to hurt him. And he turned around and his fist stopped very close to me and I think since then I've been very anxious about what he could do. I think our relationship was difficult because he was abusive and very controlling. (Audrey)

Where women had endured severe domestic violence incidents in the past, they stated it was much worse after the fires, and linked the escalating violence to the men's experience of Black Saturday, suggesting emotional disturbance:

Slow to build then he lashes out really badly. He seems to hold it in like a lot of men. You don't talk about it, you get on with your life and you're weak if you need to see a counsellor ... Trivial things set him off. It may be about finances, something he perceives as wrong. He gets right up in [my sister's] face and yells and screams and bears down on her. Sometimes she has said that this can go on for a whole day or night ... She says he messes with her head ... If she goes outside, he will follow and

yell abuse so that she feels humiliated in front of neighbours, so she goes back inside and it just continues on and on ... He has threatened her by inferring physical harm or by saying you'll be sorry or threatens harm to her family or pet. Things like, 'Leave me and you will be dead'. (Lauren)

Louise described the escalation of abuse by her husband and the influence of alcohol:

He would yell and scream, push and shove, abuse, mental abuse, tell me how shit I was and how I ruined our marriage ... but he was never a man to be angry *all the time*. He drank a little bit more after the fires. I just don't think he could cope ... When it got so aggressive it was easy to say, 'You cannot come home anymore. This has to end'. (Louise)

The unrelenting nature of the violence and abuse was described by Virginia, too:

Once in a blue moon [the kids] might get a slap or something, but apart from that he's never hit them in the face.

*Does he do that with you?*

Yeah — oh no, he's a bit of a smart arse, like he'll try and hit me where he thinks it's not going to be noticeable. He's punched me ... pulled hair, stuff like that ... Before [the fires], it might have gotten bad once or twice a year but never to that point ... But I mean from about November to about March it was just constant. Some weeks it was just every single day ... Like then it felt really urgent that I had to get out. I don't know, some days I wondered if he was going to kill me. You know he made threats before, he said I had to get out because he felt himself like he was going to kill me, and he was warning me ... I feel like it's just — I'm on borrowed time.

(Virginia)

Violence that included threats to kill all the family was described by Kylie:

Just before the fires, I wanted to leave my husband, who was quite abusive for a long time... He was more controlling after the fires ... Financially, sexually, emotionally, in every way he was controlling ... He was on edge and you could feel it, so many times. He pushed me into the fridge, threw things at my son ... he grabbed me and put me

in a headlock and I couldn't get out ... he took a knife and was threatening to kill us all. (Kylie)

In this last incident, Kylie's husband used the knife to slash the car seats.

It is curious that explanations of domestic violence after disaster as 'only' pre-existing or amongst 'certain people' are used as reasons to continue to ignore the issue. Sensibly, Enarson points to the absurdity of dismissing domestic violence in disaster situations if it was pre-existing (2012). A common response to calls for action on domestic violence is the ill-informed assertion that 'these days' women can simply leave – too often followed by statements of women's 'failure to protect' children. Women stay in violent relationships sometimes for the children and through fear of not being believed, fear of blame, and of escalating violence. These are patently real fears. The period immediately after separation is widely cited as the most dangerous for women leaving violent relationships (Bagshaw & Brown, 2010; Flood, 2010; Humphreys & Thiara, 2003; Mouzos, 2005). In Australia, half of all murders are related to domestic violence, and one woman a week is killed by her partner (Broderick 2011).

#### **Disaster brings opportunities for violent men to return**

In disaster's aftermath, there are opportunities for violent men to exploit women's new vulnerability caused by the experience of the disaster and its consequences (Jenkins & Phillips, 2008b; Santa Cruz Commission for the Prevention of Violence Against Women, 1990). A further incentive for predatory men is the possibility they could claim grant monies or other benefits meant for their ex-wife and children (Enarson, 2012). According to Jenkins and Phillips, after Hurricane Katrina, some abusers tracked women down and moved in with them (2008a). This was facilitated by women's increased fear and insecurity. As Enarson states, shelters emptied after the Twin Towers terrorist attacks on 9/11 as women sought the comfort of family and familiarity (Enarson, 2012), and after the 2004 Whakatane floods in New Zealand, 85 per cent of women who sought refuge assistance returned to violent partners (Houghton, 2009b, p. 106). Add to this that women may have been suffering Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, homelessness, unemployment, lacking childcare and schools and having to negotiate grants and rebuilding – all stressful and conflict-ridden (Fordham, 2008).

Such situations were apparent in this research, where Black Saturday indeed provided new opportunities for violent men to return to women now vulnerable through homelessness and unemployment brought on by the fires. This was most evident for two of the women in this sample. Both had been separated from their partners. The two men appeared to exploit the women's changed circumstances for their own purposes, each presenting himself as willing and wanting to help. Hailey said:

I was experiencing violence before the fires ... We had a major incident when I left him. I was drawing a line in the sand then [thinking] I can't have my kids around this, and left ... But when the fires started happening, he sort of took the opportunity to try to get back into my life ... I was too nice and not making a stance anymore because I wasn't thinking about that at the time.... Then a week and a half after the fires, he was verbally abusing me at my home, pushing and shoving me and not letting me walk out my back door, and hit me and choked me and things like that.  
(Hailey)

And Ruby remembered:

I had several phone calls from him [on Black Saturday] and it was ironic because I hadn't really spoken to him in a year. We'd separated a year before the fire but on the day of the fires he ... sort of mapped my way out ... to Yea. And at midnight that night he turned up ... [Some months later] after the fires and after the death threats and after all the manipulation and intimidation, I just wanted it to be over. I said, 'What do you want?' and he said, 'Well you've got the insurance money, give me half the insurance money' ... He pressured me by saying if I didn't give him the insurance money he was going to take the children off me. So it was just intimidation, intimidation, intimidation until my mind completely broke down.  
(Ruby)

A variation on this is *new* partners taking advantage of vulnerability in women, which was seemingly brought on by their experiences in the disaster.

Next thing [my daughter] rings and [her previous partner] has moved out and he's moved in [to her house] ... There was something about him that was really



frightening ... and they were dropping acid and cocaine ... I found this out later because he bashed her and he completely trashed the house...

[Was she like this before?]

No. She was free and easy ...

[So a shift happened after the fires?]

Yes. Her choice of partner, of two different-sex partners, her vulnerability because she took more drugs and ended in a domestic scene. (Bess, about her daughter)

### ***Theory 3: A culture of denial***

This third and final theory is consistent with the findings of this research which was directly informed by women. It states that violence against women increases in the aftermath of disaster, that this increase includes new incidents from men who had not previously been violent, and that reporting does not increase because women are silenced.

#### **Domestic violence emerges for the first time after disaster**

A significant proportion of the domestic violence that became apparent after Black Saturday was both new and denied. This explanation acknowledges that domestic violence after disaster – either isolated acts of physical violence or ‘power and control’ – may be new. This was clearly the case for nine of the women in this research. In one of Fothergill’s two case studies, the Grand Forks flood was identified as the main contributor for first-time physical abuse: ‘Karen felt the flood brought on the violence’(Fothergill, 2008, p. 144). The domestic violence was experienced as a one-off physical attack for two participants in this research.

Jill said:

I could see he was so angry, so angry ... and he pushed me onto the floor, like I’m a fairly strong person, bang on the floor. I got up and then he just pushed me and pushed me and pushed me, and I mean he was seriously scary ... my head opened the front door, and then he pushed me onto the ground ... [it was] shocking ... four ribs and the sternum, and I was on Voltaren and Panadol Osteo for two months ... and I tell you I’m pretty tough but I was really, really scared living there for the next two days. I had a crowbar near one door, I had a hammer near the other door, and I had the doors locked and I had the dogs locked in the shed which was next to me. I

was genuinely scared ... and I'm not joking, I'm not easily scared ... I mean it, if he'd been drunk I'd be dead. You just knew he was paying out on you, on everything. (Jill)

And Christina said:

He stood up, put his hand on my neck, can't remember which side, and he blocked my airways ... [He did that] until I desperately lunged for air. He wouldn't have killed me. So I landed on my knee on the slate breaking my knee cap in two. (Christina)

Christina had described her husband as 'very gentle' before the fires, but he reacted violently to her in the weeks following the fires. Other women described new domestic violence that more closely fitted descriptions of power and control, often including physical violence, again stressing the change in their husbands since Black Saturday.

I've never seen the aggression in him. That anger was absolutely not my husband ... You could hear the frustration and anxiety in his voice ... And his eyes and his face, the anger in his face, he's exhausted and pale but the anger in his face is what scared me ... I've spoken to counsellors and the CAT team and people I trust said, 'You can't do it anymore, he's so aggressive to you, we don't know what he'll do'. I was in a situation that if I left him, I was afraid of what he would do, and if I stayed with him I was afraid of what he would do. (Tanya)

Others in the research were subjected to domestic violence that was new after the fires, and persisted over time. Miranda described her husband as very gentle before the fires:

Every time he gets into a rage he is more abusive and more hurtful and more likely to threaten violence ...he is sending me these text messages...'I just pissed all over the bed'... I'm really scared ... While he is in police custody, he texts me that I will die from his hands, so will my nigger (sic) lover, that the children are dead to him, if he ever sees me again he'll punch every tooth out of my head and it continues, it continues all night. I think eventually his phone goes flat. He calls me the next morning, 'You filthy whore... How could you do this ...' It's all recriminations, all nastiness, so I am genuinely worried at this point that he is going to make good on his threats, I'm worried for me and the kids. (Miranda)

Marcie concluded her interview by saying, 'I feel guilty saying these things about him and putting him down because he's my husband and my best friend'. She had described his behaviour as very different after the fires.

He started shouting, 'Aren't you grateful, I've done all this work'. And he had a meltdown really. There was a lot of shouting at me, and at anyone who would try to speak to him — me, the kids. He would get like this [making fists] and he punched a door and made a dent in it. I was a bit afraid. The kids were. They'd get upset and they'd say, 'I'm scared of Daddy when he gets like that'. (Marcie)

And Courtney described the unrelenting nature of her husband's post-fire behaviour.

He [went away] and it was like an audible sigh of relief just to get a break from him, to just go, 'Ah, just for the week, OK we don't have to go on egg shells' ... Oh yeah, he'd shout ... when he would rage it would just go on for so long and his voice is so loud and he's nearly six foot four and he would tower over me and yell down at me, 'ARGGHH' like a lion ... Every now and then the kids would cop a slap on the face ... The other day, he really lost it ... It was the first time I thought, 'Oh my god, is he going to?' (Courtney)

One woman said there were indications her partner could be violent before the fire, but he had never acted on them until after Black Saturday.

He'd just start with the body language and the huffing and puffing, and then it would escalate to when I'd say, 'Is something wrong?' and then he'd go, he'd just lose it ... Even if you understood what he was saying and you were going, 'No, I get it, that's fair, that's alright', he just wouldn't listen. He just thought you were arguing every time you spoke and just became impossible to deal with, like you couldn't appease him ... Oh yes, he'd scream. The goal posts just kept changing ... He was a very intimidating person [and] no matter what you said, no matter how clearly you said it, he'd find some way of turning it around ... a couple of times he actually did, a push, a shove and a hit sort of thing. (Kelly)

The narratives of these women in the sample support that violence against them newly emerged after the fires.

### **Reporting does not increase because women are silenced**

The last part of this theory describes how women were reluctant to report, and are sometimes prevented from reporting or even speaking about the violence against them. This position implies a greater increase in domestic violence after disaster than is enumerated. The women's accounts from this sample indicate that after Black Saturday, both existing violence escalated and new violence emerged despite the lack of data to confirm this. The lack of recorded data revealed, above all, poor recording systems and silencing of women (Parkinson et al., 2011). Anecdotal data of high rates of domestic violence came from the most senior reputable sources, professionals, community members and, critically, from women themselves. In sharp contrast with existing published research which drew from domestic violence service data, the few domestic violence services in Mitchell and Murrindindi shires showed *no* increase in demand after Black Saturday. This stark fact was explored earlier (See also Parkinson et al., 2011). As observed in other disasters (Jenkins & Phillips, 2008a), domestic violence was seen to be a less important issue than recovery and reconstruction, and indeed, separate. There was little capacity or will by organisations with oversight of the disaster recovery to gather accurate statistics on domestic violence. Attitudes were that domestic violence pre-existed and was unrelated to the disaster. The community focus on practical recovery, grief and loss, combined with sympathy for traumatised, suffering and suicidal men prevented willingness to hear about domestic violence.

The factors inhibiting women from reporting included risk to confidentiality and fear of inflicting hurt on loved family members and loved communities. Another was fear of repercussions from partners – or indeed, their small community – if they spoke out about what they and their children were going through in living with an abusive partner since the fires. The more subliminal explanation for the silence is the magnification of all those reasons women don't report: exhaustion, self-blame, fear of not being believed, fear of escalating violence, lack of options, protection of now traumatised children, and protection of the violent — yet now vulnerable — man. Protection of the man is perhaps the main reason.

Because you've gone through a trauma, you'll continually make excuses for someone's behaviour and you'll actually feel helpless to escape the situation because they're suffering. (Becky)

The women felt compassion for the men. Health professionals were compassionate, too, and this sometimes blurred their ability to recognise and take action on domestic violence. We heard that police as well 'were sensitive' to the circumstances – after all, the men had been through a lot and were acting out of character. The result is a feeling of disloyalty by women in speaking out, and fear of tipping vulnerable men over the edge may have softened responses.

*[Would your sister get the police involved?]*

Absolutely not. She doesn't want anything to happen to him. She does not want to be responsible for anything to happen to him. (Kate)

Other women's comments, too, reflect their efforts to help their partner, despite the abuse they experienced:

He was not coping and things like that – he was having his own mental problems, and I was quite compassionate towards him and encouraged him to come back as well, silly enough. (Hailey)

I'm encouraging him this whole time to see a counsellor, 'Please go and see a counsellor... please go and get some medication ... and please cut down on the drinking...' Encouraging him. Doing what I can. (Miranda)

He became really sensitive to anything if you disagreed. This was all part of that. He was so intensely unsure who he was that any kind of criticism was amplified within himself ... Men are constantly trying to surmount and be stronger and control and when they face that [Black Saturday] - even the most beautiful guys, and I see some beautiful guys in the CFA - you see some of them crumbling too. It just breaks my heart. (Becky)

A theme in the disaster literature is that the pre-disaster response to violence against women by both legal and community services as well as community members is a predictor for how it is viewed in the aftermath (although Houghton found otherwise in her study)

(Enarson, 2012; Fothergill, 1999; Fothergill, 2008; Houghton, 2009b; Wilson et al., 1998). Disaster exacerbates both the invisibility and vulnerability of domestic violence survivors (Fordham, 2008; Jenkins & Phillips, 2008a), and can lead to 'some violent acts [going] unrecognized and unrecorded' (Phillips, Jenkins et al., 2010, p. 280). Conservative and patriarchal rurality (Pease, 2010a; Tyler et al., 2012) hampers women's willingness to report at any time (Boetto & McKinnon, 2013; Hogg & Carrington, 2006). After Black Saturday, the response to reports of increased violence against women from the *only* organisation that was funded to provide domestic violence services was captured in a local newspaper:

[A]n Australian-first study into domestic violence after natural disasters ... includes first-hand accounts from women who endured physical and psychological abuse at the hands of their partners after the 2009 fires ... In the report, eight women sought help from case managers and domestic violence services, while six went to police. All felt they were not taken seriously ... But ... chief executive of [name withheld] which covers Kinglake, said her service had not recorded an increase in domestic violence after the fires. And she could not explain why the women had struggled to get help. [She] said the study would have attracted women who were 'aggrieved with the system' and wanted to speak out. (Wilson, 2012, p. 3.)

One of the participants in this research posted an anonymous comment on the newspaper's website, refuting this. As 'LM', she wrote:

I agreed to take part in the study because I was seeing with my own eyes that not only had my partner become increasingly violent and agitated since Black Saturday, but friends' partners had as well. I sought help – from the police and from Berry Street in the months after the fires, for domestic violence issues, and neither seemed to care less. Actually, they couldn't wait to try and pass me on elsewhere ... After my experiences with 'the system', I felt humiliated and defeated. I now accept that this is my lot in life and that there is no one out there capable of helping me out. 'The system' is an absolute failure and this was very obvious in the months after the fires. (LM commenting on Wilson, 2012, posted 7.3.12 2.19pm.)

Other readers commented in support of her, prompting the chief executive officer to retract the statement that denied an increase in domestic violence:

My apologies to you LM as this article does not accurately reflect what I said, which has therefore not paid suitable respect to your experience. Our domestic violence data did not go up, and your experience could reflect that the many service providers that were on the ground after the fires, did not always link in to specialized local responses available such as domestic violence services. (CEO commenting on Wilson, 2012)

This final theory, and the key finding of this research, is that not only is there both increased and new domestic violence, but reporting *will not* increase because of its assignation of low priority, post-disaster.

In the next section of this chapter, the narratives of 17 women in this sample pointed to Black Saturday as the catalyst for the new or increased violence they observed in its aftermath. It considers the role of choice in men's decisions to use violence, and presents key theories of violence against women.

### **Women affirm increased domestic violence after Black Saturday**

One after another, respondents linked the men's violence to their experience of the day – their horror or shame, or to the drug and alcohol abuse, or to its aftermath with its attendant circumstantial difficulties, conflicts and failures. Where, for some women there were indications in the past that their partner might be capable of violence, the fires seemed to dismantle the capacity to regulate behaviour.

It's in him — and what's happened since the fires is, there seems to be no control on his emotions. He's just completely reactionary, when once he was able to moderate or there was at least some kind of understanding to his rage and anger. There was some context. Now there's no context to his rage. It just seems to be completely random. (Becky)

And Miranda unequivocally linked her partner's new violence against her to a change in him wrought by his experience on Black Saturday:

I'm well supported by my community and my parents are close by, and all of these things, but when push comes to shove I sleep alone in a house that he has a key to,

with my children. So I changed the locks. On Thursday he comes up, he's going to get the rest of his stuff ... I spend the day down at the school because I'm afraid that he is going to turn up at the school and take the kids out of school, so I'm a little bit scared.

*[Have you ever been frightened of him before?]*

No, absolutely not. The man's a pussycat. The man was so gentle. (Miranda)

Attribution theory espouses that people generally point to personality or character to explain the behaviour of others, yet claim pressure or circumstance to explain their own (Crittenden, 1983; Quarantelli, 1994; Weiner, 2010). Disaster researcher Quarantelli (1994) writes that 'the research focus should be on the circumstantial and contextual pressures that people identify rather than on the predisposing attitudes or motives that move them to action. He quotes Tolstoy: 'Every man carries in himself the germs of every human quality and sometimes one manifests itself, sometimes another, and the man often becomes unlike himself, while still remaining the same man' (1994, p. 14). An approach that privileges the 'circumstantial and contextual pressures' over 'predisposing attitudes or motives' ostensibly contradicts the philosophy of some in the domestic violence sector<sup>15</sup> which would see this as excusing men for their violent behaviour because they had suffered in and after Black Saturday.

Yet, the third position is choice. The role of choice in theorising male violence against women is controversial. Domestic violence practitioners tend to speak of men's choice observing that some men use violence where others do not, with most Australian behaviour change programs for men advocating this position (Pease, 2005). Choice as a concept is also key to some theorists' arguments (Hearn, 1998, for example, cites Tifft, 1993, Kirkwood, 1993 and Pringle, 1995; and Pease, 2005, cites Brennan, 1985 and Pence & Paymar, 1993). After all, not all men in pressured circumstances turn to violence. In contrast, some masculinity theorists question the notion of choice, arguing that men are anxiously defending against multiple threats of loss, central among them, the loss of the breadwinner role (Kimmel, 2013; Levant, 1997). This 'crisis of masculinity' has a long and cyclic history – for example, the equality arguments in the 1960s and waves of feminist challenges to male

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<sup>15</sup> Some domestic violence professionals were interviewed in Parkinson (2012a) and some attended and commented on presentations and workshops where this research was presented. See Figure 1.



dominance – with some theorists arguing that it is never *out* of crisis (Butler, 2002; Levant, 1997; Robinson, 2000). In essence, the crisis in masculinity seems to be a reaction to loss of privilege.

Likewise, many of the responses to the Black Saturday bushfires seemed to suggest that they unsettled traditional gender roles. Many, including the women themselves, felt that some men's sense of masculine identity may have been eroded by their 'performance' of masculinity during the Black Saturday bushfires, and as they lost control over housing and employment, thereby losing their prescribed role of provider and protector. Such loss of status, confidence and control by men, matched sometimes by new opportunities for women in the post-disaster period, may have triggered violence by men to regain dominance – at least in their own homes. Other disaster researchers have reached similar conclusions (Houghton, 2009b; Phillips, Jenkins et al., 2010). Men's investment in the traditional masculine role and belief in their entitlement to a superior identity plays a role in their use of violence against women, in the same way that an individual's belief in stereotypical gender roles and acceptance of gender inequality is linked to violence-supportive attitudes (VicHealth, 2009). In order to avoid liberal individualism and draw on feminist thought to consider how much the personal is political in this context of men's violence, Hearn (1998) argues that we need to understand the social context of men's violence. Allen Johnson offers a compelling parallel when he writes:

Like lynching, men's violence against women is something that individual men do and for which they can and should be held accountable. But it's more than that, and this means we have to pursue its causes in a broader and deeper way. (2005, p. 48)

The social construction of gender (and hate) indeed creates boys and men who in general believe in their superiority over women and their entitlement to more of everything (Connell, 2005). The feminist argument that all men benefit from some men's violence (Brownmiller, 1993; Messerschmidt, 1993, cited in Pease 2005) is revealed, and does not rely on individual men consciously doing their part by using violence as a way to reinforce patriarchal power. Individual men are unlikely to view their wife-beating as their patriarchal duty. Rather, it is the lack of effective censure from society and from the legal processes that is the mechanism to reinforce patriarchal power. The social forces that facilitate an

individual man's choice to beat his wife or partner are evident in the lower reporting and conviction rates for domestic violence and sexual assault, as opposed to other crimes (Greal, et al., 2011; Lievore, 2003; 2005). Society's legal institutions operate complicitly with men who use violence at home. Other facets of society also encourage men's violence. To preserve men's superior position both in the home and in the public sphere, friends, family and workmates, for example, may monitor men's performance of dominance over women, asking if a man 'wears the pants', or if he is 'under the thumb', 'pussy-whipped', 'dick-whipped', 'henpecked', has no balls, or is a wimp. In seeking to prevent male violence against women, Bob Pease writes that:

[W]e need to more fully understand the ways in which masculine subjectivities are constructed if we are to more effectively facilitate that change'. (2005, p. 38)

In his analysis of men's behaviour change programs, Pease cites McKendy's (1992) observations, where many men in these programs felt overwhelmed by external pressures and did not identify as rational beings with choices (Pease, 2005, p. 37). Tracy Isaacs (2001) considers if there are, indeed, two levels of responsibility in relation to both domestic violence and hate crimes – individual and community – concluding:

It is entirely appropriate to treat batterers as responsible agents and to address battering as a crime. Battering may have its roots in cultural attitudes about women, but it remains the individual's choice when deciding how to act on those attitudes (2001, p. 34).

Hearn gives a chilling example of one man's deliberate use of violence, and this resonates with many other examples I have heard:<sup>16</sup>

So, basically, I grabbed hold of her and thumped her one. But it's like the thing was, I thumped her hard enough to hurt her, but not hard enough to knock her down, because I didn't want to hurt the baby. I knew what I was doing. (1998, p. 210)

While not all violence against women by men is so deliberately enacted, and while men describe feelings of out-of-control rage, my position – informed by workers in the domestic

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<sup>16</sup> For example, through interviews for *A Powerful Journey* (Parkinson, Burns & Zara, 2004) and *Raped by a Partner* (Parkinson & Cowan, 2008).

violence and men's health sector and my own work in the women's health sector for almost two decades – is that there is a point at which each individual man chooses whether to use violence or not, when to use it, where, and who to use it against. The law, too, recognises violent acts as individual choice (Hearn, 1998; Isaacs, 2001) but acts on it capriciously and ineffectively as Denise Lievore (2003; 2005) found in relation to sexual assault. In 2000, Marg D'Arcy presented to the Australian Institute of Criminology conference, stating:

Research constantly reiterates the way in which the criminal justice system is manifestly inadequate in providing justice, particularly for women who are physically or sexually assaulted or threatened by men that are known to them. (2000, p. 5)

Conviction rates for perpetrators of sexual assault and domestic violence are estimated to be a fraction of all perpetrators (Centre for Innovative Justice, 2014; Gelb, 2007; Greal, et al., 2011) leaving the many women who have suffered at the hands of male partners without the support of a society and legal system that would swiftly and effectively penalise men for their violence. To counter this, Jacqui True asserts that nonviolent social norms should be reinforced by the legal system, echoing other calls for society-wide changes to inequality and strict socially constructed gender roles, and she writes:

There is still the belief in the criminal justice sector if not the criminology discipline that true crimes are perpetrated by strangers, not intimate partners ... The historical bias toward violations of human rights in the public sphere rather than those perpetrated in private is premised on a male-as-norm construct of the individual and, as such, has privileged male over female victims. (2012, pp. 24-25)

A society that has the will to remove gender inequality and to stop men's violence against women will see individual men's choices change.<sup>17</sup> However, in the 2009 Black Saturday bushfires and the years following, individual men used violence against women, and others were complicit in it by denying or excusing it. This discourse of denial is apparent in some of the accounts of the women in this sample. The disaster was either understood as a catalyst

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<sup>17</sup> This view is perhaps supported by research that indicates Aboriginal women are more likely to be victims of violence than non-Aboriginal women, and that class, ethnicity and culture can increase women's vulnerability (Pease, 2005). Rather than reflecting greater levels of violence against women by men from these groups, it could indicate the lower access to power and resources available to women from these groups. Violent and predatory men (from any background) may be more likely to partner with more vulnerable women as dominance is easier.

for the men's violence or an excuse for it. In either case, it is important to understand that at some point these men chose to use violence but they were largely forgiven for it by community members and the legal and health professionals alerted to it. Many legal, health and community professions justified and excused men's use of violence during and in the aftermath of the Black Saturday bushfires. Similarly, in the US, Alice Fothergill (2008, p. 134) drew on the literature to write that, '[i]n non-disaster times, battered women are often overlooked as victims by the public, at large, the criminal processing system (e.g., the police and court professionals), and service and health agencies and professionals (e.g. physicians, social workers) ... so it is possible that they are overlooked after disasters as well'. She concludes that 'emergency management organizations need to be more aware and sensitive to women battering issues' (2008, p. 154). In Australia, many of the responses from professionals working at the coalface of the Black Saturday fires tended to interpret men's violence as variously unintentional violence, an anomaly, a temporary lapse which, given the right environment and appropriate support from the woman and the family, would right itself in time. The message to women was that to intervene *as if* this was domestic violence would be a disservice to suffering, good men. Consequently, their allegations went unheeded and they felt silenced.

It is important to note that many of the women themselves tended to reach for excuses for their partner's violence obviously, and not surprisingly, because they felt compassion for them. But the women, too, had suffered and their very participation in the research and willingness to speak of the men's violence was an assertion of their rights to live free from it. Whatever interpretation is used to explain the men's violence after Black Saturday, its emergence as a lived experience for the women is clear from their narratives. Equally clear, was the resistance to hear about it.

As this research reveals, women who sought help were often silenced. Yet, all of the women in this research who experienced new or increased violence after Black Saturday made a clear link between the disaster of Black Saturday and the hidden disaster of their partner's violence in its aftermath. A surprising barrier to addressing this issue of violence after disaster came from the domestic violence sector itself, as some practitioners refuted that the violence described in the women's narratives was 'real' domestic violence. The next section considers this view.

### ***Real domestic violence?***

Michael Johnson's concept of patriarchal or intimate terrorism mostly reiterates that domestic violence is more than 'just' physical violence, as do other theorists (Flood, 2006; Houghton, 2009b; Johnson, 1995). When presented with findings from this research, on-the-ground practitioners, too, questioned what is 'real' domestic violence. Two local domestic violence and men's health professionals disputed that the violence described by women in this sample fitted 'on the continuum' (Frye, Manganello, Campbell, Walton - Moss, & Wilt, 2006), either because it was a one-off event or because the perpetrator had a diagnosis of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. A counsellor said:

You have to ask, what is behind domestic violence? If it's a traumatic state of mind, that would determine how it would be dealt with rather than labelling the behaviour as abusive ... You may find workers have changed their definition of domestic violence to accommodate the emotional and psychological conditions people are experiencing. (Counsellor, cited in Parkinson & Zara, 2012d, p. 146)

Yet, one participant in this research described feeling terrified after the one and only incident of domestic violence she said she experienced in what had been a happy relationship. That relationship was broken irretrievably when he physically attacked her, breaking her bones.

In the Victorian context, as noted earlier, 'family violence' is defined in the Family Violence Protection Act 2008 ("Family Violence Protection Act ", 2008) as 'behaviour by a person towards a family member of that person if that behaviour— (i) is physically or sexually abusive'. (See Acronyms and Definitions.) It goes on to list a number of other behaviours that reflect those in the Duluth Model. However, this first point is critical. The man's single use of superior physical power can obliterate trust and any semblance of an equal relationship. Further acts of power and control are unnecessary as long as she remembers her partner's willingness to use his superior physical power. This is hauntingly conveyed by MacNamara (2009):

I talked to a woman who was 72 years old [just after her husband's funeral, attended by hundreds of mourners]. I was expressing my condolences and she said, 'I'm glad he's gone'. She talked about her husband's violence. She said he was only physically

violent towards her once and that was on her honeymoon when he beat her up very badly. And then, what he did was to remind her of that on every occasion when he didn't like what she wanted to do, what she was doing, how she was doing it. He just reminded her every time about that event. He would not have seen himself as a violent man. (MacNamara, 2009)

Common Couple Violence theory, where both people in a relationship are said to be violent, is described as 'relatively gender balanced' (Johnson, 1995, p. 285) and seems to dismiss the power of a single incident. Yet Michael Johnson writes, 'Yes, all domestic violence is abhorrent, but not all domestic violence is the same' (1995, p. 293), cautioning family counsellors to avoid 'single-minded assumption[s] that every case of violence fits the same pattern' (1995, p. 292). In this thesis, the women described violence that some domestic violence practitioners<sup>18</sup> resisted because it did necessarily not fit a prescribed pattern. 'Real' domestic violence was perceived as following a pattern of circumscribed 'power and control' as theorised by Duluth and covered in Chapter 2 (Domestic Abuse Intervention Project, n.d. circa 1993). For example, Jill described a one-off violent episode which ended the relationship, and a manager of statewide services (not Victoria) attending a workshop on this research stated it was not 'real' domestic violence, and she went on to describe 'real' domestic violence as where women 'walk on eggshells for years', and she stated that she believed from Jill's account that the perpetrator of this violence was traumatised. The resistance of many domestic violence professionals to linking domestic violence to disasters perhaps springs from the fear that men will be excused, in the same way that considering class and race were viewed as problematic in reducing men's responsibility for the violence (Pease, 2005). This fear leads to denying increased domestic violence after disaster.

Suggestions were made by several domestic violence professionals<sup>19</sup> that the men would have always been violent and their partners only recognised that violence after the disaster. If violence after disaster is not recognised by domestic violence practitioners, then *no-one* is willing to hear women speak of the violence against them. This unacceptable outcome was realised by some of the women in this sample. This research exposes the culture of denial

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<sup>18</sup> Some domestic violence professionals were interviewed in Parkinson (2012a) and some attended and commented on presentations and workshops where this research was presented. See Figure 1.

<sup>19</sup> As in footnote 15.

surrounding women's experiences of domestic violence in the overall recovery efforts. It exposes the reluctance of police to treat domestic violence after disaster despite their Code of Conduct. It exposes the unwillingness of case managers and health professionals to act on women's reporting of violence. And it exposes one woman's account where she was unsupported by trauma counsellors after reporting the violence against her. That even domestic violence practitioners could refuse to hear women's accounts of violence in a disaster context is yet another troubling finding, and all must be challenged.

It is indeed deeply disturbing that some domestic violence professionals did not believe women when they reported experiences of new or increased violence in the aftermath of Black Saturday. This suggests that the culture of denial surrounding women's experience of domestic violence is endemic.

### ***Conclusion***

Although feminists first drew attention to domestic violence as a criminal issue in the late 1960s, even now, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, public sentiment lags behind legislation. The ever-present willingness to overlook violence against women is exacerbated in post-disaster circumstances where the resources of support services are over-burdened with primary and fire-related needs. The aftermath of Black Saturday further validated Taylor and Mouzos' (2006) finding that a large proportion of Australians believed domestic violence could be excused if it resulted from temporary anger or if there was genuine regret. In the face of empathy and excuses, decades of training<sup>20</sup> in the dynamics of domestic violence appeared to vanish. This played out in the long aftermath of Black Saturday as few in the affected communities chose to tackle the violence that emerged or increased. The complicating factors of the horrific and unprecedented disaster meant excuses for men's harmful behaviour came from the women, and from the men themselves, from health professionals, police, trauma psychologists, and inconceivably, from some domestic violence practitioners. The way they excused men's violence was to prioritise their suffering in the disaster's aftermath over the women's right to live without violence. Whether the men were suffering

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<sup>20</sup> Training in the dynamics of domestic violence has been offered by a myriad of training organisations and individuals including women's health services and peak bodies such as Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria. See for example: <http://www.dvrcv.org.au/training>

because of the trauma of the day, or the losses they endured, or their current difficulties, people felt sorry for these men whom they thought of as 'good' men.

The circumstances and pressures in the aftermath of disaster ostensibly challenge the foundations of the domestic violence sector. Consequently, many of its practitioners and theorists deny or question the existence of increased violence against women after disaster. The acknowledgement that the violent men were traumatised by Black Saturday somehow muddies the water and it is easier to look away from violence after a disaster. The position of this thesis is that disaster is no excuse for domestic violence – just as alcohol or drug abuse is no excuse (Braaf, 2012). It is critical that violence against women be named, and the definition of domestic violence not altered to accommodate trauma after disaster. Women do not speak easily of the violence against them by the man who is their husband or partner. Violence against women is an abuse of human rights (AusAID Office of Development Effectiveness, 2008) – and this includes, in a post-disaster context, where men may be suffering. Painstakingly slow work over recent decades to ensure domestic violence is treated as a crime is revealed here to be largely unsupported in disaster contexts.

After reviewing the literature on men's declining economic power and challenges to traditional masculine identity, Pease – unequivocally – states:

Research thus demonstrates that when men's masculinity is threatened, it creates insecurity and greater likelihood of violence against women (Pease, 2010a, p. 162).

Men's masculinity is threatened in disaster and the women who informed this research confirmed their belief that the new or increased violence they experienced or observed was directly linked to Black Saturday. Rather than accepting the men's violence as a normal part of masculinity or as an acceptable way for men to regain masculine control, the women experienced the behaviour as problematic. It is problematic, too, for our society in which the state laws criminalise violence against women. Men's sense of entitlement to control those around them perhaps allows them to perpetrate domestic violence where they would stop short of other criminal acts. This will be explored further as Chapter 6 examines the role that male privilege and expectations of women's sacrifice play in neglecting violence against women after disaster.



## CHAPTER 6

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### 6: Privilege and sacrifice

#### Introduction

‘It is justice, not charity, that is wanting in the world.’

Mary Wollstonecraft (1792)

This chapter draws on feminist theory and masculinity studies to consider the contribution of socially constructed gender roles to expected behaviour in the context of a post-disaster period. Chaos in disaster’s aftermath offers the potential for stereotyped gender roles to be strengthened, and unequal power relations between men and women exacerbated (Eriksen et al., 2010). The chapter begins with a review of the theory of the social construction of gender, specifically that women learn sacrifice as part of their brief, while men are taught to assume the unearned privilege that comes with their sex (Austin, 2008; Connell, 2005; Pease, 2010b). In a literature review, Jack Kahn (2011) found that in most cultures and institutions in the world today, it is men who hold power, and that although the privileges may be different according to geography, such privileges often include more money, authority, opportunities and dominance. Importantly, a common factor between societies is that men have stopped others from deciding on the way the society functions (Kahn, 2011).

This chapter critiques the dichotomy of gender roles – male and female – presented by patriarchy as the singular and natural societal structure, with men in charge. Catastrophic disasters present opportunities for change – either progressive or regressive (Birkmann et al., 2010). Examples of the ways regressive change in relation to gender equality was enacted in the aftermath of Black Saturday are then discussed using Connell’s three-fold model of gender (with the later addition of symbolism) as a framework (Connell, 2005; Pease, 2010b). While acknowledging the diversity of masculinities and that men profit differently from the gender hierarchy depending on their status and how closely they align to the standard of the hegemonic male, it then considers the ways that men are more

valued than women and reiterates that it is women who are asked to sacrifice in the aftermath of disaster.

The final section considers interpretations of the theory of sacrifice as it relates to women and expounded principally by Julia Kristeva, Martha Reineke and Allison Weir, and the way these theories were operationalised after Black Saturday. This attention to gender and feminist theory as part of disaster research represents a significant contribution to the newly emerging field of research (Bolin et al., 1998).

### **Opportunity after disaster to reinforce patriarchy**

Much research has been undertaken proceeding from the flawed assumption that disaster does not discriminate, but risks and vulnerabilities are different for women and men in disaster as a result of the social roles imposed on girls and boys, men and women (Domeisen, 1998; Fordham, 2008). Bushfire, for example, presents vulnerabilities that are structural according to gender and exacerbated by other social contexts of class, race, age and ability (Eriksen, 2013; Eriksen et al., 2010; Fothergill, 1998; Proudley, 2008; Tyler & Fairbrother, 2013a). Gender roles are constructed with men primarily on the front line of fire fighting and women primarily in the nurturing role, and exposes men and women to different kinds of risk – women are often left with the responsibility of home, children and pets as mostly men join organised efforts to fight the fire (DeLaine et al., 2008; Eriksen et al., 2010; Haynes et al., 2008; Jenkins & Phillips, 2008a; Pacholok, 2013; Tyler et al., 2012). The kinds of risks to those men (and some women) who physically fight bushfires are understood at a visceral level. Risks to the majority of women who do not actively and intentionally fight bushfires, however, are less visible and rarely acknowledged and lie essentially, in the risk of exacerbation of economic insecurity (Nix-Stevenson, 2013) and secondary status (Pacholok, 2009). Building on Connell's comment that crises may 'provoke attempts to restore a dominant masculinity' (Connell, 2005, p. 84), Austin argues that 'when something like a natural disaster destroys the institutions of the state, the workplace, and the home, men feel their hegemony is in crisis' (Austin, 2008, p. 7).

Disaster and post-disaster chaos disturb carefully negotiated gender roles as experience of catastrophic disasters upends closely held beliefs and the structures that support them.

[L]arger crises and disasters can represent threshold events leading to organizational and institutional change where dominant ways of thinking and acting are subject to critical review and revision ... In this regard, disasters can catalyse structural and irreversible change by creating new conditions and relationships within environmental, socioeconomic and political structures, institutions and organizations. (Birkmann et al., 2010, p. 638)

In surviving and escaping from the fires on Black Saturday, both men<sup>21</sup> and women spoke of reacting to life and death situations as individuals, rather than along gendered lines (Parkinson & Zara, 2011). Yet, in the public cultural storytelling, men continue to be represented as capable and women as vulnerable, concealing 'deep-rooted inequalities, patterns of marginalization, and unequal power structures' (Enarson, 2009; Tschakert & Machado, 2012, p. 276). Men are cast as protectors and heroes, and women as dependent on masculine agency (often heroic) and waiting to be rescued. Australian researchers observe that bushfire shapes and upholds gender roles as women are viewed as 'victims without required competencies and devoid of power' (Wraith, cited in Eriksen et al., 2010, p. 338). Yet, when women's voices are heard and documented, it seems that the 'knight in shining armour' during a disaster is equally likely to be a woman as a man. For children being driven out of the fires on Black Saturday, their protector in a life and death situation was often a woman. In this research, many women's narratives showed their clarity of thought in the most life-threatening situations – planning ahead, anticipating trouble and overcoming seemingly insurmountable problems. These women were seldom in the passive and protected roles mythologised by concepts of the gender order and the stereotypical nuclear family. The lived experience for men and women did not match the cultural expectations of how men and women should behave.

The terminology that describes women 'sheltering passively' in bushfires (Handmer et al., 2010; Whittaker & Handmer, 2010) – apart from rarely matching the narratives of the 30 women in this sample – is a misnomer when they shelter with children. It reflects 'the ideology of gender that defines men and their activities as superior and women and their

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<sup>21</sup> Men spoke of their own experiences both as workers in interviews preceding this research, and in the following research, 'Men on Black Saturday' (Zara & Parkinson, 2013).

activities as inferior', even invisible (Pease, 2010a, p. 156). Childcare is unrelentingly active, never more so than in the drama of a bushfire, and women's survival is compromised by this responsibility. The same applies in other disasters:

In a fast-moving storm surge, children slow things down. Mothers who stop to find and gather up children lose valuable time, and with children in their arms, they cannot swim, climb, or hang on. (Seager, 2006, p. 2)

In the chaos that followed the Black Saturday bushfires, new routines were forged. As noted earlier, some women previously without options and now homeless and with grant money, took the chance to leave unsatisfactory relationships. Other women stepped up to help in the community and found new skills and self-esteem. These rumblings of change had to be pulled back into order, back into the socio-symbolic order where gender roles were defined with men as leaders. Commonly, people searching for security looked to the past, reverting to traditional male and female roles. Alway and Smith (1998) described such circumstances after Hurricane Andrew in Miami:

As the need to obtain basic necessities (water, food, shelter, clothing) and to reconstruct the interpersonal environment of everyday life began to take hold, so too did gender roles reassert themselves. Housing decisions revealed some husbands patronizing their wives (and their needs for the "comforts" of modern life, such as electricity and running water) or even baldly dominating their wives (by moving the family against the wife's wishes) (Alway & Smith, 1998, p. 183).

The heightened needs of children and partners challenged the expected role of women to be nurturers, as the women interviewed noted.

Initially it was that I needed to create a home and I wanted it to be as normal as possible because I had a baby on the way and a two year old. There was also, for eight weeks, lots of doctor's visits, dressings for [my husband], medication to dispense and just managing the paper work and grant apps and material aid, finding a place, a lot of instrumental stuff which was the challenge immediately. Then came the challenges of managing a newborn without a lot of practical support from [my husband] and managing [his] fragile mental health. I saw that as being a job for *me*

to do, and protecting my children from that and the past trauma. They were very high in my priorities. [... My mother in law] rang me on a subsequent evening and said, 'If you'd supported him more... made him take his medication ...' What the fuck am I meant to do? For many years I tried my hardest for him ... And he was drinking, too, and I just know that was something that reduces your inhibitions, so he was more likely to hit me or yell at me. (Audrey)

Audrey goes on to describe the pressure she felt to prioritise care of the children and household duties over her paid employment as a highly qualified health professional:

[My son] wouldn't sleep at all yesterday and I had the day off work and I'm stressed about dad, having to put the dog down on the weekend, stressed about missing more work, and I actually wanted to be at work that day ... and here I was at home with [my son] who was sick ... I felt overloaded with all of that anyway, the care of my children ... [I was] definitely expected to manage the effects of the trauma on the children ... that's all been my responsibility, paperwork, shopping. (Audrey)

Another woman, also highly qualified, spoke of having no choice but to give up the senior level paid employment she had before the fires. Yet, it seemed her husband – the father of the children – had no restriction on his return to work:

My kids used to go to family day care so I was working four days a week down in Eltham and [the carer] looked after both [children]. One was starting school and [the carer] was going to do the school drop off, and one was three. [The carer] and her family passed away in the fires. She was my biggest support for work purposes and at the time there was not the availability for childcare to return to work for four days a week ... My husband is self-employed so he went back to work within a week and a half. Basically we didn't have a choice and we just borrowed cars and tools and I took a leave of absence from work. (Megan)

Both this research and its successor, on men after Black Saturday (Zara & Parkinson, 2013), reveal policing of traditional gender roles by the community to ensure a continuing 'stronghold of the "male-breadwinner/female carer" model of household and working life' (Pocock, Charlesworth, & Chapman, 2013). For example, men were pressured by others to

provide evidence they were doing all they could to provide for their families and quickly recover from the damage wrought by the disaster. One man interviewed described the intense and intrusive questioning he faced regularly in the aftermath:

Why haven't you got it together? Why haven't you got your garden fixed? Why haven't you got your house done yet? What are you doing with your life? Why haven't you gone back to work? Why haven't you? (Zara & Parkinson, 2013, p. 39)

And another described the expectations of him after the fire:

OK, to get things back to normal, to make things better, to rebuild, and I think to appear effective ... And Christ, the [men] really needed to appear as if they were effective, productive, constructive members of the community. (Zara & Parkinson, 2013, p. 39)

In the Men on Black Saturday research (Zara & Parkinson, 2013), men speak of the penalty of expressing their inability to cope with the trauma they felt on the day and in the aftermath of Black Saturday – penalties which extended to loss of career progression. Men spoke of the pressure they felt to remain stoic and above all, to cope. Although prohibited from crying, society's tolerance for anger and violence from men was higher. These are emotions that fit the masculine script (Pease, 2012). Duke Austin makes the link between the stereotypical male role and violence:

Men, therefore, are likely to encounter a feeling of inadequacy following a disaster because they are unable to live up to the expectations of their socially constructed gender roles ... Feelings of inadequacy build in men, creating additional stress, more depression and a need to exert control. The presence of these conditions influence higher numbers of men to choose violent, abusive, hyper-masculine masculinities. (Austin, 2008, pp. 7-8)

A reversion to the old ways of enacting gender was also documented in California after the wildfires of 1991:

Progress in carving out new gender behaviour suffered a fifty-year setback. In the shock of loss both men and women retreated into traditional cultural realms and personas. (Hoffman, 1998, p. 57)

Hoffman's article after the California wildfires described how a very advanced, sophisticated and apparently gender equal society quickly reverted to sexism (Hoffman, 1998). Men grasped the opportunity for a public presence and women were relegated to the private sphere. 'Women' as a group were devalued – dismissed as difficult or even as witches – by representatives of key institutions involved in the reconstruction such as insurance officials, architects, building contractors (Hoffman, 1998). The return to rigid stereotypes in times of crisis is part of the reproduction of privilege (Hoffman, 1998; Martin, 2010).

Men launched into command and took action. Assuming the family helm, they proceeded to exercise autonomous decision. With the domicile gone, women on the other hand found themselves thrown into utter domesticity. Whether they worked in the outside world or not, women drowned in a veritable sea of intestine, homely detail, towels, toothbrushes, underwear, Spaghetti-Os. Women further fell unwittingly into old habits of compliance. (Hoffman, 1998, p. 57)

Disaster, along with war and colonisation, provide opportunities including reinforcing patriarchy and the 'tenacious and embedded nature of gender role divisions' (Eriksen et al., 2010, p. 332), solving the crisis in masculinity (Allen, 2002; Wilson et al., 1998) and restoring the 'natural' gender order. The chaos that follows disaster is characterised by machismo – the 'reassuring' presence of men in uniform to inspire confidence that the 'right' people are in charge (Cox & Perry, 2011; Tyler et al., 2012). The aftermath is a chance to shore up the gender order and erode the hard-won gains of 'minority' groups (Birkmann et al., 2010; Cox & Perry, 2011; Hoffman, 1998). If a return to the status quo ante is what is desired, then emphatic gender roles can be relied upon to deliver this.

After Hurricane Andrew, family and work arrangements, the power associated with the masculine image and the authority of the male voice, and bodily capacities and reactions served to maintain, and where necessary, re-establish gender roles and the gender order. (Alway & Smith, 1998, p. 193)

Curiously, the conclusion reached by Alway and Smith that follows reflects a collective sigh of relief by those who benefit from patriarchy, welcoming the ostensible security of traditional gender roles – even whilst acknowledging the inequity it brings:

[W]hen we ... understand gender as a social relationship of difference and inequality that cuts across and organizes these various dimensions [of social life], then its resilience through a period of disaster begins to make more sense and its contribution to the stability and maintenance of social order and everyday life becomes even more evident. (Alway & Smith, 1998, p. 193)

The privilege of men and subservience of women is framed as normative and is suggestive of wider public support for a return to the security of patriarchy in times of disaster – despite the costs to women.

### **Opportunity seized after Black Saturday**

Where we are is deep inside an oppressive gender legacy, faced with the knowledge that what gender is about is tied to a great deal of suffering and injustice. (Johnson, 2005, p. 4)

There are diverse theories of masculinity and how patriarchy is achieved and maintained – Allan Johnson, for example described three dimensions of patriarchy – male dominated (control over institutions), male-identified (cultural ideals of masculinity and devaluing of women) and male-centred (men's experiences come to represent human experiences) (Johnson, 2005). Further, he identifies that patriarchy is maintained through its invisibility, and practices such as denial, consensus, false parallels, and suggestions that male suffering is evidence against male privilege (Johnson, 2005). Raewyn Connell suggests gendered power is three dimensional, operating through labour, power and cathexis (emotional attachment) (Connell, 2005). Pease (2010b) points out that Connell later added a fourth category for symbolism whereby 'men are culturally exalted over and above women in part because [men] control cultural institutions, such as the media, universities and religion, where men's and women's statuses are defined and promoted' (Pease, 2010b, p. 99).



In the myriad ways that patriarchy maintains and reproduces itself, some are notably apparent in the aftermath of Black Saturday and could be said to have parallels with Connell's four dimensions: repression of economic access for women (labour); violence and its denial (power); the gender order that promises 'happily ever after' as reward for compliance to gender stereotypes and heterosexual union (cathexis); and the higher valuing of men, most obviously in their frontline and emergency management leadership roles (symbolism) (Connell, 2005; Pease, 2010b; Wedgwood, 2009).

### ***Unequal access to economic power***

Perhaps the key difference in how people experienced the trauma and the aftermath of the fires lay in the fact that our society expects women to care for children — no matter what. This same expectation is not levelled at men. The option for women to take on paid work and thereby secure economic independence goes to the heart of the origins of domestic violence (True, 2012).

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, women's (paid) workforce participation inches towards the levels of men and sex discrimination legislation in Australian states and territories continues to improve conditions for women. Yet every statistical and economic measure continues to show gender inequity in pay and status (as outlined in Chapter 2). Notions of men as providers and therefore more deserving of jobs and economic power persist, and men's sense of entitlement may lead to resentment and violence against women (Scanlon, 1998). Segregation — an effective tool in discrimination employed either in terms of occupational fields or who dominates in senior positions — perpetuates hegemonic masculinity, allowing feminised fields to be devalued (Dowd, 2010; Pease, 2010a). Maleness is observed to be associated with masculine competency:

These competences are often presumed to be more relevant for management positions than feminine competences. In other occupational spaces, it may simply be a case of men being seen to have 'the right body for the job' because male bodies are often associated with a masculine disposition toward both employment and family responsibilities. (Huppatz & Goodwin, 2013, p. 300)

Once exclusion of women is denied, for example, through equal opportunity legislation, and a 'backlash' (Deutsch, 2007) may recreate gender difference on the job by differential

treatment and interpretation of behaviour, thereby facilitating ongoing discrimination against women in the workforce (Noble & Pease, 2011).

The abiding preference for male workers and for men at the top is evidenced by the statistics on women in leadership. Women comprised only 15.4 per cent of ASX 200 directors in 2012 – a high point now tapering off (Summers, 2013, p. 85) and 9.2 per cent of executive positions in Australia's top 500 companies (Summers, 2013, pp. 62-63). Traditional gender roles specify men as breadwinner and the rightful ownership of jobs by men:

Those involved in the union movement, for example, stake claims to manhood and masculinity by organizing around the principal of men as breadwinners. The basic job that all 'real men' should share is to provide for their wives and children. (Coston & Kimmel, 2012, p. 109)

Work is a defining characteristic of manhood and the stereotype of the man as breadwinner is still fixed in the cultural imagination. The women interviewed also reflected on this. Tanya noted the effect of the disaster on the link between her husband's work and his sense of masculinity:

He lost everything in his garage – all his manhood he lost ... Men, they are the protectors and providers of family and head of the family. They lost it that day. The fires took control. (Tanya)

The mythology overlooks women as breadwinners:

Child Support Agency told me that he was not going to [pay] support, and I said to myself and I said to the support people, 'I'm all my kids have, the onus of responsibility of everything, to educate, to feed, to guide, to socialise, I have three lives that are completely dependent on me for every single need'. (Ruby)

The first pressure was, 'Oh my God I've got a three year lease and a mortgage on my house. How am I going to pay it?' ... he sort of hand balled because he wanted to work less and I was taking the burden of the mortgages. I had to pay shop rent which was my business and I had to pay the mortgage because they were my responsibilities within the relationship so I had a lot of that on my shoulders and he

didn't work – pretty much from then on – so it was pretty much all on me, the financial burden. (Becky)

I sort of get the worst of both worlds, he earns not much money, and I do all the primary bread winning, and he's not here and I do everything'. (Audrey)

Audrey's comment exemplifies Enarson's (2012, p. 92) observation that the 'labor of love is not always freely chosen' in her description of expectations of women's household and emotional work in disasters. Women's disaster work in evacuating with children and pets and managing 'tense interpersonal relationships with children, partners, and parents' is located in the everyday reality of women's greater burden of domestic work in the United States (Enarson, 2012, p. 95), as in Australia. This everyday reality is amplified and complicated in disaster.

Women are characterised as nurturers and carers in the gender order – the home-maker to the breadwinner – resulting in the stark discrimination against women documented earlier. After wildfires in British Columbia, Canada in 2003:

Women were positioned as the purveyors of home-as-nest, or home as the place of family and nurturing and thus the most invested in and most responsible for the maintenance of the continuity and stability of the home. Men were positioned as constructing the houses that women then turned into homes. (Cox & Perry, 2011, p. 407)

The same 'socially constructed gender-specific vulnerability of females built into everyday socioeconomic patterns' that Neumayer and Plümper (2007a, p. 551) connect to higher female disaster mortality rates, also connect women to unequal power in relationships and unequal economic power. The post-disaster period underscored men's superior access to work and money. Interview data indicated that the choices and opportunities in re-establishing lives after Black Saturday were gendered. Women spoke of some choice for themselves and men in returning to work, but no choice in whether they, as women, cared for children:

I couldn't return to work because I had no childcare and the schools hadn't reopened, so I said to him 'If you work four days, let me go to work one day and that

way I can keep some sort of income coming in so that I can keep paying the mortgage'. And anyway, he never did that, so I was unable to get back to work. (Ruby)

Men seemed to be free to choose if they would extend 'help' with the care of their own children. They chose how much of role to play in the home and in their children's lives.

His boss had told him that he could take as long as he needed off, but the day the roads opened he was back at work. ... At that stage we were still being told to prepare for evacuation because the fire could turn around and come back. (Lauren)

His only symptom is he works ... he went to work in that second week, I don't even know if we had power on. We couldn't sleep because [we] had to keep getting up to check things weren't on fire. (Vanessa)

Another woman had just given birth to a premature baby on the day of the fires. She had no support from her partner in the days after. She said:

He didn't pick me up from hospital because he was too traumatised and he was in his own space and needed to do his own thing. It wasn't like an emotional state, it was like he needed to do stuff. He felt like he needed to help and be a fire spotter and do this super hero kind of stuff. (Kelly)

Men's freedom to choose whether or not to look after their children was not granted to women. Many women in this sample spoke of assuming primary care of the children in the emotional and physical absence of the male parent. One woman interviewed, Kylie, discharged herself from hospital to deal with family problems involving her violent husband and her sick child, saying, 'No time for a nervous breakdown, pencil it in for another time'. Jess and Miranda, too, spoke of having no option but to keep going:

As the wife in the situation, or the mother, you do not have the luxury of saying, 'Oh fuck it, I'm sick of this. Someone else do it!' Because the buck stops with you. (Jess)

Women get together and cry and hold each other then go, 'Righto girl, back in the game. There you go, you had your little sulk, we love you, we understand, we've all been through it too, go make dinner'. (Miranda)

Women's return to work, especially considering the impact of the fires on the children, relied on stable and loving childcare arrangements. Black Saturday's aftermath left fewer social supports for informal child care as extended family and friends were relocated, and fewer formal child care services due to loss of infrastructure and lives. It was women who were affected and this was the case regardless of the women's occupation or income earning capacity.

The limited choice in economic participation for women, framed from the outset with socially defined gender roles, is narrowed further after disaster. While gendered economic inequality is fundamental to the maintenance of patriarchy, women's economic dependence is also linked to violence (VicHealth, 2011).

### ***Violence and its denial***

Violence is one of the ways patriarchy is maintained and reproduced. Pease (2012) notes that violence and abuse play important roles in reproducing traditional manhood. This anticipates Willer et al.'s (2013) research findings on 'masculine overcompensation', where perceived threats to masculinity are said to result in extreme masculine displays. Similar to hyper-masculinity, men act in extreme masculine ways in order to counter insecurity. Willer et al.'s (2013) investigation of 'masculine overcompensation' confirms the theory and identify involvement of a hormonal factor. Their findings confirm earlier theories that violence may emerge as men's response to threats to their privileged position (Pease, 2012). In the aftermath of disaster, men are likely to have a feeling of inadequacy because aspects of their socially-constructed gender role – such as protecting the family, fighting the fire and saving the house – are mostly unachievable in catastrophic disaster. This, Austin (2008) notes, results in higher incidences of violence and abuse by men towards their female partners. This research into domestic violence after Black Saturday, too, suggests that some men sought to channel their distress and reclaim their masculinity through anger and violence (Parkinson, 2012a). Yet anger and violence are separate responses. While aggression, anger and jealousy may precede violence, Pease (2012) states that they do not cause it:

Men make a choice regarding when and with whom they are going to become violent. It is important then not to confuse the emotion of anger with the decision to

become violent. Anger is not the cause of men's violence towards women. (Pease, 2012, p. 132)

Some men, marginalised and excluded from the male hegemony, use opportunities like the aftermath of disaster to dominate women – exaggerating their masculine ‘strengths’ in order to secure their place in the hierarchy (Coston & Kimmel, 2012). As Anna Goldsworthy (2013, p. 13) notes, ‘Violence is the last resort of the disenfranchised man: if trumped by a woman, he can still fall back on brute strength’. Toughness and violence may be their only means of re-asserting masculinity and attracting privilege (Austin, 2008) and men who are marginalised through failing to meet the standard of the hegemonic male may resort to domination of the women close to them (Coston & Kimmel, 2012; Pease, 2010b):

They have been taught by our racist and capitalistic society that they must buy into the sexist ideology. They believe that their identity can be gained through the oppression of another, specifically women (hooks, 1981). (Austin, 2008, p. 10)

It is this framework in which the idealisation of traditional heterosexual marriage needs to be understood. Marriage is romanticised despite the reality that the intimate relationship is the setting for economic and domestic negotiations and sometimes for power struggles and violence.

### ***Happily ever after in the gender order***

In Australia and other Western countries, as Connell (2005) mooted, the hegemonic male and his feminine bride symbolise an idealised gender order with life-long reward for compliance to gender stereotypes and heterosexual union. Finding ‘the one’ requires concentration of energy and investment of emotional energy on one person or idea, and Connell’s elaboration of cathexis allows insight into this strategy for the reproduction of patriarchy (Connell, 2005). Connell (2005) writes of the social construction of sexual desire, and others lament the lack of scholarship on this aspect of her work. Nikki Wedgwood (2009), for example, writes:

This neglect by feminists of the social construction of sexual desire is regrettable because many aspects of the gender order, in particular the gendered division of labour and sexual double-standards, are reproduced daily on a large scale within heterosexual marriages and relationships. (Wedgwood, 2009, p. 336)

Social construction – this time, of sexual desire, is hidden, appearing to be the most natural thing in the world (Wedgwood, 2009). Carolyn Noble and Bob Pease (2011, p. 33) write that men and women ‘unconsciously know what the established order is and act in partnership to keep it in place’. Femininity, too, is socially constructed and compulsory for women (Greer, 1999). Notions of romantic love, sexual fulfilment and the nuclear family dominate, and the gender order is carefully crafted and updated to ensure society keeps the faith. Disaster, however, tests this faith – as do many other aspects of reality.

Fundamentally, the promise is that women will be looked after by men. The notion of ‘women and children first’ in Western civilisation is both enduring and ubiquitous despite evidence to the contrary, most recently in a 2012 study which concluded human behaviour in life-threatening situations is ‘every man for himself’ (Elinder & Erixson, 2012, p. 13220). Such evidence goes to the heart of expectations of sacrifice by women and the privilege of men. There is further evidence: internationally, more females than males die in disasters at significantly higher numbers, and, as detailed in Chapter 2, this happens because of cultural reasons, the sexual division of labour in some countries which increased women’s vulnerability, women’s poverty forcing them to live in disaster prone areas, in substandard housing or without means of transport, or through privileging the rights of males to food and rescue, and men’s greater ability to secure their own survival (Henrici et al., 2010; Phillips & Morrow, 2008). In Australia too, the trend over a century was the ever-closing gap between male and female deaths in bushfire (Haynes et al., 2008). Although Black Saturday reversed the new trend with the deaths of 100 males and 73 females (Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission, 2010b), a *Review of Fatalities* document prepared for the Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission in April 2010, found that 42 per cent of 172<sup>22</sup> deaths were of females (Handmer, O’Neil & Killalea, 2010). Nine of the 172 were children aged 0 to 11 but their sex was not specified. Overall, the gender and age distribution of those who died in the Black Saturday fires was similar to historic patterns (Handmer et al., 2010) and not as stark a differentiation between males and females as mythology would have us believe. See Figure 5 for a sex-disaggregated breakdown of deaths, where dark grey represents male deaths and light grey represents female deaths.

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<sup>22</sup> Discrepancy of one from the 173 deaths reported in the Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission Final Report (Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission, 2010b)

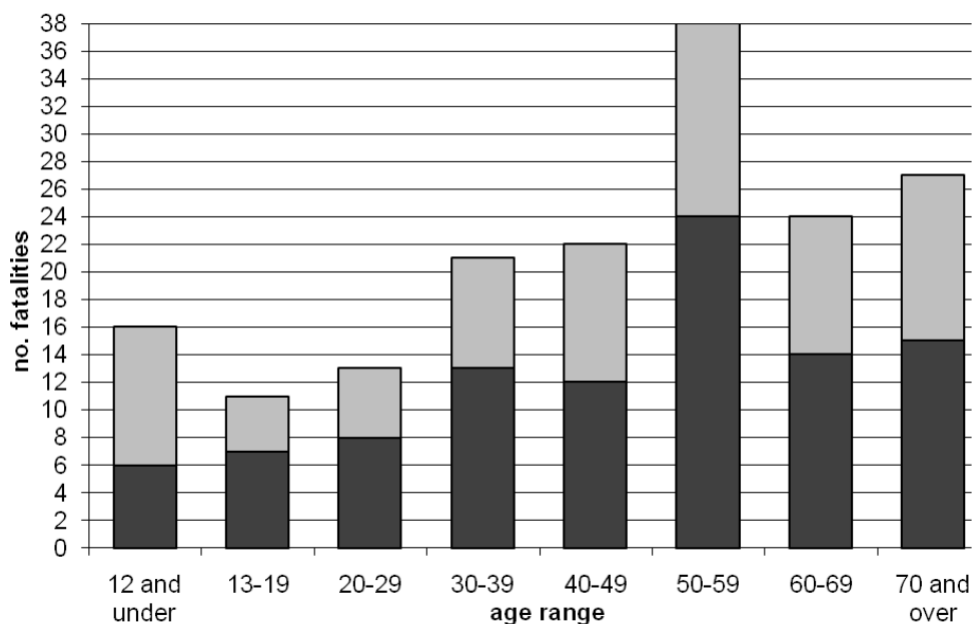


Figure 5: Age and sex stacked bar graph from Review of Fatalities 13.4.2010 (where **dark is male** and **light is female**) based on 172 total deaths, 58 per cent male and 42 per cent female (Handmer et al., 2010, p. 28).

The fallacy of ‘women and children first’ is sometimes easily discernible, as in the following account from Courtney. In her interview, she recounted escaping the fire storm on Black Saturday with her husband and children. Because their car had stalled, they were forced to walk on the edge of the road with burning embers falling on them, beside a convoy of cars escaping the fast approaching fire and unable to stop. When finally the convoy had passed, a young man in a builders’ ute drove back to pick them up. The man of the family climbed into the cabin with their two children and shut the door, leaving Courtney and her two teenage children (from a previous marriage) on the roadside. The older daughter opened the door and forced her way in. Courtney described the terrifying journey for her and her younger daughter:

When the ute picked us ... and I think this has tormented the girls and I ... he put himself in the cabin of the ute first and then sort of got the boys in and told one of my daughters to ‘Fuck off and get in the back’. And she told him where he could go and she climbed in and to the other daughter he just said, ‘No no, you have to get in the back’. And I just remember like we can still see it – I’m looking at this man and going, ‘You shoved us in the back?’ [My daughter] and I were fighting off stuff in the back for ages and were engulfed in smoke ... I found it really hard to get into the



back of the ute ... so we were actually holding on like some James Bond movie ... I was quite bruised from trying to get in and [my daughter ...] got a flash burn in her eye – because we had embers on us the whole time. [At one stage] I looked at her, I don't know if that is water or petrol on the back of this tradesman's ute, but we needed to be aware it could be something, it was right next to us, so she goes, 'Oh for God's sake' ... He put himself before the kids and that's what got me ... Recently when things blew up, I said, 'Mate, you could have stuck all four of those kids in the front, they could have held their brothers on their lap and you should have got on the back with me ... He used to often say that he would be good in an emergency ... that has haunted [my daughter] and I. If we have flash backs, it went to this look in his face like, 'You don't count as much as me'. (Courtney)

During Black Saturday, from the women's narratives, some male partners spectacularly lived up to expectations, saving property and lives – and some did not. Some men proved to be an additional burden in an already devastating day. The women's descriptions of their own behaviour on the day, too, varied from clear-thinking, decisive and heroic actions to their own inability to function effectively. Some women spoke of being shocked by their partner's response in the life threatening Black Saturday fires. Some were frustrated by their partner's inaction during the fires and annoyed by the need to take action themselves. Perhaps this annoyance springs from the reality that it is generally women who do the double shift of paid work together with unpaid home and caring work (AHRC, 2013; Waring, 1988) in the subconscious belief that in such dangerous circumstances, they will be looked after by the man in their lives. In 2013, the Australian Human Rights Commission (2013) reported that only 7 per cent of men with children under six worked part-time compared to two-thirds of employed mothers (66 per cent), and male parents spend half the time female parents spend in caring for children under 15. Eriksen et al. (2010, p. 33) write that 'both the dominator and the subordinate that form the asymmetry in hegemonic relationships are encouraged to assent to it', but when the theory of men's and women's roles did not play out in the dire reality of Black Saturday, some women felt let down. One senior worker told of a woman who was alone to escape the fires with children and neighbours because her husband was on fire duty:

She is very bitter because he wasn't there. He stayed at the CFA [Country Fire Authority] shed. She says, 'I want a man who'd protect me or die in the attempt'.  
(Parkinson & Zara, 2012d, p. 152)

One woman felt guilty about her own expectation of her husband as protector as they both fought the fires for many hours. She said, 'I would not call my husband a typical male ego, he's a very gentle person ... he's done the cooking, his own washing, shopping, for thirty-five years' yet she said she needed him to keep fighting the fires.

Expectations of men to fulfil the culturally designed masculine role of protector are not just in the male imagination. The privilege they enjoy is predicated on them being able to give and act on this assurance of protection. It is a real expectation and a belief, at least for some that 'real' men fight fires (Pacholok, 2009, 2013). Jess, a young woman interviewed, said of her husband, 'He was my fire plan' and almost died as a result of her misplaced reliance. Neighbours, friends and relatives all urged her to leave with them, but she refused and remained until the very last opportunity to leave, insisting (wrongly) that her partner would be back to leave with her. Another, Jill, spoke of her anger at her partner's failure to live up to the male standard of protector and questioned his courage. In the face of the Black Saturday bushfire, people just did what they could within their personal strengths and qualities. In this life-threatening situation, cultural conditioning failed both women and men.

***'Poor men' – more valued, more deserving of empathy***

There were emotional and psychological consequences of the hyper- and non-masculine behaviours enacted by men and observed after Black Saturday as some men overworked to reclaim their expected role as the 'protector' and others struggled to regain control. Houghton (2009b, p. 101) suggests adverse and violent reactions may have come from those 'to whom a high degree of personal and interpersonal control is important'. The complete dominance of the fires was unexpected and overwhelming to those who survived.

'I am a man, and I can do' has been defeated in so many men. Things they couldn't do and they couldn't be and so much was lost. (Becky)

The poignancy of Becky's insight is a reminder that 'men can be both privileged and miserable at the same time' (Pease, 2010b, p. 103). After the bushfires, this was palpable, and was a potent factor in shutting down examination of men's violence to women. Immediately following initial presentations of the research on women (Parkinson & Zara, 2012a, 2012b, 2012c), personnel from emergency and disaster management organisations stated they need to understand this phenomenon from the male perspective. Cries of, 'But, what about the men?' were heard at each presentation and mostly within minutes of the end of the presentation.<sup>23</sup> The topic was male violence, community apathy and strategies to protect women and children, but without fail, responses included vociferous protection of men's interests. As Judith Allen writes:

The manhood portrayed ... is fragile, defensive, threatened, and at risk. Inherently unstable, masculinity is always in process, under negotiation, needing to be "shored up," reinforced, buttressed against its many enemies". (Allen, 2002, p. 199)

Masculinity is presented as in crisis, and men increasingly positioned as the 'new disadvantaged' based on mental and physical health issues, boys 'failing' at school, and their puzzlement over the male role since the 1960s (Allen, 2002; Pease, 2010b; Wedgwood, 2009). Arguments are based on a belief that men's oppression is equal to women's and the balance has swung too far in favour of women (Pease, 2008). Yet such notions of a crisis in masculinity are part of the reproduction of patriarchy and Nancy Dowd (2010) reminds readers to remain focused on issues of power and the hegemony of men, and to resist involvement in hierarchies of need.

## **Sacrifice**

The culture of violence in which women live is most productively understood in terms of a sacrificial economy. Feminist theorists who seek to understand that culture in order to intervene on behalf of women's agency ... should invoke sacrifice

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<sup>23</sup> During the week prior to the Identifying the Hidden Disaster Conference in Melbourne on March 7, 2012, two presentations of the initial findings of this research were made alongside presentations by Dr Elaine Enarson – one in Benalla, Victoria and one in Yea, Victoria. A third presentation was made in Melbourne as part of a broader forum (Parkinson & Zara, 2012e).

as a powerfully instructive metaphor for analyses of women's lives. (Reineke, 1997, p. 5)

Sacrificial theory posits that social cohesion is bought through the sacrificial economy, and, more explicitly for this argument, that social cohesion comes at the cost of women's sacrifice (Kristeva, 1981; Moi, 1986; Reineke, 1997; Weir, 1995). This research presents evidence that women were expected to sacrifice their own needs and safety in the aftermath of Black Saturday to ensure they first cared for husbands, partners and children. This phenomenon was not named as 'sacrifice' by the women who offered it, nor by the workers and community members who described it. Neither is it written about in the disaster literature. The silences in regard to domestic violence after disaster – indeed the culture of denial – may be explained by aspects of the theory of sacrifice and that of male privilege. Women's sacrifice lies at the core of patriarchy and is therefore assumed rather than acknowledged or studied. Women learn sacrifice as part of their constructed gender role so entirely that it becomes unremarkable. As theorised by Luce Irigaray, 'Women are the sacrificial victims of the patriarchal economy, and insofar as they perform sacrifice, they can only do so by sacrificing themselves' (Condren, 1995, p. 174).

In broad terms, Rene Girard's work on the theory of sacrifice focuses on its manifestation as public ritual – and particularly scape-goating – as a means to unite a fractured community. The 'economy of sacrifice' effectively buys social order. It calms agitation through the identification and sacrifice of a scapegoat. The effect is to serially negotiate and temporarily achieve social order. Characteristics of this are evident in the relentless media attention on the perceived failings of Christine Nixon, the Chair of the Victorian Bushfire Reconstruction and Recovery Authority and, at the time of Black Saturday, the Victoria Police Commissioner (Sparrow, 2010) but less applicable for the purpose of theorising the daily sacrifice expected of women in the fire-affected communities, and indeed women generally. However, there are aspects of the theory of sacrifice and interpretations that are clearly germane, for example:

There is ... hardly any form of violence that cannot be described in terms of sacrifice ... Once aroused, the urge to violence triggers certain physical changes that prepare men's bodies for battle. This violence lingers on. It should not be regarded as a simple reflex that ceases with the removal of the initial stimulus ... When

unappeased, violence seeks and always finds a surrogate victim. The creature that excited its fury is abruptly replaced by another, chosen only because it is vulnerable and close at hand. (Girard, 2005, pp. 1-2)

The quotation from Girard has parallels in men's violence against women after Black Saturday. The Victorian Assistant Police Commissioner, Tim Cartwright, introduced the initial research on increased domestic violence after Black Saturday (Parkinson, 2012a) at the *Identifying the Hidden Disaster* Conference in Melbourne in 2012. He said:

As a man standing before you here in uniform, it saddens me to think that one of the greatest challenges of dealing with domestic violence is our own concept of masculinity ... This is about men being men, as they see themselves, as we see ourselves, in response to disasters. The implications are that in public we are strong and fearless and not affected, but the implications for many women is when we come home, we don't cope at all. The women, as invariably the closest to these people, suffer. We see increased domestic violence, we see kids exposed to increased domestic violence, we see increases in alcohol consumption, in drug consumption, break downs of all sort. (Cartwright, 2012)

Such acknowledgement from the highest levels of the Victoria Police force affirms willingness to consider masculinity as a concept and as a contributor to increased violence against women after disaster. The next section reflects on how open society is to hearing of this violence and addressing it.

### ***Women's sacrifice after Black Saturday***

The ultimate powerlessness of the sacrificed guarantees the futility of their protest, as it seems nothing can change the 'sacrificial structure of language and society' (Walt, 2005, p. 286). The link to women's sacrifice in the aftermath of disaster is most evident in Girard's concept that social cohesion is based on sacrifice and Kristeva's that the socio-symbolic order rests specifically on the sacrifice of women (Weir, 1995). Julia Kristeva asks:

What can be our place in the symbolic contract? If the social contract, far from being that of equal men, is based on an essentially sacrificial relationship of separation and articulation of differences which in this way produces communicable meaning, what is our place in this order of sacrifice and/or of language? (Kristeva, 1981, p. 23)

Her question captures what this research documented in the aftermath of Black Saturday in the shires of Mitchell and Murrindindi. The women who informed this research were indeed 'other' and were silenced in the interests of social cohesion. So, too – arguably – were those so silenced that they did not feel able to participate.

In the disorder and chaos of Black Saturday's aftermath, there was no mutually agreed scapegoat to bear away the sins and the troubles of those communities, although the treatment of Christine Nixon reveals attempts to find one. Instead, increasing numbers of women suffered within the private domain, as women have suffered from domestic violence for millennia. In the second half of the 20th century, some small recognition of this violence against women began to filter into the legal systems of developed countries – these concessions forced by feminists who began to hold power within these societies and question notions of conjugal rights.

Community members, health professionals and disaster recovery and reconstruction workers knew that women were enduring domestic violence (mostly) behind closed doors, as outlined in Chapter 5. Although there was no public ritual, sacrifice of their own health and wellbeing was clearly required of these women after Black Saturday, as revealed in their narratives. 'The personal is political' in this post-disaster context translated to individual women being expected to tolerate domestic violence and show loyalty to their men. In doing this, they protected not only their partners' or husbands' reputation in the community but they protected the community itself. The veneer of respectability helped with the appearance of a community as cohesive, constructive and recovering. A community worker said:

The stoicism is portrayed as heroism, in a way ... You are looking at cones of silence around domestic violence anyway. People want to maintain their respectability in the town. I can see that people may not want to report on people who were the heroes of the day, and they would be more forgiving, perhaps. (Parkinson & Zara, 2012d, p. 148)

Society is more forgiving when there are mitigating factors, such as in crime and punishment. This ethical tug finds its roots in recognition of human frailties (Brooks, 2002)

and springs to the fore when men have been heroes. A senior government worker remembered:

One woman [whose husband was a prominent community member], there was violence against her. She was supported ... but very discreetly ... I was astonished when I learned of this particular instance ... I thought how odd that I didn't know about this, even within my own team. People were being very, very discreet because her husband was very prominent and a bit of a hero in the town. (Government worker cited in Parkinson, 2012a, p. 22)

The accounts of the women interviewed revealed that their sacrifice was expected of them. And why would this not be the case? Social construction means that society expects women to sacrifice themselves and is structured to maximise this outcome. Girls are raised to put themselves last and women are expected to live with discrimination – named as 'civilized oppression' by Jean Harvey (1999). The corollary is that the social construction of gender teaches men to feel entitled to express rage, and that same construction means society excuses men for violence, and is complicit in it. Germaine Greer wrote that:

Rage cannot be easily disentangled from grief, but there is a gender angle too. Women do grief; men do rage ... because rage is masculine. Even in the vaunted British legal system and the systems descended from it, men have a right to rage, even to accumulate rage and hoard it till it reaches toxic levels. If a wife should displease a husband to such an extent that he loses control, his bottled-up rage pops its cork and he murders her, he can walk from the court scot-free. (Greer, 2010, pp. 22-24).

Two years after Black Saturday, a commissioned document authored by all community recovery committees stated that, 'An increase in family stress and domestic violence was difficult to confront and resolve' (Community Recovery Committees, 2011, p. 12). The response the authors described seemed to be to back away from the identified reality of increased domestic violence. In one community, a well-attended and valued group for domestic violence survivors which ran at the local Community House was negatively received by community members (Parkinson & Zara, 2012d, p. 25). At an individual level, too, this research shows women directly asked by police and health professionals to go

home and endure domestic violence. Alcoff and Gray (1993) write that speaking out about sexual assault has the power to disrupt the dominant discourse and women are routinely silenced to protect the status quo – the exception is when the perpetrator was not from the privileged group (Alcoff & Gray, 1993). Luft (2008) writes that race and class based myths emerged after Hurricane Katrina as white women volunteers reported harassment and assault, and perpetrators were assumed to be black. In fact seven of the eight reports were of white men and it proved impossible for the Common Ground white volunteers together with white and black community leaders to sustain a campaign against white male violence (Luft, 2008).

***Pressure not to speak: 'How can I complain?'***

There was unspoken yet enormous pressure not to speak about men's violence after Black Saturday because of what the men had been through and their continued distress. The women in this study described instances they felt had damaged their partners. One man told his wife he was physically ill after seeing the shape of a woman shielding a child, both carbonised in that position. He saw the bodies of a woman and two boys who had tried to shelter in their front yard. He could not forget the image of a cow that was on fire, or a goat that had to be sawn in half to be buried. Some of the women had partners who were volunteer fire-fighters, at the front line of an unprecedented disaster. Their training would not have been adequate preparation for what they had to face, and the sight of so many injured and burned people. The stress of that day and the following weeks of high alert is unimaginable to those who were not there. A Country Fire Authority (CFA) volunteer, Tom, spoke of his experience on Black Saturday:

If you remember the Michael Jackson 'Thriller' video with the cemetery and those dead people come out of the cemetery, that was Kinglake on that night at about one in the morning. There were people walking just sort of covered in a blanket. They had very few clothes on and they came up to me and they just couldn't really talk. And I remember one guy just saying to me, 'Water, water' ... we couldn't say anything. We had no idea what we'd been through. We were just absolutely shattered. (Zara & Parkinson, 2013, pp. 4-5)



Tolerance of bad behaviour, through to violence, seemed to increase post-disaster as men were said to be acting 'out of character'. As Liv said, 'The fire took all of our boundaries away too, so ... everyone would accept bad behaviour. Even up to now'. The hope was that the adverse changes in these men would be temporary and eventually resolved by time passing or progress in re-establishing family life and getting back to 'normal'.

I didn't want him to break. I didn't want him to die. He was pretty fragile, he was pretty angry and I didn't want him to go and smash his car into a tree or something stupid like that. (Louise)

Many informants spoke of the heartbreak hearing of one suicide after another – highly noticeable in small communities made even smaller after Black Saturday. Workers, too, were shaken by the potential and the reality of it. The result was the conscription of women into the culture of denial of domestic violence. This was facilitated by the women's compassion. Eleven women made statements that showed compassion for their partners despite the violence. Becky said, 'I knew he was suffering ... God only knows what happens in that poor little head these days', and Sally said, '[H]e actually was a bit vulnerable and I felt sorry for him ... I view him as being unwell, rather than just being a callous bastard'. Tellingly, Jill compared her suffering to his when she said, '[H]e could see flames when he was trying to go to sleep – I think he actually suffered more'. Often, women's compassion and sacrifice was for the sake of the children, and the cost was sometimes their own safety. Women sacrificed safer and more promising futures for what they saw to be the best interests of the children. They spoke of needing to provide a stable environment for children after the tumult of their experience of Black Saturday.

They jury is still out on [whether to separate]. I guess I have my concerns, I mean you ask me that two months ago and I would have been talking to a lawyer ... I'm probably not ready to deal with the whole host of things and neither are the kids. (Courtney)

I know I would not have put up with the last two years of abuse if it wasn't for the kids and thinking predominantly that their dad being there for them was more important than not. (Becky)

Concern for children is paramount to women's decisions, sometimes propelling women out of violence and into unknown and mostly unsupported territory. Sometimes, however, it traps women. In this research, two women had direct requests from their children to stay.

I hadn't said anything, but it was one of those days when I thought, 'I can't do this anymore, that's it'. OK, I'm shooting baskets with [my son] and he says to me, 'I can understand why you would want to' and he didn't finish his sentence, 'but please don't leave, we've been through enough'. (Courtney)

Well they say, 'We know that it's hard for you, we can see that, and we don't want it to continue but at the moment we're not set up enough to move out so when we move out you can move out, Mum'. (Lauren)

However the cost of the women's selflessness was high.

I'm very worried that, because I've subjugated my own needs for that of my children and my partner that then I might not suffer some delayed other Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. I have a few little twigs of things that happened over summer when I saw smoke or smelt smoke. Or depression, and I think I'm skating along by the skin of my teeth from anti-depressants to be honest. (Audrey)

Women are taught to overlook their own needs and put themselves last, and this was particularly so for women and mothers after Black Saturday. Marcie reflected, 'We are so fortunate to have had all this kindness and generosity. And how can I complain about anything?' Health and community workers pointed to the tendency for women to tenaciously hold families together, repairing homes, husbands and children before thinking about their own situation. One worker said:

The women have done what we expect. They get up, they help each other, they cook food, they look after the kids, they try and hold their husbands together, they do exactly everything in a disaster that they do every day in their lives. And they put aside a lot of their own traumas. (Government worker, cited in Parkinson & Zara, 2012d, p. 149)

Health and community workers observed a tendency for women living with violence from their partners to deny their own needs after Black Saturday, thinking that others were more deserving of help. Domestic violence workers reported that previous clients withdrew from services they had accessed before the fires to allow for others who were 'worse off than them' to access services. Such women have been described as 'secondary victims' of the disaster, effectively denying themselves services they need.

Specifically in relation to disasters, Thomas Merton, had a theory of relative deprivation, where people benchmark the most severe deprivation [and measure everything against that]. It's a big problem within disaster areas when people are not wanting to assert their own needs because they don't feel as affected as other people. It could mean seriously increased risk for those people who give up their claim on services they might have had before the disaster. They are secondary victims because agencies can't support them anymore. (Mental Health Practitioner, cited in Parkinson & Zara, 2012d, p. 150)

Despite this pressure not to be 'disloyal' and not to speak about men's violence for so many reasons — 'how heroic they had been', and 'how they were acting out of character', and 'it was just the alcohol' and 'they were depressed or feeling suicidal' — sometimes women had the courage to speak about their partner's violence and to ask for help. Even then, they were not heard. Some women who did disclose found that the person or professional they told was not ready or willing to hear them break the silence. The complicity of society in upholding a man's right to rule his household is strong in the everyday and such violence may even be seen as legitimate and excused (VicHealth, 2009). In the aftermath of a disaster, these community sentiments are stronger and the arguments for excusing family and community violence are persuasive.

### ***Inadequate specialist and community service response to domestic violence***

Specific domestic violence services offer the best response to women. Post-disaster, general mental health and counselling services were plentiful, but inadequate for domestic violence. Domestic violence workers stated that even highly skilled psychologists may not have domestic violence expertise. For example, Access to Allied Psychological Services (ATAPS) is a system that was established to enable easy and free or low cost access to psychologists for

fire-affected people. Although a valuable service, domestic violence workers were concerned that not all psychologists would be skilled in this specific issue. It is equally clear that few case managers had any knowledge or understanding of the dynamics of domestic violence (Parkinson et al., 2011). The women's accounts told of some case managers, counsellors and psychologists inadequately responding to signs and even direct requests for help. Specialist expertise is clearly irreplaceable.

Eight women spoke of seeking help with no positive outcome. With family, they were ignored, accused of over-reacting and blamed for not caring well enough for their men. Friends and work colleagues did not want to get involved and were sometimes fearful of violence or confrontation themselves, leaving the woman unsupported.

I told all my friends, I told them at work, I told them at [my other workplace], I think that was a stupid thing to do ... I don't think that helped. I probably shouldn't have said anything to them ... I think they thought that [he] might come down and belt the crap out of me [there], and [the boss is] only about this big. (Jill)

Sometimes women persisted in trying to get help from different people, different services. The women's accounts revealed health professionals failing to follow up on initial conversations, or willing to drop the issue if the man denied any violence, or keen to pass the woman on to some other service. One spoke of several efforts including contacting specific domestic violence workers:

They were really nice, they took all the details, and I told them stuff that I'd never told anyone, I really let it all out ... it came out in the conversation with [them that I was going to see a new bushfire case manager], and then it was like, 'Okay, you should tell this case manager about all this'... it was like passing the buck. That's what it felt like ... [and when I saw the case manager] I think it was a lot more than what she'd signed on for as a bushfire case manager. That was sort of the end of it. It felt a bit humiliating. (Virginia)

Others spoke of revealing the violence against them to professionals only to feel betrayed by their response – or lack thereof. Audrey said:

[The social worker/facilitator] didn't do anything about my situation ... [With the counsellor] I deliberately told her I was frightened three times during that session ... And [later in a joint session] she said to me in front of [my husband], 'Are you frightened physically?' and I said 'No' because I wasn't about to say yes in front of him because God knows what would have happened if I had said that. And she never followed up ... We played phone tennis and then I gave up. (Audrey)

And Hailey recounted:

When I was trying to get a lawyer or a solicitor, anyone, I was after anyone pretty much, amongst those phone calls I rang a domestic violence worker ... She got in contact with me the day before my second court hearing, and she said they couldn't get anyone to make it, to be there supporting me ... I had no help with that side of things. (Hailey)

Some women appealed to their partners' counsellor to intervene, with equally unsatisfactory outcomes.

He was getting very angry at a situation and then he would jump to another situation and get angry at that ... So they sent a psychologist to the home. [My partner] answered the front door and, 'No, no, there's nothing wrong, everything's wonderful' and the psychologist went away. (Lauren)

I rang [his counsellor] and said, 'Listen, you need to know it's not all rosy here, he needs help, he's angry, he's scaring me, this is not healthy for a baby, not for a [child] to be around, it's not right'. And then as soon as she started talking to him in the next session he comes home and goes, 'That was my final session, she says I'm doing really well'. (Kelly)

Ultimately, some women gave up. One woman, after finishing her interview for this study, said, 'I'll get out of here in a box', revealing her extreme level of fear and surrender.

Not only were some women seeking help with domestic violence not well served by the health professionals they saw, they spoke of feeling reprimanded by the person they confided in. This effectively stopped them seeking support from other people. Echoing the

broader disaster literature that services are reduced or stretched after disaster (Enarson, 2012; Fothergill, 2008; Houghton, 2009a; Phillips, Jenkins et al., 2010), they feared they were just complaining and wastefully accessing services that others (more deserving) could be using. This misconception was, surprisingly, reinforced by one woman's counsellor.

I said, 'You must get sick of people and their sob tales' and she said, 'You're pretty well off. I know ... couples that are so badly damaged there's no hope for them, and their kids are damaged and everything's a total mess. So you and James are comparatively easy.' (Christina)

The 'comparatively easy' situation was one where Christina's partner choked her, only dropping her when she was gasping for breath, and breaking her kneecap on the tiled floor.

A possible explanation for the denial of domestic violence by workers in the face of disaster recovery is two-fold. First there is, indeed, immense pressure on individuals to show understanding and loyalty to suffering men, and secondly, that workers who were very much part of the fire-affected communities — either long-term residents or those arriving immediately after the disaster and who worked tirelessly to help restore lives — were less likely than more distanced professionals to recognise increased domestic violence. As described previously, those with State-wide responsibilities and an overview of communities were in agreement — their sense was clear that domestic violence had increased. This underlines the reluctance of community members to speak out about people they know and care about. Their understanding of the depth of trauma experienced by (male) survivors of Black Saturday may have led to a reluctance to act in any way that would further add to daily burdens and pressures. A third explanation is that 'oppressive actions by individuals are legitimated by these wider social practices' (Pease, 2010b, p. 170).

Instead of practical help, for example, with psychological or psychiatric help *for men*, or help with legal support or housing, generalist counselling seemed to be offered as the panacea for all. Christina's account, in particular, illustrates how the fact of domestic violence (even with the evidence of broken bones) was sublimated beneath concern for, ostensibly, the relationship and more poignantly, concern for the man. In Chapter 5, we read in Christina's own words, 'He stood up, put his hand on my neck, can't remember which side, and he blocked my airways ... I landed on my knee on the slate breaking my knee cap in two'. In the

surrounding context for this statement, Christina had described a relationship where her husband criticised her, barked orders at her, devalued her work, and found her 'unworthy' to attend an important funeral. When she sought help by way of positive intervention from his friend (asking him to speak to her husband about his behaviour), the friend called her a 'stupid bitch'.

In the course of seeking critical feedback, a private communication with a trauma counsellor revealed the approach taken by a team of three to counselling with Christina and her husband. It is paraphrased here for confidentiality purposes. The trauma counsellor wrote that it became clear that Christina's relationship with her husband one of equality and respect. In her email, she referred to the 'allegation of domestic violence'. In essence, the trauma counsellor described the situation as one where in the midst of an argument, in frustration, Christina had thrown a water jug on to the floor and her husband, fearing the valuable paintings in the house were under threat, moved towards her to restrain her and 'she ended up with a broken arm'. In her correspondence, the counsellor understood that others may think it strange that she and her colleagues responded to the allegation of domestic violence in the way they did, but the man was horrified that Christina had a broken bone and he blamed himself. The counsellor wrote that the context was one where people were acting out of character and there was community gossip about his actions. She continued that, in going back over the events that led to Christina's broken bone, both Christina and her husband were able to recall that he had slipped on the water and slid into her, resulting in the injury (Personal Communication, 2011d).

Christina did not tell it this way. Her account to us of the violent incident – even after the counselling – was very different to the narrative described by the counsellors and the man. She told us she did not persist in asking them to believe her version of events:

I was a bit over it. They said, 'Well, do you want to discuss whether he blocked your airways because he told me that he pushed you because you were going to smash [dishes]'. Well of course I admitted that I did that, It would have been very satisfying to smash the dishes and I said, 'No just leave it, if that's what he thinks then that's what he thinks'.

In our patriarchal society, men count for more and this plays out, perhaps unconsciously, by those seeking only to help. As Maria Margaroni asks:

[H]ow can psychoanalytic structures offer an elucidation of or emancipation from contemporary distributions of power if they are themselves immersed in the patriarchal, racist, or homophobic ideologies that sustain and reproduce such distributions? (Margaroni, 2007, p. 793)

The reproduction of patriarchy and privilege relies on women playing their part. Key sacrifice theorist, Nancy Jay, considers how sacrifice relates to social reproduction, defining sacrifice as blood sacrifice and linking it to institutional violence (Goode, 2009; Jay, 1988; Raab, 1997). Goode writes, 'An approach like Jay's stands at the confluence of these two streams – a feminist critique of patriarchy that is also an anthropological account of sacrifice as an institutional form of violence' (Goode, 2009, p. 400).

In Christina's case, whose trauma were the counsellors concerned about? Both partners had experienced an ongoing period of trauma from the bushfires threat, but when Christina became angry, the result was that he blocked her air pipe until she desperately lunged for air and broke her kneecap. The extent of her anger, in her own words, was, 'I banged the kettle down and picked up the plastic bowl in which I customarily wash dishes and threatened to smash it on the slate'. It wasn't safe for her to show her anger, no matter how victimless, yet the damaging results of his violent anger – choking his wife and causing her broken kneecap – were rationalised. The trauma counsellor warned that 'people are coping as best they can' and men who had seen dead bodies were just starting to come in to counselling and she hoped 'nothing would inhibit this continuing', concluding, 'In summary what I am trying to say is that by focusing solely on domestic violence without the context of trauma, it is a danger that you [the author of this thesis] will do more harm than good for an already traumatised community'.

Indeed, Fothergill (2008) writes that men's experience of disaster may be perceived by themselves and others as reason enough for 'losing' control, and further, that violent men often use situational factors to excuse their violence – a theme illustrated by Kelly, one of the women in the sample:



Whereas he would hold it back if we were in front of people normally, he really embraced the whole, 'I can be an absolute prick to everybody and I can get away with it because I can say I've been through the fires and I'm traumatised' ... You don't want to upset [him] because it just gets big ... At what point do you go, 'I'm sorry but your behaviour is bad and I'm pointing it out to you', instead of going, 'Let's not say anything cos he'll get upset'. (Kelly)

Other women, too, were dismayed at the way the community excused this behaviour. Lauren remembered, 'The comment came up regarding breakups and fights where police were called. It was accepted that it was just because of the fires. I felt that this was not OK, to just accept it'. Women and children living with a violent man needed more than counselling. As Virginia, one of the women interviewed, said, 'It's all right to talk about it, but sometimes they've got to actually follow through'.

#### ***Inadequate emergency response to domestic violence***

In regard to police and legal responses to post-disaster violence, there is a question of whether domestic violence was informally relegated to a low priority as demand on policing increased following the disaster. A second question was whether police had a greater tendency to excuse the men's behaviour because they knew them personally and knew the stresses faced by Black Saturday survivors. After a particularly bad incident, Hailey told police, 'I definitely need [an Intervention Order] after today. [The police officer] said, "Are you sure about that? It's going to really affect him"'. Some case managers, too, lamented the lack of action by police and the inference that women put aside their own safety for the good of the family.

So much has been justified as a result of the fires ... So much has been fobbed off. So many women have gone to police and been told by police, 'Things will settle down again'. (Case manager, cited in Parkinson & Zara, 2012d, p. 140)

Yet, other community members and professionals welcomed this police approach as sensitive and sensible, fearing the effect of a police report or criminal charges on the health and wellbeing of already scarred and suffering men. Liv explains in detail from her perspective as a community worker as well as a woman in the community why she supported this approach:

[Police not charging] has been really good. I mean it probably isn't good for some people and in really highly physical violent relationships it wouldn't be good. But it was good for the community because people were behaving and doing things that they wouldn't normally do, out of not knowing how to cope, like drink driving... Local coppers would come up and say, 'Settle down' and they'd talk to them and they'd try to sort it out and refer them to different services but they wouldn't write a report on it which was really great. I thought it was really great because ... they were doing a lot of community building at the same time ... They're great blokes and they're very supportive like that – because it was just creating secondary trauma again. They know all the locals really well and they know it's not their normal personality. They're not going to charge them for something because they know it is going to exacerbate their condition ... Knowing it could send this guy over the edge and then commit suicide, or this family environment is going to be heaps worse off because you know he's going to go to court and be fined or put in jail. As a community we all work with these families but statistically it [domestic violence] doesn't show. (Liv)

This sentiment is widely shared and motivation for the 'softly, softly' approach is apparently well-intentioned. Yet fundamentally, in domestic violence situations, it is prioritising what is best for violent men over the rights of women and children to live free from violence. This fundamental right was enshrined by the United National High Commissioner for Human Rights in the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (1993) and reiterated by the Council of Australian Governments in its *National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children* (Council of Australian Governments, 2011a). Liv's statement is further evidence, too, that domestic violence incident reports were not always made by police, despite their attendance. Whether police recorded the incident was not as pertinent to the women as whether they received an effective and constructive police response. The Victoria Police Code of Practice for the Investigation of Family Violence since 2004 has provided a sound basis for effective response to men's violence against women (Victoria Police, 2004, 2010). Sadly, six women interviewed spoke of unsatisfactory local police responses where the interests and wellbeing of the men was privileged over their own right to safety. Lauren said:

[My sister] said a neighbour or someone must have called the police. When they arrived, the police were told that everything was fine [so nothing happened]. This was a case of severe and ongoing domestic violence. (Lauren)

Five other women told of inadequate police responses to their calls for help in regard to the violence against them. Virginia said police attended two hours after she called triple 0, and a day or two later contacted *him* about his alcohol problem rather than the violence against her. She has never received a follow up call from police or from Domestic violence services referred by police. She described what happened:

I think it must have been just before Christmas I called the cops at one point. I called triple 0 and it took them two hours to get here. I mean I was scared, I wouldn't have called them otherwise ... I went to the police and then he didn't even know that they'd come because he was in bed, it was blown over by then. And they told me they were going to ring in the next few days or something to see how I was. I never heard back from them at all ... But then [my husband called me and] he said to me, 'Oh, the police called me and asked me did I want counselling for my alcohol problem' — cos he had no idea that they'd come — and I said, 'Okay, what did you say?' and he said, 'I said how did you get my number and I haven't got an alcohol problem'. But I thought that was a bit — I mean they knew he'd gone to bed ... I was scared stiff. (Virginia)

Ruby said the police laughed at her when she showed them a death threat in a text from her ex-husband. She said:

After I had the death threat, because then I was living in this house that I didn't know and I had things happening to the house, people knocking on the door, I was too scared to open the door, I didn't know if someone was going to be there about to blow me away.

*[What was the police response with the intimidation?]*

He laughed at me. (Ruby)

When Jill called the police after her partner assaulted her, injuring her sternum and four ribs, she related what happened:

The police made him go, I stayed in the bungalow. It wasn't good. And the dogs were locked up and the police gave me, I think, till Tuesday to get out .. And you knew that this is it, there's no going back here, this is it, we're finished. And then of course you've got the time to work out whether you're going to get him charged.

*[And the police were helpful?]*

No, no they weren't helpful at all actually ... No, they were very chauvinistic about it all ... They just weren't helpful. It was like, 'We don't really want to know and we've known [him] all his life... He's a good bloke.

*[Was there a report?]*

No, I don't think so, and that's what ... my case manager said, she said, 'When there's been a report of domestic violence they've got to do something about it' ...

No, they didn't do whatever they were meant to do. (Jill)

Miranda described what happened when she called for police assistance:

I call the police. He goes back [inside] and he locks the door. I'm afraid that he's going to hang himself, I know it's going to take the police 10 minutes to get there and I know that he can die in three ...So I'm banging on the door, I'm screaming out for whoever there is, somebody to come with a bar and help me get this fucking door open because my husband is going to kill himself. The police arrive. [My husband is] aggressive, he's hostile, swearing, he's out of control, he's drunk out of his mind, he's so off beam. He says he's not going to do anything while I'm at the scene, so I go a little further away and let the police do what they need to do. They get him into the car, they section him under the Mental Health Act and they take him... While he is in police custody, he texts me that I will die from his hands.

(Miranda)

While police came quickly to Miranda's ex-husband's suicide attempt and put him in custody, they did not prevent him from harassing her throughout the night with death threats while he was in police custody.

Hailey's account was one of prolonged neglect by police, and her long narrative reveals ongoing indifference. As a young woman with a toddler and baby, her experience covered several incidents of severe physical domestic violence. She was advised by a friend who was

a police officer that police may not have attended when she called because they were 'busy on important fire-related issues'. When they did attend one particularly bad physical assault, they failed to be present to give evidence at the subsequent court hearing for his breach of an Intervention Order. Hailey said that a week and a half after the fires:

I rang the police, they came, he admitted it, they arrested him, and the police said to me, 'He'll be going to court again because he just breached the intervention order. We'll speak to you tomorrow', which never happened. And he ended up going to court and the police didn't even show up there at all.

*[So the police didn't testify?]*

No... I should have put a complaint to the police for not going to court ... if they had done their job properly I would not be in this mess now ... They never told me [why]. But speaking to my [police officer] friend ... she said they were very busy, they were all dealing with the fires ... Apparently I'm not that important.

*[You said you contacted the police four times for breaches, what kind of conversation did they have with you about it?]*

One of the police officers ... suggested to move to Rosebud, he said, 'A lot of single parents move to Rosebud, you should go down there'. My mum was there and heard all that.

*[So where are you at now with your ex?]*

I have to see him every week. The court basically downplayed a lot of the violence and he actually has to come to my home to get the kids now, and I said all along I want a public place and I can't do anything about it. I've spoken to the police about it and they said, 'Sorry love you can't do anything about it' ... Legal aid could not represent me because my ex had used legal aid in the past ... It's funny because the first time I reported the domestic violence to the police, the police attended and it was 2am, they would have to have been called from their homes. They were badgering me, saying most women who go through something like this just turn around tomorrow and withdraw, and they didn't want to do anything. These were two male police officers. They were not very helpful. They were pretty negative about it ... The police said, 'We can't do much about it, we can't get him out of the house', even though he was drunk, and he was violent. They left him in the house

and I left, I was safe at my mum and dad's. The next day he rang me and said, 'I'm going to trash the house'. I rang triple 0 and I said what happened, and they said there are no police officers to attend. Next day I went to the doctor, to the police station, made my statement and then went home and the house was destroyed. I spoke to the main officer that was dealing with it and he said, 'It's his house as well, we can't do much about it'. (Hailey)

In another interview, Kylie told of her struggle with her ex-husband's increasing violence against her. She described her ex-husband as controlling and violent before the fires and more so afterwards. He had thrown a hot iron at her head and slashed the car seats and threatened to kill her and the children:

He would hide my car keys, he would tape me to see what time I got home, wanted things done his way. Many times there'd be abuse ... It was a very split personality. Very charming and nice to other people, and everyone loved him. At home he was nasty to the kids, nasty about the house. If it wasn't clean enough he would throw things around. He hurt me physically many times ... One day at the end, he kicked me, threw my daughter across the room. (Kylie)

He had been reported to police by Kylie's daughter. Kylie said that she went to police 12 months before separating and was told she had to book in and could not report. Even after separating, when he broke into her house, police said they could not do anything.

[Another time] I asked police for an Intervention Order with my mum and dad both there. I spoke to one of the police officers there and he said, 'Just put a screwdriver under your door'. I said, 'But he's threatening my brother-in-law, he's threatening [my colleagues], he's threatening me ...' I said, 'Can't I get an Intervention Order?' and he said, 'No, just put a screwdriver under your door' ... I was told by the sergeant, 'You are the one that married him'. It was comments like that made me think I was getting nowhere. (Kylie)

The most telling incident was also after they had separated.

I tried hitting but I couldn't match his strength. So I bit him, very hard .... He ran down to the police ... and said, 'Look what she's done, she's bitten me'. I rang at the

same time [because I had the three kids inside] and I said, 'He's just assaulted me on the face and all over my body' ... They said, 'Because he's the first one in the police station we're going to take his story', and they put an intervention out on *me* and arrested *me* ... After they arrested me, two days later, I showed them my bruises and said, 'Do you think you've got the right person?' ... Because the Intervention Order was taken out on me, I've been arrested 20 times ... if I drove out my driveway I was breaching it. Everywhere I was, he was there. They recorded breaches every time. I have five breaches. He drives five different cars. The Magistrate understood. She said, 'How are you meant to know what car he's driving?' The second last breach was when I walked into the supermarket and didn't see him and was talking to a friend ... He had the upper hand because the police took out the Intervention Order. Being arrested all these times, I looked like a criminal. (Kylie)

Male privilege and women's sacrifice are easily understood in the treatment by the legal system of two of the women in the sample as described below. In 2009, the then Attorney-General Robert McLelland wrote:

Access to justice is central to the rule of law and integral to the enjoyment of basic human rights. It is an essential precondition to social inclusion and a critical element of a well-functioning democracy ... The critical test is whether our justice system is fair, simple, affordable and accessible. (Access to Justice Taskforce, 2009, p. ix)

It was none of these things for several of the women in this sample. Indeed, the Australian Law Reform Commission noted the family law system as lacking these elements when addressing family violence matters (Australian Law Reform Commission, 2010) and The National Council to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children (2009) found women were prevented from equal access to justice. The Women's Legal Service Victoria observed a 'significant growth in the number of women who are unrepresented in family law proceedings in 2013, due to guideline changes announced by Victorian Legal Aid', noting also that private lawyers' fees for family law are commonly from \$300 to \$600 per hour with barristers charging around \$4,000 per day (Women's Legal Service Victoria, 2013, pp. 19-20). They conclude that pursuing a legal remedy is prohibitive to single mothers not qualifying for legal aid (Women's Legal Service Victoria, 2013).

Two of the women interviewed, Ruby and Hailey, faced barriers that resulted in damaging restrictions to their lives and their children's. Ruby wanted to move back with the children to her extended family in NSW. However, the court had restricted her to living within 30km of their small town so that her ex-husband could have access to the children. He lived in the city and moved freely between his flat near the beach in the city to the small isolated town where Ruby and the children lived. Ruby's employment options and her eldest child's tertiary education options were both limited by this decision by the court. Hailey faced the same 30 km restriction. The victim of extreme violence from her husband, without a job because her workplace had burnt down, and without a place to live after her landlord sold the home she rented with her small children at a high post-fire price, Hailey sought to move with her children. The court prevented her from doing so, despite the fact that she had organised employment and accommodation close to extended family. She had offered to drive her children the 200km round trip every second weekend to her ex-husband but was still refused. Neither woman had broken any law, yet, if they wanted to keep their children, were effectively imprisoned within 30 kilometres of small fire-affected and low employment towns, easily observed and controlled, while the violent men moved freely.

In a 2010 High Court Challenge, *MRR v GR* [2010] CHA 4 (SL) (High Court of Australia, 2010), a similar restriction 'in the best interests of the child' was removed and a Sydney woman was allowed leave Mt Isa to return to Sydney with her daughter. However, neither Hailey nor Ruby had access to Legal Aid to mount such a challenge and they had been 'conflicted out' of receiving Legal Aid. Conflicts can result in cases where Court staff and police may know the perpetrator or the victim, or where a legal service has had contact with one of the parties in dispute and therefore cannot provide service to the other party. This especially affects rural people, and women face additional disadvantage as male perpetrators of violence are likely to require legal representation immediately following an incident while women victims may not seek it out until some time later. There is a structural impediment to women, not only in access to the law, but in outcomes (Abrahams, 1986).

While women have primary responsibility for childcare and while women are so clearly economically disadvantaged (see Chapter 2), such legal decisions are gendered and unfair and fail to meet the former Attorney-General's standard to ensure basic human rights. The law was not accessible for either of these women and their human rights were



compromised. Women are reluctant to report violence and having done so, deserve a response that reinforces their right to live free from violence. There is a sound and evidence-based reason why domestic violence is never acceptable — including after a disaster. VicHealth and others provide a compelling argument, pointing to the evidence that intimate partner physical violence is an unequal violence, where women sustain more injuries than men, suffer more severe forms of violence, and are more likely to fear for their lives and more likely to be fatally injured (VicHealth, 2011). The homicide statistics in Australia tragically bear this out, revealing that almost one woman a week is murdered by her partner (Broderick 2011).

## **Conclusion**

Black Saturday exposed the default position of Australians to protect men's interests at the expense of women – indeed the privileging of masculinity ensures this, in prosecutorial decision-making as well as in broader social environment (Connell, 2005; Greer, 1971; Lievore, 2005; Maher, Segrave, Pickering, & McCulloch, 2005; Pease, 2010b; Spender, 1982; Summers, 1994, 2003).

The privileging of men after Black Saturday played out at a number of levels. Women were silenced long before getting to the point of seeking domestic violence services due to the tendency of professionals, reported by the women, to put the violence down to Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and sideline the issue of the men's violence. In weighing up *whose* needs were more important, some domestic violence professionals and trauma psychologists even privileged 'fragile' men above the needs of women. From the outset, there was neglect by authorities to collect domestic violence data or act on anecdotal reports of violence, thereby condoning violent masculinity. The omission to acknowledge domestic violence – for example, in public meetings, in documents, in disaster recovery literature – was ubiquitous. In one community, there was explicit resistance to a Community House support group established after the fires for women experiencing violence from their partners. Across the shires, police advised women to go home rather than make a complaint against violent men. Trauma counsellors – as inured as the rest of society to male privilege – re-wrote one woman's narrative of abuse to absolve the man of responsibility, and most curious of all, domestic violence workers suggested this violence post-disaster was not 'real'

domestic violence. Black Saturday disturbed any complacency about women's and children's rights. When women's safety at home was pitted against empathy for vulnerable and suffering men, men came first. As researchers drawing attention to the issue of increased violence against women after Black Saturday, advocacy attempts were quickly and regularly punctuated by the question, 'What about the men?', instantly diverting attention from men's violence to men's suffering. Disturbingly, some trained professionals working in the police force and in the domestic violence sector joined these ranks. Institutional protection was revealed to be without basis in practice in these circumstances – no more than a thin veneer of protection (Jenkins & Phillips, 2008a).

The data presented here reveals that when women did seek help for the violence against them after Black Saturday, the complicity of society – heightened after disaster – often prevented action to protect and support them. They were expected, and were sometimes explicitly asked, to suffer in silence for the greater good. Patriarchy, at heart, means that women don't count as much as men. Post-disaster conditions of societal upheaval and chaos demanded – and achieved – a swift and cohesive response by all to affirm patriarchy and restore the status quo.

## CHAPTER 7

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### **7: Conclusion and future actions**

Black Saturday inspired much research, including numerous research projects undertaken by the Bushfire Co-operative Research Centre (CRC) and over 50 commissioned pieces of research by the Bushfires Royal Commission (Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission, 2010a). A current collaborative research program instigated by the Australian Emergency Management Institute and the Fire Services Commission in Victoria focuses on future changes (to 2021) and their associated implications for the emergency management sector.<sup>24</sup> While some sociological aspects of disaster are considered amongst this wealth of disaster research, little is about gender and even less considers increased violence. However, the gendered disaster research that does exist has attracted the interest of emergency managers in Victoria. This research with 30 women in the shires of Mitchell and Murrindindi, for example, has specifically drawn attention to the issue of increased violence against women in the aftermath of disaster in Australia and prompted changed practices within police training and Department of Human Services training and data collection.

Significantly, the research and associated conferences contributed to the establishment in 2014 of a Gender and Disaster Taskforce in Victoria, chaired by the Fire Services Commission (now Emergency Management Commission Victoria) (Aubrey, 2014) and co-chaired by the Executive Officer, Women's Health Goulburn North East. The Taskforce has the potential to offer a platform for an integrated gendered approach to emergency management in Victoria, and a model for other states and territories.

As the first research in Australia to foreground the voices of women and gather data directly from them about violence after a disaster, it also contributes to the sparse studies on increased violence in disaster contexts in developed countries. It is the first step in an

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<sup>24</sup> See, for example, <http://www.firecommissioner.vic.gov.au/our-work/research/2021-2/>

unfolding body of work that other researchers may pursue and that policy makers may use to inform post-disaster planning, recovery and reconstruction.

The women's words expose the denial of increased violence against women after disaster and invite researchers and professionals to take up the significant challenges in revealing a more complete picture of disaster and its aftermath. Such research is pertinent to diverse sectors, and particularly to disaster and emergency management (including police), gender theorists and educators (encompassing both feminism and theories of masculinity), health professionals, and those who work in the prevention of violence against women field.

The claim of this research is that there are indications that the findings are generalisable to the extent that many women will experience increased domestic violence from male partners after disaster. Estimating the prevalence of such an increase would rely on quantitative methods. However, a quantitative survey would be subject to similar impediments to those experienced by the Australian Bureau of Statistics in gathering data on intimate partner sexual assault, and as identified by researchers such as Denise Lievore (2003). A careful methodology, informed by domestic violence research and professionals would be essential to understand the barriers preventing women's accurate responses in paper-based questionnaires (see also Picardo et al., 2010). A methodology including anonymous telephone or internet responses, carefully worded questions, and questions about past and present partners could provide both accuracy and the security women need to provide an account of their experiences of domestic violence. A survey attentive to these barriers would enable an estimate of the prevalence of domestic violence post-disaster. Assessment of any increase would then rely on comparable baseline measures pre-existing the disaster.

A robust evidence base of the prevalence of increased violence against women after disaster would assist in improving policy and practice response to domestic violence. However, in its absence, the observations of increased violence against women (as detailed in this thesis) demand implementation of prevention and early action measures. In the words of Aisha Bain (a women's protection adviser for the International Rescue Committee), 'stop looking for "proof" and put survivors first' (Bain, 2014). She writes:

International research conducted in countries hit by crises has provided ample proof that gender-based violence (GBV) occurs in each and every emergency ... We at the International Rescue Committee (IRC) have found that women and girls do not come forward to disclose the violence they have experienced until specialised services are in place, and only then if they are trusted to be safe and confidential. (Bain, 2014, para 3)

Even then, the broader culture must be prepared to accept that men who may be valued in the community may also be perpetrators of domestic violence. This research reveals the need for clear-eyed recognition of increased violence against women in the aftermath of disaster and for a disaster response that protects women and offers options, while proactively addressing the increased support needs of men. The intention is that these research findings will initiate new policy and practice, informing practitioners, policy makers and funders, leading to improved service delivery and more inclusive post-disaster planning. One simple outcome could be that case managers, social workers and psychologists routinely ask women if they feel safe at home, name domestic violence and refer to specialist domestic violence services. In theoretical terms, this research begins to address the gap in considering domestic violence in the post-disaster period in Australia, thereby contributing to a gendered account of the dynamics of disaster.

## **Key findings**

Four key findings emerge from this research and each is summarised below:

1. Violence against women increased for the 17 women who unequivocally linked their experiences of new or intensified male violence to the Black Saturday bushfires. As noted in the section on the significance of this research, it is probable that similar findings would emerge if this study was to be replicated after a future disaster like Black Saturday. There are indications that many women will experience increased domestic violence by their male partners in the aftermath of disasters in Australia, and probably in other similar countries. This claim of generalisability is supported by its resonance with what is known about domestic violence and disasters world-wide including in other developed countries. Principally, we know that disasters and their aftermath damage relationships as well as property and infrastructure, increasing

pressure and stress on individuals and couples. Increased domestic violence is indeed the ‘hidden disaster’ that accompanies natural disaster.

2. Inadequate official data: There was a culture of denial about increased domestic violence after Black Saturday, evidenced by the lack of any reliable system for recording incidents adequately – an omission that remained obstinately in place through the recovery and reconstruction period. Professionals in the domestic violence sector and the psycho-social and emergency recovery sectors were choosing *not* to record violence against women in deference to men. This, coupled with under-reporting, creates a major data gap.
3. Entrenched gender roles: The opportunity that disaster presents to forge change resulted in regressive change in fire-affected areas after Black Saturday as gender stereotypes became more rigid. The women’s narratives told of how they lost the infrastructure and the right they had before to have paid employment. This affected women more than men. The prescribed gender roles became more entrenched as men were expected to protect and provide, and women to nurture husbands and children first and foremost. Patriarchy reasserted the social order visibly as uniformed men and male community leaders overwhelmingly assumed the high level leadership roles in recovery and reconstruction. Media coverage of male heroes emphasised the hegemonic male role.
4. Women’s sacrifice: Women were conscripted to sacrifice their right to live free from violence for the benefit of the men, or the children, or the greater good of the community. The corollary is that male privilege was strengthened.

### **Recommendations for future action**

This research argues for a systematic approach to disaster response, recovery and reconstruction that recognises the increased risk of women being exposed to domestic violence in disaster contexts and includes plans and strategies to address such risk before and after disaster, including planning for evacuation which considers women in existing domestic violence situations. Ideally, National Disaster Guidelines would include domestic violence as an issue that must be anticipated and responded to effectively. The following recommendations are grouped according to the four key findings:

### **1: Prioritise domestic violence**

It is recommended that management of emergency planning, recovery and reconstruction:

- 1a. Prioritise domestic violence along with other needs considered pressing and urgent, and allocate responsibility to one body with over-arching responsibility, such as the equivalent of the Parliamentary Secretary for Bushfire Reconstruction, the Victorian Bushfire Case Management System or the Victorian Bushfire Reconstruction and Recovery Authority.
- 1b. Involve specialist domestic violence services in disaster response and recovery planning bodies and specify this requirement in Disaster Resilience Guidelines and with key emergency management organisations in each state.
- 1c. Establish a new position of Domestic Violence Disaster Liaison Officer with police forces with expertise in the dynamics of disaster and domestic violence and with a designated role in disaster recovery.
- 1d. Establish a National Preferred Provider Register to list disaster trauma practitioners who have a sound understanding of domestic violence
- 1e. In planning, in operations and in disaster literature disseminated to affected communities, name it: say the word 'violent' and not 'stressed' and 'angry', and give options for referral and support.
- 1f. Include an agenda item on domestic violence in regular meetings of post-disaster community recovery committees and oversight bodies.

As women are reluctant to report their husbands or partners and this is exacerbated post-disaster, the rates of reported domestic violence incidents are unlikely to increase until service providers demonstrate a willingness to hear about such violence, and have the skills and training to ask the right questions. It is further recommended that management of emergency planning, recovery and reconstruction:

- 1g. Educate fire-affected communities through material included in post-disaster literature for affected communities and through community meetings. For example, local domestic violence workers could attend and speak at community

information/recovery meetings regularly, and a postcard could be uniformly tailored for each disaster-affected community, stating, 'Disaster is no excuse for domestic violence' with referral information.

1h. Educate high level emergency management leaders so they understand there will be no significant increase in reported domestic violence until we – as individuals, communities, professionals and emergency leaders – are willing to hear from women about the violence against them. This would be in the context of broader education on the dynamics of domestic violence post-disaster.

## **2: Inadequate data**

All health planning demands a solid evidence-base for funds to be committed. Unless the increase in domestic violence following disaster is quantified with clear and consistent recording and common/agreed language, data will remain unconvincing to policy makers and funding bodies, and responses to domestic violence will remain inadequate. It is recommended that the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) and management of emergency planning, recovery and reconstruction:

2a. Include in National Disaster Guidelines that after disasters, one authority is to have responsibility for central monitoring and reporting on levels of violence against women after disaster. Within this role, ensure all human services personnel responding to disaster, e.g., case managers, health and community services and police:

(i) have undertaken a 'Domestic Violence and Natural Disaster Training'<sup>25</sup> (or similar) module based on the Common Risk Assessment Framework training to identify and respond effectively to domestic violence

(ii) record domestic violence statistics accurately, e.g. on data collection forms that allow domestic violence to be noted in addition to other presenting issues.

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<sup>25</sup> Such as that developed by Women's Health Goulburn North East.



2b. Review police practice, such as the Victoria Police Code of Practice for the Investigation of Domestic Violence, to ensure accurate recording of domestic violence after disasters.

### **3: Entrenched gender roles**

The strong hold of the “male-breadwinner/female-carer” model of household and working life shapes the allocation of unpaid domestic work and care ...a profound shift in the ways in which paid work and care are organized, and a cultural transformation of gender norms, appear essential to the achievement of ... greater gender equality. (Pocock et al., 2013, p. 608)

Major cultural changes have been achieved, for example, in smoking, littering and road safety, and the past 50 years have seen a cultural revolution in regard to women’s role and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) rights. It *is* possible to effect change in how we structure society to further benefit both men and women. The following actions could begin such change:

- 3a. Form a Taskforce to work with the Emergency Services Commissioner (or equivalent), and across the key emergency services in each state to identify and address gendered vulnerability.
- 3b. Include women equally in all levels of disaster planning, recovery and reconstruction planning.
- 3c. In disaster training and in best-practice social change campaigns, raise awareness that the way men and women act and interact reflects social conditioning and pressure to conform, often with harmful results, and leave women at a disadvantage both during and after disaster. Men, too, suffer through inability to meet gendered expectations of protecting and providing, often impossible in disasters.
- 3d. In disaster planning, address the likelihood that women may be alone or with children when trying to protect properties or escape. Prioritise all adults leaving with children as vulnerable.

3e. Avoid gender stereotypes, employ local men and women in paid recovery and reconstruction efforts and case management roles, and offer a gradual and supported re-entry to the workforce.

3f. Investigate ways of supporting men in the aftermath of a disaster, in the knowledge that they are often reluctant to seek formal counselling. For example:

(i) Educate men in peer support, allowing men to take the lead in helping other men through long-term recovery; promote these through social marketing using effective anti-violence campaign models.

(ii) Ensure emergency organisations have immediate and ongoing debriefing available which minimises stigma and builds on peer relationships.

#### **4: Women's sacrifice**

In the period after disaster, when women succumb to pressure to accept reduced rights (Hoffman, 1998), thereby sacrificing their own needs, they unintentionally perpetuate the gender order (Noble & Pease, 2011). Reflecting on former Prime Minister Julia Gillard's famous misogyny speech, Goldsworthy writes, 'There comes a point at which female stoicism becomes complicity', reiterating Gillard's statement that it is sometimes necessary to 'not get on with it' (Goldsworthy, 2013, p. 19). Women do not have equal outcomes in this country and what is needed now is 'social solidarity and collective contestation of the gender hierarchy' (Jurik & Siemsen, 2009, p. 75). The expectation that women sacrifice their identity and their safety to bolster social cohesion belongs in the past, as does male privilege. Feminists are good at subversion and effecting change (Coles, 2009). It is recommended that:

4a. Relevant state disaster authorities review post disaster reconstruction grants and employment contracts with a gender lens to ensure fair distribution of funds and paid work opportunities.

4b. Relevant state disaster authorities prioritise re-establishment of childcare and school education infrastructure, together with school buses.

4c. Federal and State governments institute policies to effect social change where men have equal responsibility for parenting, e.g. paid paternity leave to encourage full-time early fathering.

4d. State governments educate both boys and girls on the social construction of gender through revised curricula.

The broad *outcome* sought is a re-examination of what it means to be a man or a woman in our society during and after disaster, and the attitudes and practices that support gender inequality. The *change* sought is to remove the dichotomy that dictates behaviours according to sex. The expectation that men be relentlessly strong and cope is not feasible. Neither is the expectation that women sacrifice for the greater good, which demonstrably leads to women's economic disadvantage and may lead to emotional and physical harm. Such narrowly defined roles based on sex are damaging to both women and men.

### **Recommendations for future research**

As the international literature is now showing, gender permeates every aspect of disaster experience. Gender focused research is a pre-requisite to moving beyond the one-world view that has too often characterised disaster research. Research into gender and emergency management would inform policy on both constraints and opportunities to effect culture change towards equal participation by men and women. As Birkmann et al. (2010, p. n.p.) write, 'it seems to be important to ask how learning takes place in organizational structures as well as within single organizations and how opportunities for learning under time pressure – particularly in the post-disaster phase – can be created'. Further research with women, men and with couples would contribute to a knowledge base on the dynamics of male violence against women after disasters. Masculinity theorists urge study of how privilege is maintained and reproduced. Studies with men who feel they failed the standard of hegemonic masculinity in the great test of disaster, and studies with women on barriers to their equal economic participation and equal presence within emergency management would further inform this important area of study. Theories of sacrifice, too, offer insight into the dynamics of the post-disaster period and deserve greater exploration and application to other issues of discrimination against women. Studies such as these in

different parts of Australia and involving different demographics would add a further dimension.

## **Conclusion**

The chaos after disasters offers days or weeks to claw back patriarchal territory lost to women's rights. Decades of mythology about the 'protected' sex, blended with ubiquitous rewriting of disaster history to minimise women's competence and heroism – and exaggerate men's – provide fertile ground for regressive change in the gender order. The post-disaster period is characterised by men in uniforms on the ground – working, saving, rescuing and restoring (Alway & Smith, 1998; Scanlon, 1998). Together with increased violence by men, mandatory care-loads for women, powerful imagery about the role of wives and mothers, and the suffering of good men, the result is a potent mix for strengthening male hegemony.

Indeed, the aftermath of Black Saturday presents Australians with the opportunity to see how deeply embedded misogyny is and how fragile our attempts to criminalise domestic violence and hold violent men accountable for their actions. When the stakes are high, it is men's interest that will be protected, and our commitment to the notion that women and children always have the right to live free from violence is revealed as conditional.

The urgency of disaster is claimed as reason to overlook violence against women and gender inequity, with bigger things at stake. The complexity of trauma and suffering post-disaster challenges the commitment of individuals, communities and emergency management to stop domestic violence. 'Not violent, not silent'<sup>26</sup> appears not to apply in this context. While resilience in the face of adversity is the mantra of disaster recovery, women complaining of domestic violence contravene the community's effort to reconstitute itself. In believing Australia's rhetoric of saying no to domestic violence and speaking out, those women were not playing their assigned part in the sacrificial economy.

Violence against women is only possible because our inequitable society privileges masculinity. Optimistically, Kristeva and Weir both claim the possibility of engaging with 'the social order' to change it (Kristeva, 1981; Weir, 1995, p. 152). Such change relies on

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<sup>26</sup> Slogan of the Australia-wide White Ribbon Campaign.

eliminating men's violence and institutional dominance, equally valuing 'women's work', removing hierarchy from heterosexual relationships, and interpreting gender differently to allow for new ways of living (Pease, 2010b, p. 106). Gender roles and relations are constantly being shaped and negotiated, and Connell (2005) reminds us of our agency in determining future iterations of the gender game:

The vast changes in gender relations around the globe produce ferociously complex changes in the conditions of practice with which men as well as women have to grapple. No one is an innocent bystander in this arena of change. We are all engaged in constructing a world of gender relations ... men no more than women are chained to the gender patterns they have inherited, men, too can make political choices for a new world of gender relations. (Connell, 2005, p. 86)

Post-disaster change does not have to be regressive, reinstating and reinforcing the traditional inequitable structure – a structure that has high costs for men and women, girls and boys. Disaster can be functional as well as dysfunctional, allowing positive evolution of social systems, and can offer a change for the better (Birkmann et al., 2010, Dasgupta et al., 2010; Quarantelli, 1994). As conservative American economist Milton Friedman (2002, p. xiv) writes: 'Only a crisis – actual or perceived – produces real change. When that crisis occurs, the actions that are taken depend on the ideas that are lying around'. The aftermath of catastrophes throws open the chance to radically reshape gender roles, and women (and men) must be ready to fight for gender equality in these transient windows of opportunity. An emergency management response to disaster that has embedded gender equity at all levels, together with education of communities on the contribution of strict gender roles to suffering in disaster's aftermath, could exemplify and hasten a more equal society where men's violence against women is rare.

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## Appendix 1: Depiction of heroes after Black Saturday

### Police 'heroes' tell of Marysville evacuation

The Age 17/2/2009

<http://www.theage.com.au/national/police-heroes-tell-of-marysville-evacuation-20090217-89ue.html>

(Accessed 2/3/2014)



### Black Saturday Heroes honoured

News.com.au 22/8/2011

<http://www.news.com.au/national/black-saturday-heroes-honoured/story-e6frfkx0-1226119317426>

(Accessed 3/4/2014)



## Black Saturday hero honoured

Electrical Trades Union <https://www.etuvic.com.au/content/black-saturday-hero-honoured> (Accessed 2/4/2014)



## Top honour for our brave bushfire hero

The Border Mail 10/6/2013

<http://www.bordermail.com.au/story/1561151/top-honour-for-our-brave-bushfire-hero/> (Accessed 2/4/2014)



## Black Saturday hero Leading Senior Constable Cameron Caine awarded OAM

Herald Sun News 3/11/2012

<http://www.heraldsun.com.au/news/victoria/black-saturday-hero-leading-senior-constable-cameron-caine-awarded-oam/story-e6frf7kx-1226509455378> (Accessed 3/4/2014)



## Bushfire hero named Father of the Year

The Age 27/8/2009

<http://www.theage.com.au/national/bushfire-hero-named-father-of-the-year-20090827-f0u2.html> (Accessed 3/4/2014)



## Fire heroes honoured

Posted on 19 October 2010. Mountainviews Star Community

<http://mountainviews.starcommunity.com.au/Mail/2010-10-19/fire-heroes-honoured/> (Accessed 3/4/2014)



## Awards for fire heroes

Mountainviews Star Community Posted on 11 August 2009.

<http://mountainviews.starcommunity.com.au/mail/2009-08-11/awards-for-fire-heroes/> (Accessed 3/4/2014)



## Bush fires: Australia's bare-chested national hero

The Telegraph 12/2/2009

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/australiaandthepacific/australia/4601925/Bush-fires-Australias-bare-chested-national-hero.html> (Accessed 3/4/2014)



## Appendix 2: Participant information and consent, and ethics approvals

Women's Health Goulburn North East

**Date:**

### Women's experience of bushfire and its aftermath

Principal Researcher: Ms. Debra Parkinson

Associate Researcher(s): Ms Claire Zara (*A second Associate Researcher was noted on initial Participant Information and Consent Form but did not begin work and the NEH Ethics Committee was advised of her absence from the project on March 12, 2010.*)

This Participant Information and Consent Forms are 5 pages long. Please make sure you have all the pages.

#### 1. Your Consent

You are invited to take part in this research project.

This Participant Information contains detailed information about the research project. Its purpose is to explain to you as openly and clearly as possible all the procedures involved in this project before you decide whether or not to take part in it.

Please read this Participant Information carefully. Feel free to ask questions about any information in the document.

Once you understand what the project is about and if you agree to take part in it, you will be asked to sign the Consent Form. By signing the Consent Form, you indicate that you understand the information and that you give your consent to participate in the research project.

You will be given a copy of the Participant Information and Consent Form to keep as a record.

#### 2. Purpose and Background

bushfires that affected so many communities in Mitchell and Murrumbidgee Local Government Areas were unprecedented. The ferocity of the fires, the total devastation of whole communities, the individual tragedies were a new and traumatic experience for the people living and working there. While some previous Australian research has looked at what happens in disaster recovery phases, none is particular to these unique communities and circumstances.

Research will be conducted to capture aspects of the experience of women during the fires of Black Saturday in Lower Hume and during the disaster recovery period that continues.

This research will allow women the opportunity to focus on what was (and perhaps remains) important to them. It could be that women speak about personal survival and grief, or they could speak about the politics of the disaster response and recovery. Issues of gender bias or inequity, or physical or sexual violence may emerge.

In addition, women will be invited to have a five or ten-minute 'conversation to camera' on topics they are happy to share with the World Wide Web. These will be uploaded to a dedicated page linked to the WHGNE and Women's Health in the North websites. This is a way of giving the community access to aspects of the research as it evolves. This option is for women or workers who are interested in it, and is not an intrinsic part of the research. [Note: *No films were made.*]

#### 3. Procedures

Participation in this project will involve you:

Being Interviewed

All information remains anonymous as your name and location will not be attached to any of your responses. While it is not possible to guarantee absolute confidentiality as people who know you may recognise your story, the anonymity of your participation is strengthened by our process, in which you will be asked to approve the document produced from your interview, and it is your right at this stage to make corrections and deletions. Notes from interviews will be destroyed once they have been written up and checked. The content of our discussions will be treated confidentially. Coded data is stored in a locked filing cabinet at WHGNE for a maximum of seven years.

#### **4. Possible Benefits**

WHGNE has conducted previous research with women that focused on issues such as breast cancer, teenage pregnancy, disability, social isolation, violence and sexual violence in intimate relationships. In the course of each research study, it became apparent that participation was valuable to women.

Women wanted to contribute to the research to help on three levels — to raise public awareness; to help others; and to contribute to their own recovery. For some, the interview was an opportunity to open up to others, initially the researchers, and then to others close to them. It took courage to attend and it was an important appointment for women. For their own healing, it helped them articulate out loud what had happened, sometimes for the first time.

#### **5. Possible Risks**

You may feel upset by talking about your experiences. If you take part in the research, you have the right to request and receive post-research debriefing. This can be negotiated at the time of interview or earlier, in the days following the interview, or following your reading of the interview notes. Participation in this research is entirely voluntary, and if you agree to participate, you may withdraw your consent at any time by speaking to me and saying you wish to stop the interview and/ or withdraw your information. At this time your Informed Consent Form will be returned to you.

#### **6. Privacy, Confidentiality and Disclosure of Information**

Any information obtained in connection with this project will be de identified. In any publication, information will be provided in such a way to minimise the possibility that you will be identified. Information gathered through interviews will be coded to maintain anonymity.

#### **7. Results of Project**

At the completion of this project a research report of the findings will be posted out to you.

#### **8. Further Information or Any Problems**

If you require further information or if you have any problems concerning this project you can contact the principal researcher or the Executive Officer of Women's Health Goulburn North East. The researcher responsible for this project is:

**Ms. Debra Parkinson**

**Telephone:** *(Telephone and mobile phone numbers provided)*

#### **9. Other Issues**

If you have any complaints about any aspect of the project, the way it is being conducted or any questions about your rights as a research participant, then you may contact

Executive Officer  
Human Research and Ethics Committee  
*C/- Secretariat (Name, address and telephone number provided)*

#### **10. Participation is Voluntary**

Participation in any research project is voluntary. If you do not wish to take part you are not obliged to. If you decide to take part and later change your mind, you are free to withdraw from the project at any stage.

Before you make your decision, a member of the research team will be available to answer any questions you have about the research project. You can ask for any information you want. Sign the Consent Form only after you have had a chance to ask your questions and have received satisfactory answers.

#### **11. Ethical Guidelines**

This project will be carried out according to the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans* (June 1999) produced by the National Health and Medical Research Council of Australia. This statement has been developed to protect the interests of people who agree to participate in human research studies.

The ethical aspects of this research project have been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of Northeast Health Wangaratta.

*(This following paragraph was included on all Participant Information and Consent Forms given to **women**. Workers required a separate permission slip and are not included in the PhD studies.)*

Please note:

Women's Health Goulburn North East has given me permission to analyse up to 20 interview transcripts to contribute to my study for a PhD at Monash University, under the supervision of Professor Denise Cuthbert. Professor Cuthbert is Head of School and a member of the Sociology Program in the School of Political and Social Inquiry.

This means that I will be writing a thesis and, as well as the thesis, there may be other articles, reports or presentations drawn from the research findings. The Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee (MUHREC) has approved this research (CF10/0448 — 2010000209) based on the original Ethics Application and Approval received from North East Health.

(Version 1: 15 October 2008)



**CONSENT FORM**

Northeast Health Wangaratta

**Full Project Title: Women’s experience of bushfire and its aftermath**

I have read, or have had read to me and I understand the Participant Information version 1 dated October 15<sup>th</sup> 2008. I freely agree to participate in this project according to the conditions in the Participant Information.

I will be given a copy of the Participant Information and Consent Form to keep

The researcher has agreed not to reveal my identity and personal details if information about this project is published or presented in any public form.

Participant’s Name (printed) .....

Address .....

.....

.....

Telephone.....

Signature

Date

Name of Witness to Participant’s Signature (printed) .....

Signature

Date

Declaration by researcher\*: I have given a verbal explanation of the research project, its procedures and risks and I believe that the participant has understood that explanation.

Researcher’s Name (printed) .....

Signature

Date

\* A senior member of the research team must provide the explanation and provision of information concerning the research project.

*Note:* All parties signing the Consent Form must date their own signature.

RECEIVED  
20 OCT 2009



Wednesday, 14 October 2009

BY:.....

Ms Debra Parkinson  
Women's Health Goulburn North East  
PO Box 853  
Wangaratta 3677

Dear Ms Parkinson

Re: Research Project: *Women's experience of bushfire and its aftermath*

The Northeast Health Wangaratta Human Research Ethics Committee at their meeting of October 13 2009 reviewed the above research project.

The HREC is pleased to approve the above project based on the following provisions.

- Concerns were raised regarding the level of support available to participants especially those who may voice their concerns for the first time, possibly causing emotional distress. The Committee requests that mechanisms be put in place i.e. information handouts encouraging participants to seek help via the information supplied if needed.
- The HREC suggests that recruitment of participants be done via poster displays and newspaper advertising rather than referrals from front line services as clients undergoing counselling could be seen as vulnerable thus giving a biased result.

The HREC wish you well with the project and looks forward to receiving a 12 monthly progress report in 2010, followed by a final report in 2011.

Yours sincerely

*Allan Wills*

**Mr Allan Wills**  
HREC Chair



### Human Ethics Certificate of Approval

Date: 5 March 2010

Project Number: CF10/0448 – 2010000209

Project Title: Women's experience of violence following the Black Saturday bushfires

Chief Investigator: Prof Denise Cuthbert

Approved: From: 5 March 2010 To: 5 March 2015

---

#### Terms of approval

1. The Chief investigator is responsible for ensuring that permission letters are obtained, if relevant, and a copy forwarded to MUHREC before any data collection can occur at the specified organisation. Failure to provide permission letters to MUHREC before data collection commences is in breach of the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research and the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research.
2. Approval is only valid whilst you hold a position at Monash University.
3. It is the responsibility of the Chief Investigator to ensure that all investigators are aware of the terms of approval and to ensure the project is conducted as approved by MUHREC.
4. You should notify MUHREC immediately of any serious or unexpected adverse effects on participants or unforeseen events affecting the ethical acceptability of the project.
5. The Explanatory Statement must be on Monash University letterhead and the Monash University complaints clause must contain your project number.
6. **Amendments to the approved project (including changes in personnel):** Requires the submission of a Request for Amendment form to MUHREC and must not begin without written approval from MUHREC. Substantial variations may require a new application.
7. **Future correspondence:** Please quote the project number and project title above in any further correspondence.
8. **Annual reports:** Continued approval of this project is dependent on the submission of an Annual Report. This is determined by the date of your letter of approval.
9. **Final report:** A Final Report should be provided at the conclusion of the project. MUHREC should be notified if the project is discontinued before the expected date of completion.
10. **Monitoring:** Projects may be subject to an audit or any other form of monitoring by MUHREC at any time.
11. **Retention and storage of data:** The Chief Investigator is responsible for the storage and retention of original data pertaining to a project for a minimum period of five years.

Professor Ben Canny  
Chair, MUHREC

cc: Ms Debra Parkinson



# WOMEN'S HEALTH

GOULBURN NORTH EAST

*Challenging inequity, embracing diversity.*

## Permission Letter for:

"Women's experience of violence following the Black Saturday bushfires" February 12, 2010  
(Debra Parkinson)  
Supervisor: Professor Denise Cuthbert Room  
H5.37  
Building H Caulfield Campus  
School of Political and Social Inquiry Arts  
Faculty  
MONASH UNIVERSITY VIC 3800

Dear Professor Cuthbert,

Debra Parkinson is a consultant to Women's Health Goulburn North East and currently conducting a project looking into various aspects of women's experiences in the aftermath of bushfires in the Lower Hume region. We are seeking information about women's experiences generally, following the fires, and this could include accounts of survival and grief, gendered responses to disaster recovery, the politics of the disaster response, inequity, or violence and sexual assault.

The project is expected to be completed by the end of 2010 and will result in a project report covering all of the aspects that emerge of women's experience in the post-disaster period following the bushfires in the Lower Hume region.

I have given my permission for Debra to use any of the 30 transcripts that result from interviews she will conduct in the WHGNE project, and that she will choose up to 20 transcripts where women speak of violence or sexual assault.

I understand that she is hoping to undertake a PhD investigating violence against women in the post-disaster period following the Black Saturday fires and that she will re-analyse the women's accounts for the purposes of this sole focus.

I have read and understood the Explanatory Statement regarding the research and hereby give permission for her to use 20 of the 30 transcripts (of her choosing) for this research towards her PhD. I also give permission for her to use appropriately de-identified data in both the PhD thesis and any related publications, conference papers and other products. Where possible, Women's Health Goulburn North East should be acknowledged.

Yours sincerely,

**Susie Reid, Executive Officer**

Women's Health Goulburn North East ACN A0039392E ABN 75 815 140 163  
57 Rowan Street Wangaratta 3677, P.O. Box 853 Wangaratta 3676  
Ph. [03] 5722 3009 Fax. [03] 5722 3020  
[whealth@whealth.com.au](mailto:whealth@whealth.com.au) [www.whealth.com.au](http://www.whealth.com.au)



# WOMEN'S HEALTH

GOULBURN NORTH EAST

*Challenging inequity, embracing diversity.*

## Permission Letter for:

"Women's experience of violence following the Black Saturday bushfires"

August 2, 2012

Re: Debra Parkinson  
Supervisor: Professor Denise Cuthbert  
Dean, Graduate Research, RMIT

(Second supervisor) Dr Kirsten MacLean  
Hons Coordinator, PSI  
Senior Lecturer in Sociology, PSI  
Monash University

Dear Professor Cuthbert,

On 12.2.2010, I gave written permission for Debra Parkinson to use up to 20 of the 30 transcripts that were, at that stage, being gathered through interviews with women following the Black Saturday bushfires.

The purpose of this letter is to advise that I have extended this permission to include all of the transcripts of women's interviewed gathered in this research. In this way, she can draw on all the women's data to inform the PhD she is writing under your supervision.

I also give permission for her to use appropriately de-identified data in both the PhD thesis and any related publications, conference papers and other products, in accordance with ethics approval received. Where possible, Women's Health Goulburn North East should be acknowledged.

Yours sincerely,

**Susie Reid, Executive Officer**

Women's Health Goulburn North East ACN A0039392E ABN 75 815 140 163  
57 Rowan Street Wangaratta 3677, P.O. Box 853 Wangaratta 3676  
Ph. [03] 5722 3009 Fax. [03] 5722 3020  
[whealth@whealth.com.au](mailto:whealth@whealth.com.au) [www.whealth.com.au](http://www.whealth.com.au)



## Appendix 3: Recruitment flyer

### **Collecting women's stories of their experience of life after bushfire**

Worldwide research suggests that women experience disasters differently to men. Because we have very little research about Australian women following events such as the Black Saturday Bushfires, your views and experiences are important.

- What aspects of trying to recover from the bushfires would you like to raise?
- Have interventions and assistance been helpful or caused problems?
- Have you experienced violence since the Black Saturday bushfires?
- What are the obstacles to you rebuilding your life?

Your information will assist in post-disaster planning and will improve services to women and communities in the future.

For more information or to make a time to share your story in a confidential and private setting, please call ...

We can arrange for an interview at a time and place that suits you.

## **Appendix 4: Interview schedules**

### Interview schedule for women

1. First, can you tell us why you decided to participate in this research?
2. Now, let's start by asking how you came to be living here.
3. Can you tell us a bit about what's happened to you in the fires and in the months since?
4. What aspect/s of what you've just told us would you like to talk about further?
5. What do you see as critical events during that time? What made those events critical to you?
6. What would have helped or made a difference to you at that time?

## Appendix 5: Relationship characteristics

Characteristics of the 17 relationships where DV was present - 15 direct experiences and 2 indirect (shaded) regarding a sister and a daughter

Approx. Years in relationship	DV before fires	Power & Control evident	Frightened of partner	Still with partner	Stable, non-violent before	Factors noted as affecting male	Man's role during fire	Thought death was imminent	Compassion for man
6	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	New living circumstances	Present	Yes, both	Yes
10	Escalated	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Mental illness?	Coped well	Yes, both	Yes
3	No	Yes	Yes	No	No		Negligent	Yes, he	
10	No	Yes	Yes	No	Sep before	Predatory	Not in fires	Yes, she/ he - not in fires	
Not stated	(Escalated)	Yes	Yes	Yes, can't leave	No		Firefighter	Yes, he	Sister: Yes
20	Escalated	Yes	Yes	Yes, can't leave	No		Present	Yes she / he denies	
12	Escalated	Yes	Yes	No	No	Mental illness?	Mostly absent	Yes, both	Yes
10	No	Yes	Yes	Yes, can't leave	Yes		Negligent	Yes, both	Yes
20	Escalated	Yes	Yes	No	No		Present	Yes, both and sister	Yes
10	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		Coped well	Yes, all	
(1)	(New)	(Yes)	(Yes)	(Yes)	N/A		No role	Unsure daughter/No he	
10	No	No	Not stated	Yes	Yes	Prev. trauma	Present	No, but protracted threat	Yes
5	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Sep before	Predatory	Not in fires	Unsure /No - he	Yes
18	No	No	Yes	No	Yes		Firefighter	Yes, he	Yes
25	Escalated	Yes	Yes	Yes	No		Negligent	Yes, both	
25	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Alcoholism	Present	Yes, all	Yes
18	Escalated	Yes	Yes	NO	No		Present	Yes, all	No
Totals	1 Yes 9 No 7 escalated	Yes 13 No 4	16 Yes 1 Not stated	8 Yes 9 No	7 Yes 7 No 2 Sep 1 N/A			Yes M 12 F 11 No M 5 F 4 Unsure F 2	10 Yes 1 No



