Fathers in the Frame:

Protecting Children by Including Men in Cases of Violence against Women

By

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Abstract

This thesis uncovers how law and policy, as well as how social workers speak to their practice, shape how the Manitoba child welfare system intervenes in cases of violence against mothers. By investigating the dominant discourses of 'invisible fathers' and 'mothers failing to protect,' this project substantiates how these discourses contribute to the failure of the current system to hold the perpetrator accountable for his violence. I set out to confirm the argument that men need to be included as both risks and assets in the frame of our child welfare lens when assessing risk for children in order to realize a feminist perspective in our work with families. Discourse analysis methods from a number of sources were drawn on to reveal and analyze how the discourse of 'mothers failing to protect' has emerged, and how it informs child welfare practice and policy in ways that harm mothers and children.

Acknowledgments

Along the way, I was fortunate to have several scholars whose work I admire, as well as my family and friends, beside me. I would like to take this opportunity to thank these individuals.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION - BRINGING MEN INTO VIEW

No one can make us feel inferior without our permission.
Eleanor Roosevelt

My discovery of a thesis topic came towards the completion of my courses in graduate school. I was embarking on my required class on data analysis that I had saved to the bitter end, mostly because, like many clinical social workers, I was dreading it. I was not interested in research; I just wanted to work with people. It was in this class, however, that I began to understand the social justice aspect of research. My professor, Susan Strega, had completed her dissertation on mothers' and social workers' perceptions of how child welfare services are delivered when domestic violence is present. It appeared that two dominant themes prevailed: fathers are absent and mothers are responsible. As her study was cross-national, covering mothers and social workers in British Columbia and the United Kingdom, I began to wonder what research on this topic might look like in the Manitoba context.

On reading Susan's dissertation, I began searching the literature for other feminist work in the area of child welfare. I came across an article by Marilyn Callahan (1993) titled "Feminist Approaches: Women recreate child welfare." Callahan highlights how the profession of child welfare is not only dominated by women as its service providers, but it is mothers who receive a majority of the services. Callahan asks: why wouldn't a feminist approach to child welfare make sense? I tended to agree. It was therefore a blend of these two works that raised my curiosity as to how the child welfare agency I was working for at that time delivered service.

Sharing the Callahan article with my supervisor as well as my colleagues evoked interesting conversations regarding how we as an agency were delivering service to families where violence against mothers was present. One colleague, after reading this article, commented that it made her think that since other systems such as Income Security had begun to hold fathers financially responsible for their children, why wouldn't child welfare hold fathers responsible in other ways?

The field of child welfare can be an easy target for criticism. In such a complex system, required to meet differing demands for children, parents and the community with limited resources, researchers can identify service gaps with little difficulty. Protecting children from harm is complex, fast paced and often risky work. Child protection social workers must be able to quickly investigate, identify, assess and treat a problem in a systematic and innovative way, often with the resistance of the people for whom help is intended (Echlin & Marshall, 1995). Unlike other areas of social work practice, where clinical skills are the primary focus, a child protection worker must be able to investigate like a police officer, think like a lawyer and treat like a social worker (Vogel, 1987, cited in Echlin & Marshall, 1995). The overall goal for these social workers is to protect children by assessing the risk and safety of those children who may be in danger of abuse or neglect.

Once a child welfare worker myself, I often struggled with our approach to mothers who found themselves in a violent relationship, as no clear standard of practice existed. When I first came to this work, I believed someone had to be held responsible for the protection of the children when violence occurs between their parents. I would always set out to assess the risk of the father to his spouse and children. But if Dad turned

out to be uncooperative or difficult to access, I would turn my investigative focus on a mother's ability to keep her perpetrating spouse away or ask her to consider leaving the relationship for the sake of her children. In some other circumstances, for example, if a no contact order was in place, I would become frustrated if I discovered that Dad had been around the home. Again, I would warn the mother that this was not in the best interests of her children, and if she was going to subject her children to the chance of witnessing more violence, she would not be what child welfare considers a "protective parent." At times, helping Mom and her children became confusing and frustrating, as helping a mother did not always coincide with protecting her children. This apparent ease in holding mothers responsible without questioning this practice leads me to inquire why child welfare workers seem to so easily accept the position of blaming mothers as the standard of practice and the "common sense" approach.

Since my early work in this field, my attitudes have evolved, especially with respect to cases of women who are physically abused by their partners. Initially, I found myself asking why a woman would stay in a violent relationship. Eventually, I came to see my role as assisting women to be aware of as many options as possible and recognizing and empathizing with their difficult dilemmas. I came to recognize that careful assessment—of both caregivers—is necessary because not all cases of violence against women are equal and different planning is required on a case-by-case basis. Instead of asking why Mom does not leave, I now hold the perpetrator responsible to stop the violence against his partner, and in the case of a no contact order, to honour it. I began to focus more on assessing a father/man's risk and willingness to change, not a mother's duty to protect herself and her children. I also found it imperative to include the

perpetrator of the violence in the case planning, as long as he accepted responsibility and was not harmful to the process. As well, when I began examining the discourse that guides our practice in child welfare, I realized that inconsistency could be found in our language about our work and the policy that guided our practice. I therefore realized that this disconnect between policy and practice also needed to be investigated.

Once I identified my research problem, I began to explore the topic of violence against women further. I was intrigued by how many terms are found in the literature to describe this phenomenon. In the case of domestic violence, the terminology I discovered is what I would describe as gender neutral. Terms such as "domestic violence," "spousal abuse" and "family violence" are used to describe violence against women. Immediately, these labels can confuse the reader about who is perpetrating the abuse and who is subjected to it. One can also be left with the implication that either partner, male or female, is the perpetrator, or both are equally contributing to the abuse. But the statistics tell us otherwise. In Canada, we know that close to 25% of spousal relationships include violence, although many authors speculate that this is a conservative statistic (Statistics Canada, 2002). Of this 25%, women are the victims in more than 85% of spousal violence situations (Statistics Canada, 2002, cited in Strega, 2002). Throughout my career and education as a social worker, I have been aware of the professional discourse about violence in the family. In this discourse the terms "family violence" or "domestic violence" are commonly used to refer to or describe men's violence against women. According to feminist poststructural theorist Chris Weedon (1997: 82), language use can be where inequality begins. Weedon goes on to add that the power of discourse constrains what can be known and what can be said in specific social

and historical contexts. I will for these reasons examine the language used in child welfare practice and policy. In my own work, I have chosen to use terms such as "woman abuse" and "violence against women" as I believe they more accurately reflect the reality of the violence in the family that child welfare workers commonly encounter.

Along these same lines, as the reader will see throughout this project, I refer to the perpetrator as "he" and the abused partner as "she." I believe these pronouns accurately reflect my own professional experiences as a domestic violence counsellor and child welfare worker, as well as being confirmed by the research literature I examined for this project. Injuries from physical or sexual assaults between intimate partners that require medical attention occur more than seven times as often to women as to men (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000, cited in Bancroft & Silverman, 2002). Sexual assault by intimate partners occurs eight times as often to women as to men, and stalking occurs eight times more often to women as opposed to men (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000, cited in Bancroft & Silverman, 2002). Researchers have concluded that cases of mutual abuse are rare (Berk et al., 1983, cited in Bancroft & Silverman, 2002). I do not deny the fact that women have the potential to be violent to male partners or that there is violence between female same-sex partners, but I do not explore these situations in this project as they are rarely encountered in child welfare.

The purpose of the research is to explore how the ways in which the child welfare system intervenes in cases of violence against women in southwestern Manitoba is shaped by the discourses embedded in Manitoba child welfare legislation and policy and in the ways in which child welfare workers speak to their practice. A feminist discourse analysis has been utilized to uncover the extent to which the notions of 'fathers missing in action' and 'mothers failing to protect' are dominant themes in the Manitoba child welfare

system. Literature and research from within child welfare and feminism, coupled with my own data analysis, are used to explore these dominant discourses. This project is premised on the belief that the rhetoric and actions produced by these discourses are oppressive to women and add to an ongoing failure to hold responsible men who perpetrate violence against mothers. The argument developed throughout this project is that fathers/men need to be included in the frame of our child welfare lens when assessing safety and risk for children in order to diminish risk and increase safety for mothers and children involved with child welfare.

Underlying this research project is my belief that child welfare's prevalent focus on the investigation and intervention of women in cases where they are victims of wife abuse is a social injustice, in that they bear the brunt of the responsibility and scrutiny during an investigation. Fathers/men also need to be brought into view. My primary aim is to explore social work practice with fathers/ men, or the absence of practice with fathers, as I believe inattention to men in child welfare contributes to injustice for mothers. My objective is to examine this issue in order to not only to critique current child welfare practice, but to improve it. A second goal is to encourage those in the child welfare field to equalize the responsibility for a child's well being by facilitating shared responsibility between both parents. Finally, by examining the prevailing discourse I hope to further explore the extent to which perpetrators of the violence are held or not held accountable in cases where violence against the mother is present. My hope is to affect social work practice in child welfare to the point that those in the field will regularly or consistently include 'fathers in the frame' of their assessments and interventions.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW- Father Exclusion and Mother Blaming

Women are not going to be equal outside the home until men are equal in it.
Gloria Steinem

Canadian child welfare research confirms that a majority of cases are completed with mothers, not fathers (Goard & Tutty, 2002; Strega et al., 2008).   Within the existing child welfare literature, there is an overrepresentation of information on mothers who have found themselves in abusive relationships and a lack of information on the fathers who perpetrate violence. Research suggests that the current child protection system tends to concentrate on intervention with mothers, regardless of who is the alleged perpetrator—as, for example, in cases of child physical abuse, which is perpetrated equally by fathers and mothers (Farmer & Owen, 1995). More than a decade ago, Harriet Dempster (1993, cited in Farmer & Owen, 1995) found that when fathers perpetrated child sexual abuse, workers concentrated on the mother's ability to protect the child from further abuse.   Julia Krane's (2003) Canadian research indicates that little has changed recently. Taking a feminist perspective to study women whose children have been sexually abused and the child welfare case workers involved, Krane noted the pressures put on these mothers by the child welfare system, even though they were not the initial source of concern for their children's welfare. As Krane points out, what the mother did not do was seen as more detrimental and blameworthy than what the male perpetrator did. The child welfare gaze remains firmly fixed on a mother's availability and parenting skills, while the father's parenting attributes are ignored.

Similarly, in cases of violence against women, assessments tend to focus on the mother's ability to protect herself as well as her children from the perpetrator. Betty Carter (1993) found in her research into how non-offending mothers were treated by child welfare agencies in Ontario that mothers continue to be blamed for the victimization of their children, even though men are predominantly the sexual abusers of both boys and girls. Many of the perpetrators disappeared from view and the mother became the focus of the child welfare system.

Jonathan Scourfield (2003) in his book, *Gender and Child Protection*, revealed the gendered nature of child protection work and aimed to understand these gendered discourses and practices within which child protection work is situated. Through his research, he established several discourses of masculinity found in the social work office: men as a threat, men as no use, men as absent and men as irrelevant. He saw these discourses as relating to the ever increasing powerful discourse of the 'problem of men' (Scourfield & Coffey, 2002). Judith Milner (2004:95) warns that when we rely on "men as threat" constructions to guide child welfare interventions, social work ends up demonizing men who are already socially excluded and the women who live with them are excluded by association. Women and mothers, on the other hand, were seen as oppressed or responsible or the maker of choices (to stay with or leave their partners). Scourfield and Coffey (2002: 333) make the point that "what we see in child protection work is a reflection of a wider societal discourse that holds women ultimately responsible for things that go wrong in families, including the bad behaviour of men." They discuss specific examples of the gendered nature of child welfare found in the office. For

instance, they note that fewer fathers/men than mothers attend court proceedings and that most social workers hold traditional gender expectations for men and women

It appears for the most part that women continue to be blamed for the majority of problems in families, whereas men remain largely invisible (Risley-Curtiss & Heffernan, 2003). Weedon (1997: 8) points out the irony of this situation. She notes that in our culture we are seen as extensions of our fathers. For example, most children are given their father's last name rather than their mother's. The irony is that when things go wrong in the family we do not typically hold men accountable. This becomes increasingly troublesome in the instance of violence against a partner/mother. The woman is seen as the party responsible to protect herself and her children and obtain the resources the family requires should they come up against any challenges.

It is for these reasons that a feminist analysis of child welfare is useful, as it places the experience of women, the major group of service providers and consumers, at the centre of the inquiry rather than on the margins.

Is Engaging Fathers a Feminist Issue?

> **I myself have never been able to find out precisely what feminism is: I only know that people call me a feminist whenever I express sentiments that differentiate me from a doormat or a prostitute.**
> **Rebecca West (1892-1983)**

This project maintains that social workers engaging fathers/men in child welfare cases where violence against women is present is, in fact, a feminist issue. Einat Peled (2000: 32), who has written extensively on this topic, notes that very little data exist on parenting interventions with violent fathers. As feminist research seeks to create social

change, including fathers/men in the frame of analysis in these cases is part of social change. Men and women being held equally responsible for the well being of their children is essential for the development of a feminist practice framework in child welfare. As Peled (2000: 32) states, "viewing violence against women from a feminist perspective and the empowerment of abused mothers involves the pursuit of an egalitarian distribution of parenting rights and responsibilities between women and their partners." Although the response of the child welfare system has been viewed as inadequate in cases of violence against women (Echlin & Marshall, 1995), very little research has been done with the social workers who seek to assist in these cases. However, development of a feminist practice model for social work is not so straight forward. Should practitioners focus on liberating women from the constraints of the mothering role? Or should they advocate for support to assist mothers in their role as mothers? In the feminist literature, the dominant model that has emerged is one of the empowerment of women, based on principles of equal opportunities (Dominelli & McLeod, 1989). According to Liz Kelly (1994: 54), the guiding principle for policy and practice must be the empowerment of women as it constitutes the most effective form of child protection. This principle comes from the recognition that many of the difficulties that lead to child welfare intervention in the first place can be located in the structural disadvantage of women. The argument is that empowering mothers will lead to better environments for children (Daniel & Taylor, 1999).

By including fathers in the frame we can contribute to the task of empowering women/mothers. This can be accomplished by holding the violent family member accountable for his behaviour. Including fathers/men empowers mothers/women by

encouraging the social work field to develop and practice intervention strategies for working with violent men, and this is key to reducing and stopping violence (Holt, 2002). In addition to reducing violence, including fathers will also give child welfare workers more resources to draw from when helping families they work with. As a result, not only will the inclusion of men mean a decrease in responsibility for women, but enhanced case plans that will benefit children as well. The bottom line is that focusing on women and avoiding men yields the same result: when men are left out of the equation the violence is likely to continue. The next sections explore the two themes prominent in the current child welfare system where violence against women is present: fathers are invisible and mothers are responsible.

Fathers Missing in Action

> **The first resistance to social change is to say that it is not necessary.**
> **Gloria Steinem**

Although all children who come to the attention of child welfare systems have fathers, men are curiously excluded from these interventions (Strega et al., 2008). In the case of woman abuse, fathers who physically assault mothers are virtually invisible in child welfare practice, policy and discourse. Strega (2004: 23) discusses how, through the operation of language, power and institutional practices, the 'reality' of men beating mothers becomes transformed into the 'reality' of mothers failing to protect their children. Peled (2000) concluded that this invisibility of men automatically focuses our attention on the mother's behaviour and, as a result, removes any responsibility on the part of the perpetrator.

Other researchers have referenced fathers being excluded from the frame of child welfare investigations. In the opinion of UK researchers Brigid Daniel and Julie Taylor (1999: 210), "child welfare does not appear to purposefully engage with men in general, and fathers in particular, either as risks or as assets." They note the assumption that it is a good idea to take into account fathers when assessing the situation of children at risk or in need, but not necessarily to determine how a father is or might be an asset. It appears from their findings that child welfare social workers and administrators start out with the intent to include fathers, but this rhetoric rarely matches reality (Daniel & Taylor, 1999). In other words, a consensus appears to exist in the social work field that including fathers in their assessments is a good idea, but in reality men in general and fathers in particular are not being engaged with purposefully as potential risks (to the mother and child) or as potential assets by child welfare systems (Daniel & Taylor, 1999). The result is that the focus of the social work intervention remains firmly planted on the mother.

Given that social workers are placing this type of scrutiny on women—even when anti-discrimination frameworks have a high profile in the profession—Scourfield (2008) theorizes that in some ways child welfare workers are doing what they know they should not do. In his study of the 'occupational culture' in a child welfare office, some workers commented they are doing what they believe is wrong by not challenging men who are the root cause of many problems. Strega (2004) and others have questioned this contradiction and explored possible rationales for why workers may ignore men/fathers:

- Workers can be under-trained in interventions with violent fathers and as a result may lack the confidence, knowledge and skills to intervene in such cases. As Peled points out, "very little information is available on parenting work with violent men" (2000: 32).

- McMahon and Pence (1995) offer a constructivist perspective, suggesting that men are constructed as having rights (to stay in his house, to have access to his children) and women are constructed as having responsibilities (emotional and physical caretaking of men and children). Child welfare workers are hesitant to infringe on men's 'rights' but are quick to expect women to fulfill their 'their responsibilities.'

- Saunders (1994) speculates that workers who work in child welfare see themselves as 'copers' and are impatient with the inability of battered mothers to 'cope.'

- Perhaps social workers, most of whom are women, are acting out their own failed attempts to resist patriarchy, their own compromised choices, and their battered clients are simply the location of these struggles. For example, it continues to be true that while women numerically dominate social work at the practice level, they are usually in the minority in managerial, administrative and academic positions.

One can only speculate at this point on the reasons why workers take this position and it would be a useful subject of inquiry for further research. Karen Swift (1995), in her research on child neglect, has noted that the process of collecting a set of facts and matching them to an idea of 'neglect' "incorporates many assumptions that lie far beneath the surface of conscious thought" (Swift, 1995: 122). Swift's research demonstrated that social workers are powerfully influenced by gender, race and class ideologies, and these influences form their assessments and conclusions. Along the same lines, I believe that powerful discourses are at work when child welfare workers assess instances of violence against women/mothers. If we as a society believe women are responsible for childcare, then responsibility for children's neglect will inevitably be assigned to mothers. In the case of woman abuse, if we believe that women are responsible for protecting children and acquiring assistance for the family when violence

is present, then children's exposure to violence between their mother and a male partner will be a mother's responsibility.

Research about fathers whose children are involved with child welfare could inform practitioners about effective techniques for working with fathers and assist them in taking responsibility for their children. I hope that by shedding light on the need to intervene with fathers, this project may be able to reveal some effective interventions for change. "Feminist social workers know that women continue to be disproportionately held responsible for what happens to their children, whereas the role of men continues to be largely overlooked" (Forste, 2002, cited in Risley-Curtiss & Heffernan: 35). Again, it is for these reasons we must include 'fathers in the frame.'

Regardless if a father lives with his children or not, it is important that research examines how father-children relationships influence children's functioning. "Although it is important not to overvalue the importance of fathers, it is equally important not to dismiss their significance" (Silverstein, 1997, cited in Risley-Curtiss & Heffman, 2003: 36). For decades, the literature has mentioned the importance of working with both fathers and mothers in such a way as to encourage men to be more actively engaged in the care of their children (Featherstone, 2001). The rhetoric, therefore, might suggest that there is a spirit of readiness for fathers to have more of a parenting role in society in general and in childcare practice in particular. However, Daniel and Taylor (1999) point out that in both these realms there is evidence that reality does not match the rhetoric. Although more men might be involved in childcare, very few couples are sharing responsibilities fully and equally (Featherstone, 2001). It is still women who hold the main responsibility for organizing and managing childcare.

Scourfield (2003) found that when violence against a mother appeared in a more complex manner, social workers constructed men as no different from women or better than women. He explains that this did not have anything to do with the man as much as it had to do with workers expecting more from women. He also uncovered the theory that social workers appear to adopt a working hypothesis regarding challenging men, but after being worn down by finding this approach mostly unsuccessful, they make decisions about who they can work with realistically. In most cases that turns out to be women.

The observations of these researchers parallel my own experience as well as those of my colleagues in the child welfare field. Some of the fathers do not wish to meet with the worker, even when the invitation is given. It is a response that workers readily accept. Some workers admit they do not try to engage fathers at all. They feel that due to caseload pressures, they just cannot spare the extra time it sometimes can take. Nevertheless, when a mother (who is usually the primary caregiver) does not wish to meet, we do not allow her the same right. If we set out to speak to a mother or hold her accountable, we are usually successful. When we are required to locate a father to serve court papers, we are successful. Could the same rigour be applied to including fathers in the frame of current practice when violence against women is involved?

Strega (2004) points out in her research that men's involvement in the problems of women and children is made invisible simply by the language we use to describe domestic violence. Discourses used in the field when describing violence against women—such as "family violence" or "domestic violence"—inadequately represent the reality of the problem. An additional point she makes is that these terms primarily emphasize physical abuse, not the emotional or sexual abuse that can also be suffered.

Gender-neutral terms imply that both mother and father can be perpetrating the abuse when we know that in the majority of cases, it is violence directed at women by men. Strega goes on to highlight other examples of male invisibility when she notes the "moral panic in both the UK and North America over single motherhood, yet men's primary role in creating single motherhood by their absence as fathers is rarely, if ever noticed" (2004: 5).

Linda Coates and Allan Wade (2004), in their research on the connection between violence and language, found that when they examined different professionals in positions of power who are involved in adjudicating sexual assault crimes, such as judges, psychologists and lawyers, they discovered that judges found psychological reasons to excuse a perpetrator's behaviour, such as stress, alcohol/drug use and abuse in childhood. But judges are not alone. Authors of various texts, researchers and other mental health professionals develop similar constructs to excuse male behaviour, thus adding to men's invisibility. Following the same train of thought, Evan Stark and Anne Flitcraft (1996: 81) note, "men have remained invisible in the child welfare system and mothers are held responsible for child abuse even when the mother and child are being battered by an identifiable man." According to Hayden and McCarthy, this focus in social work comes from "violence against women simultaneously being 'socially promoted and socially prohibited' in both Canada and the UK" (cited in Strega, 2004: 26). It would seem that even though Canadian legislation and policy forbid violence against women, "cultural life and everyday social practices normalize its existence and women's primary responsibility for its occurrence" (Strega, 2002: 27). Strega asserts that as a result, the question of 'why does she stay' is asked, and not 'why does he hit her?'

But regardless if a father is considered a risk or an asset or a combination of both, child welfare social workers must always keep in mind that the priority is to assess the risk they pose to children and their mothers. Jessica Edwards (1998) found that men, whether present or absent, tended to be regarded by social workers and health visitors in the UK as problems (Edwards, 1998, cited in Daniel & Taylor, 1999: 211). Edward's study shows the gulf between rhetoric and reality. The workers that Edwards interviewed consistently spoke of the importance of engaging men, but in their practice gave covert messages that childcare is a woman's job and failed to engage with the men they did encounter (cited in Daniel & Taylor, 1999:211).

Recent research finds that little has changed. Strega et al. (2008) conducted a quantitative study of child welfare practice in a mid-size Canadian city by random sampling and reviewing case files. File recordings demonstrated that almost half of workers considered fathers to be irrelevant; 20% of fathers were described as risks to both mothers and children while 20% were considered assets. Notably, contact with fathers described as risks to their children was documented in 40% of files, in contrast to contact with fathers described as assets documented in 70% of files (Strega et al, 2008: 6). To a large extent, current practice and ideology in child welfare has "let men off the parenting hook" (Peled, 2000: 33). A father or father figure can leave his children without being seen as abandoning them, and can fail to feed, clothe or in any way provide care for a child and not be seen as neglectful (Scourfield, 2003; Swift, 1995). Peled looks at parenting by men who abuse women and notes that domestic violence researchers (for example, Bogard, 1988; Bowker et al. 1988; Dobash & Dobash, 1992) have criticized child protective services for focusing their attention and intervention efforts solely on

mothers. She suggests that workers do this because mothers are the "more available, more manageable client" (Peled, 2000: 33), which results in making the abusive fathers invisible and therefore not accountable for their abuse. In addition, present day social work interventions and assessments with children of abused women, as a rule, do not include a reference to the role of abusive men as fathers or how they are also responsible for their children's well being (Peled, 2000). Peled argues that holding such men accountable for their children's well-being may, under certain conditions, contribute to the healthier emotional development of their children.

But child welfare workers do not deserve all of the criticism. The lack of understanding of battering fathers can also be credited to the batterers themselves. Peter Jaffe in his forward to *The Batterer as Parent* (Bancroft &Silverman, 2002: viii) points out that abusive fathers tend to make themselves "unavailable for participation in services or research studies so they have remained invisible and poorly understood." For example, a majority of the early research into violence against women was completed in battered women's shelters and, as a result, leads us to correlate children's emotional and behavioural difficulties with their mother's physical and psychological well-being without adequate attention to how the conduct of batterers was influencing the behaviour that researchers were observing (Bancroft & Silverman, 2002). One of the main reasons the research began in this way was the easy accessibility of abused women and their children. In addition, women were highly motivated research volunteers because they hoped their participation might bring about change and effect their situations.

There are other men that purposely avoid social workers despite their best efforts. Perhaps these men hold the belief that childcare is only a mother's concern or it is

unpleasant to come face to face with a person who is going to challenge their problem behaviour. Others can be intimidating or threatening in their demeanour, which discourages workers from attempting to work with them. Scourfield (2008) cautions that we cannot dismiss the very real dangers that child welfare workers face with these men. In other words, social workers exclude men because some of the men they encounter are very difficult, though it must be noted that some of the mothers that workers encounter can be equally difficult. In the end, Scourfield encourages workers to remain even-handed, not painting all men as aggressive (and therefore to be avoided) and all women as good mothers. He summarizes by noting, "this is not simply a sexist discourse we can wish away" (Scourfield, 2008: 6).

Exposing men's 'missing in action' status in my research may contribute to reducing violence against women in two ways. By putting the focus on fathers we may encourage workers to learn more about men's contributions and risks to the family and social workers can learn how to intervene better with families where violence is present.

Mothers Failing to Protect

> **A woman is like a teabag, you cannot tell how strong she is until you put her in hot water.**
>
> **Nancy Reagan**

Gender bias within the child welfare system has been well and consistently documented over several decades (Callahan, 1993; Gordon, 1988; Hutchison, 1992; Miller, 1987). Because women are viewed as being responsible for the care and control of their children, they are also blamed as inadequate and neglectful when something happens to them (Milner, 1993, cited in Tutty & Goard, 2002). Historically, mother-

blaming has been a prominent phenomenon: when neglect and/or abuse were identified, women were deemed responsible because they were in charge of children's care (Gordon, 1988).

Eileen Munro (1998) notes that the scrutiny mothers face at the hands of child protection workers is "surprising … since men are considerably more likely than women to be violent and so one would think professionals would give men more, not less attention than women in assessing danger to children" (cited in Scourfield, 2001: 332). Munro goes on to say that "child welfare sees abusive men as a danger to women and children and believes he should be removed, but it is seen as the mother's responsibility to ask him to leave, and not doing so constitutes 'failure to protect' so it is women's actions and attitudes which are mostly scrutinized" (Munro, 1998, cited in Scourfield, 2001: 85). Based on my own experience, I believe there is a general feeling in the field that women would be better off without these particular men, and little empathy is shown by workers if they do not wish him to leave.

Jonathan Scourfield (2008) writes about discourses of femininity and masculinity as one area of exploration for explaining gender bias in child welfare practice. Despite the feminist consciousness social workers spoke of, such as acknowledging women being oppressed in the families they worked with, child welfare workers saw women as ultimately responsible for children in a way that men were just not expected to be. Scourfield (2008) found that social workers ascribed to an ideal of gender equality in families, but the families they worked with were seen as so far from equal that it was women who had to be expected to make changes. Despite being oppressed by social forces, mothers were seen as ultimately making free choices to stay with abusive men or

leave them. I suggest that when we as social workers assume that the best course of action is for an abused mother to leave her partner, then we are implying that stopping the violence is the woman's responsibility. Not only is this perspective problematic, because it puts the focus on the woman's behaviour, but it also implies that leaving is always a viable solution and an appropriate option for all women. According to Ramona Alaggia (2007: 2) women often face a host of barriers that may limit their choices about how to respond to violence in their relationships. She adds that women's rights advocates acknowledge that leaving an abusive situation is a difficult process that may take several attempts. Many situations are complicated by problematic custody and access orders. In some cases leaving may put a woman at even greater risk. Other women may be financially dependent on their partner for survival and may not have access to affordable housing in their area. If this is the case, leaving may mean living in poverty for a mother and her children. Many women also stay because they hope for better and for change in their partner or simply, as in many relationships, because feelings of love and attachment keep them from departure.

Some researchers have argued that we need to assess violence against women through a different lens. Randy Magen (1999: 131) calls for assessment to include "information on the proximity of the child/children to the violence, the nature of the violent incidents, age of the child, the manner in which the incident was resolved and the extent to which the children witness other forms of violence." He believes it is essential that each risk factor to a child be evaluated on an individual basis. All who have worked in the child welfare field know that there will be times where social workers will uncover imminent risk to children and will have the obligation to protect by removing the mother

and children or the abuser from the home. Magen acknowledges that when workers are unable to protect children in the home, the children must be protected outside the home. But the assumption that Mom and child will be safer by leaving does not always hold true. The risks to women attempting to leave these situations are substantial. Martha Mahoney (1991) chose the term 'separation assault' to describe the dangers faced by battered women who attempt to leave their abusive partners. The risks of leaving include being "stalked, harassed, abused, murdered and made homeless" (Magen, 1999: 132). The implication of these ideas and beliefs seems to be that not only should an abused woman take action to stop abuse, but that this action will be successful.

Although it can appear that leaving is a rational, commonsense solution if a woman is beaten, this rationality does not take into account that she must choose between known and unknown dangers. The known is continuing to live with the abuser; something she already knows how to do. The unknown is comprised of the uncertainty she will have in her future such as where she will live and what sharing custody with this man will look like. Evan Stark (1995: 132) coined this decision process "the calculus of harm." According to Jeffery Edleson (1988: 295), workers contribute to the unknowns through their "absence of concern for, and intervention with, the perpetrator who is creating this dangerous environment in the first place." He suggests that instead of child welfare workers putting their focus on getting a mother to leave, they could begin by assessing the abuser's willingness and capacity to change in order to help eliminate the risk to the children in the home. Edleson adds that if child welfare systems are truly concerned with the safety of children, they must not ignore the very person who is creating the unsafe environment (1998: 296). As I noted earlier, powerful discourses are

at work when acceptable practice excludes fathers from assessments and blames mothers for their partner's behaviours. Randy Magen (1999) concurs that the difficulty begins with the problem being defined in terms of what the mother failed to do rather than in terms of the father's actions. He highlights attribution theory as one explanation for mother blaming. He defines attributions as the commonsense explanations people use to explain what happens to themselves and others. The need to believe that the world is just, fair and predictable leads many in Western cultures to attribute the cause of problems to a person's personality, attitudes or values rather than situational causes such as statuses, context or other variables. Using the example of an abused mother and her children, the natural but inaccurate focus is on the mother's behaviour, not on the abuser's behaviour, an inadequate police response, a court's failure to take action or patriarchal social systems (Magen, 1999: 129).

Julia Krane (2003) outlines one of the child welfare work processes central to invisible fathers and responsible mothers: the transformation of mothers into 'mother protectors.' Most importantly, there exists a strong theme that mothers are expected to put an end to sexual abuse when it occurs, regardless of what that protection role may entail. Many child welfare workers expect a mother to know or that she should have known about the abuse. Women's stories peppered throughout her book detail that women have been expected to change work schedules and readjust sleep or work routines as well as their social lives in order to fulfill the protection role. In addition, women are thrown into the position of choosing between their children and their partners and there is a lot of pressure to choose their children. She emphasizes the high cost of the 'mother

protector' role to women and suggests involving non-offending partners in the protection of their children.

Krane (2003: 233) outlines a discrepancy between designating a mother as a protector and depriving them from verbalizing their own experiences, needs and choices. Even though women's availability and supervision are considered the most important factor in stopping violence, workers were not receptive to seeking alternative case plans and this was seen as a failure. She points out that turning mothers into protectors may seem beneficial at first and is likely one of the contributing factors as to why this practice is so widely used. With an increased focus on mothers, the child welfare authorities ensure something is being done about children being abused and minimum standards being met. It may also be cost effective, without putting too much of a burden on public funding. But these coerced and cajoled mother protectors are often angry, anxious, frustrated and resentful. Instead of working in unity with child welfare agencies, Krane fears these women try to survive despite them. In the end, she makes a clear point that an adversarial child welfare system can never be for the 'best interests of the child' when it is a system that is guilty of ignoring the needs of the women workers are entrusted to help.

The 'failure to protect' concept appears to be applied almost solely to mothers. Consider, for example, the case of Andrea Yates, the Texas mother who killed her five children. Her husband knew of her distressed mental condition (postpartum depression), yet he continued to leave the children alone with her with no support or supervision. Where was the 'failure to protect' for the father in this case (Risley-Curtiss & Heffernan, 2003: 4)?

24

Child Welfare Practice and Policy

> **If the shoe does not fit, must we change the foot?**
> **Gloria Steinem**

According to Carolyn Goard and Leslie Tutty (2002: 65), although the goal of social policy is to improve the welfare of citizens, some social policies that are introduced with the best of intentions can have the opposite effect. Child protection legislation that mandates intervention when violence in the home is identified has been criticized as further victimizing abused women, ignoring male perpetrators and ultimately not protecting children (Goard & Tutty, 2002: 66). One concern that has been cited by women's advocates in regards to current Manitoba child welfare legislation is the use of gender-neutral terminology when describing what is primarily violence against women (Goard & Tutty, 2002). For example, current Manitoba legislation uses terminology such as "family violence" to characterize violence that is almost solely against women.

Women's advocates and feminist researchers argue that use of this language distorts the reality of the situation—that women and children are harmed by their partners/boyfriend or fathers/stepfathers (Goard & Tutty, 2002). Gender-neutral language fails to attribute accountability and responsibility for the abuse to the male perpetrator and minimizes the abuse a mother is subjected to. Such legislation has also been criticized for allowing a child welfare agency to apprehend children if they are subjected to violence in the home. Fearing the removal of her children, an abused woman will likely not disclose the abuse (Goard & Tutty, 2002). Even though this fear is very real, the statistics on what Canadian child welfare agencies in fact do in these cases

look quite different. In other words, women may not have as much to fear as they thought.

According to the findings of the Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect completed across Canada in 2003, children who are the subject of investigations involving only substantiated exposure to violence against their mother are less likely to be removed from their home than children experiencing other forms of maltreatment. In fact, cases remained open for ongoing services less often for substantiated investigations involving exposure to domestic violence compared to substantiated investigations involving other forms of maltreatment (36% versus 45%) (Trocmé et al., 2005). From this information, it would appear that Canadian child welfare agencies recognize domestic violence as a form of maltreatment but do not consider these families to require ongoing services from child welfare agencies.

As I discussed previously, Canadian child welfare efforts in general have tended to be focused on the mother's ability to protect her children, while men who commit the violence are largely ignored. Mothers and fathers are often subjected to markedly different investigative and intervention approaches (Milner, 1993), and abusive fathers are frequently less visible and accessible in the child welfare system (Callahan, 1993; Krane, 1997; Magen, 1999; Swift, 1995). Very little is known about these men as fathers and how child welfare can successfully intervene in cases where violence against women is present. This view is echoed in the United Kingdom. Nicky Stanley (1997) argues that "without a social work focus on men that involves exposing and examining their violence, mothers in situations of violence at the hands of their partners may be left

carrying intolerable burdens and child protection intervention may prove at worst, to be oppressive or, at best, ineffective" (cited in Featherstone, 2000: 9).

Milner (2004) talks about how in the UK the only safe, ethical option in working with violent/controlling men is for men to be seen in male-only groups for resocialization and for women to be seen separately for empowerment and assistance with making better choices in partners. The resocialization process for men seems to involve challenging men on their attitudes and behaviour. It tends to be a problem-focused approach, which means "one must look back at what was wrong and harmful to others as a necessary part of moving forward and work towards the elimination of such behavior" (Dobash et al. 2000: 84). Turning back to Canada, Marilyn Callahan has written extensively on this topic. In *Rethinking Child Welfare in Canada*, Callahan (1993) discusses the child welfare system's response to violence against women. She exposes the victimization that abused women experience when their children are removed because the mother has failed (or will fail) to protect them from the abusive partner. She describes the abused women's loss of self-esteem, loss of child tax credits, reduction of social assistance and ineligibility for housing. Many lose their housing once children are removed from their care. Callahan also criticizes the child welfare practice for ignoring the poverty and powerlessness of many abused women (Callahan, 1993).

Finally, what appears to be the largest barrier to effective practice is conceptualizing what is meant by the "emotional abuse" of children. While there appears to be a visceral sense that children who witness the abuse of their mothers are being emotionally maltreated, Manitoba has failed to develop comprehensive statutory

definitions which would define how Child and Family Services should intervene. This will be explored in finer detail when the discourse of the child welfare texts is examined.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY-Uncovering the Fault Lines

Possibly the one characteristic that most feminist scholars would agree upon is the need for social change.

Rhonda Kesler Unger

The aim of this project is to explore the ways in certain dominant discourses influence and to a large extent determine how the child welfare system intervenes in cases of violence against women in southwestern Manitoba. The methodological framework employed was feminist poststructural discourse analysis. Two data sources were utilized: documents relevant to how child welfare works with domestic violence and qualitative interviews conducted with social workers. Discourse analysis was used to examine whether, and how, the discourses of 'mothers failing to protect' and 'fathers missing in action' are present in relevant Manitoba legislation and policy documents. Discourse analysis of interview data provided insight into how discourses, both those embedded in legislation and policy and other discourses in circulation, shape child welfare practice. The specific documents examined were those sections of the Manitoba *Child and Family Services Act* that relate to violence against mothers and their major contingent policy, the *Safety Assessment and Safety Plan* forms and instructions, currently used by designated Child and Family Services intake departments across the province. These were selected as they are the texts that most instruct child welfare practice in domestic violence situations.

The purpose of this chapter is to consider what exactly is meant by using 'feminist research' and highlight previous feminist works that influenced and provided a working methodological model for this project. In keeping step with my objective of affecting

social work practice in the child welfare field, I provide descriptions of what feminist discourse analysis is to give readers an understanding of the methodology. Finally, I lay out my data collection and analysis methods and discuss the assessment and evaluation of my research.

The Need for a Feminist perspective

When one sets out to complete a feminist research project, a place to start is by defining what is meant by feminist research. At the most basic level, feminist research simply attempts to incorporate into social reality the feminist perspective. Feminism is a belief that women as a group face some form of oppression or exploitation. It also encompasses a commitment to uncovering what causes and sustains oppression, in all its forms (racism, classism, etc.), as well as involving a commitment to work individually and collectively in everyday life to end all forms of oppression (Macquire, 1987). According to Sandra Harding (1987: 42) the overall goal of feminist inquiry is to provide for women explanations of social phenomena that they want and need. According to Harding (1997), the questions about women that men have historically wanted answered have all too often had to do with desires to pacify, control, exploit or manipulate.

Shulamit Reinharz (1999: 219) offers her own definition of feminist method in her book, *Feminist Methods in Social Research*. She writes:

> Feminism is, in essence, a method- a method of strategic heresy—a method for understanding, from a marginal or boundary-dwelling perspective, one's own participation in socially constructed realities, both politically and personally, both socially and cognitively…. [F]eminism viewed methodologically, is an emergent scientific method—one which begins with the death of the subjectivity/objectivity dichotomy and which involves questioning the very bases of socialization and perception.

In examining various feminist social research methodologies, Reinharz (1992) points out that the focus on perspective is a central theme across the work of many feminist researchers. She also argues that feminist criticism of established research stems from a distrust of the power and perspective of androcentrism—or reality through a male lens in research and society—not from the rejection of traditional methods of inquiry. As such, Reinharz suggests that feminism is a perspective rather than a method

As I began to explore feminist research in a quest for a definition, I soon discovered that just because they encompassed a common focus does not mean that feminist researchers have the same perspective. What is shared is the basic tenet that "females are worth examining as individuals and as people whose experience is interwoven with other women" (Reinharz, 1992: 332). According to Marjorie DeVault (1999: 28), for the most part, "feminist researchers have modified, rather than invented research methods; however, feminist researchers have produced a distinctive body about writing about research practice and epistemology, and that is where I locate feminist methodology." What is unique about feminist methodology is the diversity of epistemologies represented among feminist researchers. Therefore, feminist research occurs when people who self-identify as feminist create an avenue to study traditionally marginalized groups and help create social change that would be of a benefit to them.

For the purpose of this project, another important aspect of feminist research is its ontological claim that reality as interpreted by a vast majority of the social sciences is incomplete. Instead, organizational behaviour is seen as being dominated by an androcentric worldview in that it communicates the male experience and is based on male assumptions and perspectives. Females—their experiences, assumptions and

perspectives—often have been excluded as subjects of study, as researchers and as interpreters of results (Belenky et al., 1986).

Social sciences dominated by theories and concepts emerging solely from a male consciousness may be irrelevant for the female experience and inadequate for explaining female behavior (Shakeshaft, 1987). Harding (1987) maintains that just adding women to the traditional social sciences will not work either. Early feminist researchers tried this and what they found is it falsely suggests that only those activities that men have found important to study are the ones that shape social life. Harding believes this outlook leads us to ignore such critical issues as how changes in the social practices of reproduction, sexuality and mothering have shaped the state, the economy and other social institutions.

Feminist research cannot speak for all women but what it can do is provide new knowledge grounded in the realities of women's experiences and actively enact structural changes in the social world (Bayton, 1997).   Feminist research is research guided by feminist epistemology and methodological considerations that seek to address the inequality that continues to exist for women in patriarchal society. A   feminist methodology must adhere to particular practices if it is to be truly feminist. Research questions must reflect concerns of women, be of interest to women, and be politically motivated. Social justice and social change as they relate to the concerns of women as a group are primary goals of feminist research. Devault (1999) identifies three distinct criteria which lead to a feminist research practice:

> 1. *Excavation* – making women visible in research practice, study and design. "Feminists seek a methodology that will shift the standard focus

from men's concerns in order to reveal the locations and perspectives of all women" (1999: 30).

2. *Minimize harm and address issues of power in the research process* – feminist methodologies have searched for practices that will limit the exploitation and harms that traditional research practices have generated. Such practices are found in non-feminist research as well, but what sets them apart is they have drawn from "the work of grass roots and professional women's organizations to develop inclusive procedures that are less hierarchial" (1999:31).

3. *Research as inherently political* – Feminist methodology is concerned with research that has intrinsic value to women because they are women. Furthermore, this research should agitate for social change on a level that is meaningful for women and seeks to alleviate oppression as experienced by women. "What makes practice distinctively feminist is its relevance to change in women's lives or the systems of social organization that control women" (1999: 31).

Feminism was therefore a good choice as the foundation of this project. Feminist research was developed and is primarily utilized to shift our focus from the male-dominated lens within which traditional research has been produced to allow a more detailed account of women's lives. If feminist research is to create change and advance women's position in society, then a focus on social work practice with regards to male perpetrators when it comes to issues of violence against women has the potential to contribute to these goals.

There have been feminist researchers before me who have inspired this thesis and used similar methodologies. First and foremost, Susan Strega's dissertation entitled "The Case of the Missing Perpetrator: A cross-national investigation of child welfare policy, practice and discourse in cases where men beat mothers" uses a feminist poststructural discourse analysis to examine the themes of 'failure to protect' and 'children witnessing' in the child welfare systems of British Columbia and the United Kingdom. This project closely follows Strega's work, and aims to replicate it in terms of local micro practice in southwestern Manitoba.

As Michel Foucault (1972: 94) maintained, it is precisely through multiple, local relations of power that larger effects of domination are produced, rather than through the top-down imposition of disciplinary controls. Power, in Foucault's terms, is seen as an interplay of forces operating on the micro level of everyday exchanges in all relationships. These exchanges are both from the 'bottom up' as well as the 'top down.' However, these exchanges are not equal, but instead are sites in which a multitude of hierarchies are played out on a micro level (Foucault, 1976). This understanding of power is built on the recognition that discourse (language, ideas and conceptual frameworks) shape all exercises of power. Understood in this way, power is inextricably connected to the credibility of the perspective being presented. This credibility is both dependent on and reproductive of hierarchies, which are influenced by gender, class and culture. For example, if we look at the issue of gender in our culture, traits associated with masculinity (action, reason, independence, productivity, leadership, competiveness and the public realm) are valued over those associated with femininity (nurturance, collaboration, expressiveness, dependence, emotionality and the domestic realm). I rely

on this interpretation of power in my examination of child welfare discourse, and how that discourse is enacted and deployed in rural, southwestern Manitoba.

A second important influence has been the work of Karen Swift. In *Manufacturing Bad Mothers: A Critical Perspective,* Swift (1995) examines child neglect by using the sociology of knowledge, critical theory, phenomenology and poststructuralism to study child welfare policy and practice and how neglect is created. Her work is influential as it invites social workers to examine how gender bias exists in the discourses that guide our practice. For example, if child neglect is constructed as an absence of care, and care of children is associated with femininity, then the responsibility for neglect will inevitably be assigned to mothers.

Finally, as previously mentioned, Marilyn Callahan's (1993) article entitled "Women Recreate Child Welfare" is also influential. Her argument that a feminist perspective in the field of Canadian child welfare only makes sense was one of the early inspirations for my choosing to study social work practice through a feminist lens. To have a feminist lens, for me, simply means to see the world from a woman's perspective. Callahan's work stands out as her work honours the common experiences and histories of women in our society.

Epistemology

The methodology adopted in any research project is founded upon a particular epistemological position. Epistemology is a branch of philosophy as well as a strategy that is concerned with the creation of knowledge. It includes a theory of knowledge that answers the questions of who can be a knower, and what counts for 'truth' in knowledge

production. It also informs what tests beliefs and information must go through in order to be given the status of "knowledge."   Some examples of justifying beliefs are explaining things as being 'common sense,' established by the authority of God or based on custom and tradition (Harding, 1987: 123).   Attention to an epistemological position works to expose underlying presumptions of our realities in order to uncover how social reality is created.

Objectivist epistemologies, such as those used in traditional science, assert that there is a single, knowable truth that can be discovered or revealed through following certain prescribed procedures, for example, the alleged application of objectivity on the part of the researcher. Scientific knowledge has traditionally been heralded as the 'best' kind of knowledge, superior to other forms of knowledge such as philosophy, legends and folklore (Harding, 1997).   Science's methods include observation, mathematical calculation, experiment and replication.   Objectivity in this context is achieved by separating the 'knowing subject' from the 'object of knowledge' or person being studied. It is believed that because scientific knowledge is allegedly free of bias, it is the only kind of knowledge that can or should be relied upon for finding the 'truth' of a matter. Not only has it been taken for granted that knowers are male, but when male scientists and philosophers have paused to note this fact, as some indeed have done, they have argued that things are as they should be. It is no exaggeration to say that anyone who wanted to count as "knower" has historically had to be male (Harding, 1995).

Feminists have argued that traditional epistemologies, whether intentionally or unintentionally, systematically exclude the possibility that women can be knowers (Harding, 1987). They also claim that the voice of science is a masculine one, and

history has been written from the point of view of men. As such, feminists have proposed alternative theories of knowledge that seek to legitimate women as 'knowers.' One of these epistemologies is feminist poststructuralism.

Feminist Poststructuralism

Weedon (1997: 6) defines feminist poststructuralism as a mode of knowledge production that uses poststructuralist theories of language, subjectivity, social processes and institutions to understand existing power relations and to identify areas and strategies for change. Through the examination of discourses, feminist poststructuralism is able to explain the workings of power on behalf of specific interests and to analyze opportunities for resistance to it. Poststructural theorists examine micro power relations, such as how work with men is conducted in the local child welfare office, instead of large abstract social structures, such as the entire Canadian child welfare system. In sharp contrast to traditional theories of knowledge production, poststructuralists believe that there are multiple truths and reject the notion that there is one universal Truth. They rely on local narratives to produce truths that are more likely to capture the complexity of a situation. Poststructuralists subscribe to the theory that reality both reflects and is constructed through discourses. For example, how social workers speak to their practice in cases of violence against women and their interpretations of the laws and policy that guide them reflect particular discourses. According to Adams (2000), all knowledge is discursively constructed and truth is pluralistic. Poststructuralist feminist epistemology includes several key philosophical concepts including discourse, language, power and subjectivity, some of which I elaborate on here.

Postructuralists believe language is the place where actual and possible forms of social organization and their social and political consequences are defined and contested (Hall 1985: 101). According to this perspective 'reality' is socially constructed as well as produced and reflected through language. When using this outlook, the research focus is not only on the individual's experience but the discourses that shape this experience, which is why this project examines not only social workers' accounts of their work when violence against mothers is present, but also the legislation they are mandated to follow and the policy guidelines that flow from that legislation. I set out to uncover how child welfare discourse, policy and legislation reflect and shape social workers' ideas about their practice. For example, Scourfield's (1996) notion of 'occupational discourse' shows how child welfare policy, legislation and discourse reflect and incorporate dominant discourses such as masculinity and femininity, including women's responsibility for men's violence.

Nicola Gavey (1989: 210) believes that feminist poststructuralism can offer us "a theoretical basis for analyzing the subjectivities of women and men in relation to language, other cultural practices and the material conditions of our lives." It embraces complexity and contradiction and, I would suggest, surpasses theories that offer single-cause explanations of patriarchy and gender relations. It not only gives credence to women's active resistance to patriarchal power as well as our oppression by it, but also offers promising ways of theorizing about change—all of which are important to feminism.

According to Patricia Waugh (2000), poststructuralist approaches represent a more radical change in thinking than that of the other feminist epistemologies. How they

do this is by completely rejecting the possibility of the objective collection of facts and insisting that knowledge is rooted in the values and interests of particular groups (Letherby, 2003). Letherby (2003: 52) sums this up by saying that "the aim of feminism ceases to be the establishment of the feminist truth and [instead] becomes the deconstruction of truth." Feminist poststructuralists are also concerned with reconstruction because they suggest changes to language, language use, discourse and practice, as I do in later stages of this work.

Drawing on the work of Foucault, feminist poststructuralists explore the links between power and knowledge. When power and knowledge are intimately linked, and no one truth exists, there is the possibility of uncovering forms of resistance within subjugated knowledges that can potentially work to eliminate women's oppression, while at the same time addressing and celebrating the diversity and experiences of women regardless of where they may be located. Of particular interest to feminist poststructuralists are rhetoric/reality gaps or 'fault lines,' such as an example discussed earlier: child welfare literature and policies often state it is good practice to include fathers/men in assessments but in practice this rarely occurs. Bringing discourse analysis to bear on these gaps allows one to ask: what discourses are so powerful that they successfully instruct workers to ignore policy and law? Such discourses are often so powerful that they do not have to be spoken or explicit; they are just "understood."

Similar studies have explored these "understood" or "common sense" discourses such as Scourfield's (2003) research on the gendered occupational culture of a child welfare office. Occupational culture can be defined as the ways of talking and thinking about clients that are (and are not) acceptable in the culture of the social work team, and

the approaches that become taken for granted. Scourfield highlighted two gendered discourses: masculinity and femininity. In regard to discourses of femininity, he found both male and female workers equally discussed women as greatly oppressed in the families they worked with. They saw them as oppressed by poverty and especially by men. But despite this feminist consciousness, Scourfield uncovered that when it came to decisions about a child's welfare, workers saw women as being "ultimately responsible for children, in a way that men are just not expected to be" (2008: 2). The workers ascribed to an ideal of gender equality in families, but the families they worked with were seen as so far from equal that it was women who had to be expected to make changes and were seen as ultimately making the choice to stay with abusive men or leave them. Scourfield's work illustrates the usefulness of a feminist poststructural approach for understanding where our experience comes from, why it is contradictory and how it can be changed.

Discourse

There are unlimited numbers of discourses that exist in a society and compete for meaning. Discourses include not only verbal expression and written texts, but the activities of people who produce them and use them and take up the conceptual frames they circulate. In Foucault's view, discourse is "the conjunction between knowledge and power." (1980 cited in Dant, 1991: 21). Gill (1998: 47) describes discourse as "what we know about and speak about, and how we can know and speak about it, it enables us to say and think some things, rather than others, thus shaping our sense of reality." Discourse sets conditions of what kind of talk occurs, and which talkers speak. As

Weedon (1997:26) observed, the weight discourses carry depends on "the range and social power of existing discourses, our access to them and the political strength of the interests they represent."

Strega (1999: 69) states that "discourses function to produce and maintain power relations through their assumptions, their processes of inclusion and exclusion, their imposition of value assumptions and by their suppression of difference." She adds that "a discourse presumes a central reality and pushes to the margins ideas that challenge that reality" (p.70). In the case of child welfare, "failure to protect" is a dominant discourse applied to mothers who stay with a violent partner and other ways of intervening, such as engaging with the perpetrator to assess his ability to change, are so marginalized that there are no discourses in circulation to describe them.

Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis is difficult to define as a method because it can be taken up in so many different ways. Norman Fairclough (1992) posits it as a perspective, a way of approaching and thinking about a problem. Simply speaking, discourse analysis is a research methodology primarily used to study the way power, dominance and inequality are enacted and reproduced by text and talk in particular social and political contexts. According to Fairclough (1992: 232), discourse analysis does not provide absolute answers to a specific problem, but rather it "enables us to understand the conditions behind a specific problem, and have us realize the essence of that problem, and its resolution lies in the very assumptions that enable the existence of the problem in the first place." Critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1995) and feminist poststructural

approaches provide a perspective through which to examine the language in text as well as talk in child welfare themes such as 'failure to protect'.

Data Collection

For this project two types of data were collected: documents relevant to how child welfare works with domestic violence and interviews with child welfare social workers. Each of these types will be discussed in turn.

A.) The Documents

The documents that direct and guide child welfare practice for social workers in Manitoba can be divided into two categories: legislative and policy-oriented. The laws governing the child welfare system are set out in three provincial acts: *The Child and Family Services Act*, *The Adoption Act* and *The Child and Family Authorities Act*. It is these documents that set out for Child and Family Service Authorities, along with social workers and law enforcement, what they can and cannot do to protect children. The second is *The Child and Family Services Standard Manual*, consisting of service and programming guidelines that assist child welfare workers in their work with children and families who enter that system. It is within this manual that one can find the *Safety Assessment and Safety Plan* used by child welfare workers to assess risk to a child and the specialized plan that addresses what a family will do to ensure the immediate safety of children.

There are very few documents that guide social work practice in regards to violence against women. For this project, I selected for analysis the two most relevant documents: *The Manitoba Child and Family Services Act* (2000), which is the mandatory

legislation that guides child welfare work in Manitoba, and the *Safety Assessment and Safety Plan*, an assessment tool that assists social workers when investigating risk of abuse or neglect to a child. It comes in electronic as well as a hard copy format. As I no longer have access to the electronic system, a hard copy was utilized for this project. The rationale for choosing these documents was that I determined them to be the documents most relevant to everyday practice for child welfare workers in cases of violence against mothers. In making my determination, I relied on the following considerations:

- The documents are the ones that the child welfare workers who were interviewed recognized and cited as the most relevant to their practice in these cases.

- As a former child welfare worker, the documents were ones I considered the most relevant to my own practice in violence against women cases.

Child welfare agencies in many provinces, including Manitoba, utilize a risk assessment form as part of a case management approach to child protection work. These assessments provide a systematic framework for gathering information about a child and his or her environment in order to assess any current or future likelihood of harm. More specifically, risk or safety assessments are tools used by intake workers at the reporting/intake phase to measure the immediate risk to a child in order to inform decisions on whether to investigate and remove a child, as well as structuring the timing of child abuse investigations. They are also used when there is a change in circumstances of an ongoing case. The *Manitoba Child and Family Services Act* is the provincial legislation that dictates how the four child welfare authorities in the province of Manitoba assist and intervene with families where child abuse or neglect is suspected. Permission

for utilizing copyrighted material for this legislation was granted within the Canadian Legal Information Institute (CanII) website, a non-profit organization managed by the Federation of Law Societies of Canada whose purpose is to make Canadian law accessible on the Internet.

B). Participant Recruitment

Social workers were recruited by initiating a snowball sampling method, or word of mouth. As I knew many social workers in the field of child welfare, I contacted past colleagues to explain my research project and ask for their participation. The criteria for selecting participants included: interviewees were professional social workers with either a BSW or MSW degree; they were either currently working in the field of child welfare or, if they had left, they had done so within the past two years in order to keep the research current; participants needed experience in working with families where fathers were physically violent towards mothers; and, finally, participants had to be willing and able to share their thoughts, feelings and experiences about their practice in these situations. Respondents were drawn from rural southwestern Manitoba, in particular the city of Brandon, as I wished to study the practice of workers who have been employed at Child and Family Services of Western Manitoba.

All four participants recruited for this study hold a Bachelor of Social Work degree and either currently or previously worked at Child and Family Services of Western Manitoba. All were female between the ages of twenty-seven to thirty-four and possess experience working with cases where violence against women had been present and willing to share these experiences. At the time of the interviews, two social workers

continued to work for child welfare agencies in Manitoba, and two had left the field approximately one and a half years earlier. The two who left had different reasons for leaving the field. One reported that she had left for a new employment opportunity and another sought a position due to funding cutbacks as she was in jeopardy of losing her job at the inception of the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry-Child Welfare Initiative (AJI-CWI). As a result, it was necessary for her to secure a position elsewhere. Three of the participants worked in or continued to work in an urban centre and all participants had been intake workers at one point during their child welfare careers. Three had experience working in a rural area. Interestingly, three participants completed their social work practicum placements in child welfare and this experience resulted in their initial employment within the social work field. The same three reported child welfare as a chosen field to begin their careers. Participants ranged in experience from seven and a half years to two and a half years in child welfare practice.

Interviews: Process and Rationale

In gathering accounts of social workers' experiences in the child welfare system, I chose a method that would enable their stories to be distinct and clear. I conducted in-depth, open-ended, semi-structured audio-taped interviews that loosely followed an interview guide comprised of question areas (Appendix 3). Interviews are appealing to feminist researchers because they offer the researcher access to people's ideas, thoughts and memories in their own words.

Four interviews were conducted for this project. The rationale for a small number of interviews is that the interviews were conducted as a supplement to analyzing child

welfare documents and in order to make observations about the effects of discourses. Similar studies that guided my work also used a small number of interviews, such as Strega's (2004) dissertation and a few others I mention as informing my analysis later in this chapter. Aside from Strega's work, there were no other discourse analysis studies that employed both interview and textual analyses. Most studies rely on only one data source. For example, O'Neill (1998) studied the theoretical literature surrounding wife abuse to extract discourses (such as the discourses of pathology or learned behaviour) to explore how society explains this event but she did not conduct interviews. Nancy Berns (1999) studied several popular women's magazines to discursively examine their portrayal of domestic violence as a private problem that is often the victim's to solve.

Finally, I note that discourse analysis is a time and labour-intensive method of data analysis; one must 'live with' the data. Because of the intensiveness of the method, the only factor within a researcher's control is to keep data to a manageable level.

Ethical Considerations

In the initial stages of my research, as I reflected on the interview aspect of the project, I thought about how similarities in location between interviewer and participants (for example, gender, education and work experience) might influence participants' responses. I projected that our similarities would only increase participants' comfort and ability to share their current practice. To be sure, I incorporated what is referred to as prior consent (see Appendix 2). It includes questions that confirmed that participants understood their rights and responsibilities in taking part in the research. Confidentiality of participant identities was also maintained. At the time, I invited respondents to

express any discomfort they may have had regarding the interview or the questions being asked. Finally, I verbalized to participants that they were free to answer or not answer any question during the interview as well as having the right to terminate their participation at any time.

It is important to consider power relations as an ethical consideration in the interview relationship. While I began each interview with an interview guide that consisted of a list of questions that I developed for the interviews (see Appendix 3), I invited participants to ask questions they might have at any time throughout the process. The prepared questions were only used as a guide and questioning was tailored to each interviewee. The purpose was to assist respondents in feeling more comfortable in sharing their standpoints and experiences as well as following the feminist principles of egalitarian research relationships.

Another equally important issue involved my own self disclosure during interviews. I revealed personal information regarding my own practice and experience where I determined it was appropriate, for example, when I was attempting to make interviewees more at ease. My rationale for doing so was that I was concerned that social workers could be apprehensive to open up for fear of being judged. By sharing some of my own practice challenges I reduced these possibilities. Although one can only speculate on these dynamics at this point, I do believe that disclosure used properly and in the initial stages of the interview was successful, therefore enriching the data collected. Finally, I acknowledge that some amount of disclosure matches my own style as a practitioner, so as a researcher it was quite comfortable to continue along the same lines.

Once participants read the information sheet (see Appendix 1) to familiarize themselves with the aspects of the research and agreed to participate, I scheduled a later date to meet and more fully explain the purpose of the study and its processes and to obtain informed consent (see Appendix 2). As I believe it is critical to offer alternatives, participants were given the choice of where the interview would be held. Three interviews took place in my home and one took place at a participant's home. The rationale for providing choices was to give participants a sense of control and input into the process and to ensure that confidentiality could be maintained.

At the outset of the interviews, I reviewed the nature of the research with participants, reminded that it would be audio-taped, and that all audio recording would be transcribed. Interviews on average lasted from one hour to two hours depending on how much each participant was prepared to share. It was during this time that social workers were informed of the guidelines for confidentiality and anonymity. Participants were assured that they had the option of withdrawing from the research process at any time, as participation was purely on a voluntary basis. Audio tapes and transcripts would be strictly confidential, excluding any names or identifying information of participants and instead would be identified by a pseudonym chosen by the participant. Client and colleague names were also blackened out on the transcriptions. The transcriber hired to complete transcriptions signed a confidentiality agreement to further ensure the privacy of participants (see Appendix 4).

Participants were also assured that they could not be identified in the reporting of the findings. All identifying information was excluded. In its place, respondents were asked to choose a pseudonym that they wished to be identified by. Tapes and transcripts

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were stored in a locked filing cabinet located in the researcher's office and were shredded at the completion of the project. All electronic files were password protected with the researcher only knowing the password. A field journal was utilized where I recorded notes on my observations make prior to and after each interview was completed. As I am an experienced social worker, and child welfare practice can be emotionally-charged work, support along with debriefing was offered. I remained vigilant to participants' needs during the interviews and alert for signs of distress. Participants were provided with contact information for local Employee Assistance Programs for professional consultation and support services.

Upon completion of the interviews, all participants were offered the opportunity to review their transcripts and have the opportunity to clarify any of the information they provided during the interview. All participants agreed to do so. Hard copies were printed of each transcript and mailed to each interviewee. They were asked to review their transcripts for accuracy and edit any sections they desired or offer any additional comments. Interestingly, few edits were made, and only one participant added further comments to her original responses. Workers verbalized that they were mostly pleased with their initial responses. The only glitch experienced was in one section where the tape recorder could not pick up one interviewee's answer and she could not remember her initial response. The participant was then asked to give another response to this question and she was able to answer with little hesitation.

Data analysis was a difficult undertaking. As feminist researchers point out, we have to interpret respondents' words in some way while realizing that these words can be interpreted in a number of ways (Harding, 1992). I believe now that including

participants in the data analysis, and thus the direction and focus of the project, fulfilled the goal of following feminist research practices (DeVault, 1999). If one were to go ahead and analyze data without offering participants the opportunity for insight or clarification, this may stifle their perspectives or lead to a misinterpretation of the data. Although this process turned out to be more time consuming, the authenticity and accuracy it offers the results was worth it.

Once transcripts were sent back with their edits completed, I phoned each participant with any questions I had regarding their responses and sought their confirmation and feedback to my preliminary data findings. The rationale behind this 'member checking' was to ensure I had a true understanding of their responses. Finally, participants were offered a copy of their transcribed interview as well as a copy of the completed thesis for their own records. Interviewees were interested in receiving a personal copy of the finished thesis, but not copies of their edited transcripts.

Additional Ethical Considerations

All research must take into consideration any potential harm that could come to interviewees as a result of participating in the research process. As has been previously mentioned, plans were outlined for participants in order to ensure anonymity and confidentiality during data collection as well has how their data would be stored. This included participants' written, informed consent, which was obtained prior to interviewing. Participants were ensured respect and this researcher provided her best effort to practice sensitivity to the women researched.

I acknowledge that sharing practice with the fear of being judged as a competent or incompetent practitioner had the potential to be an obstacle for participants. I made every accommodation to help social workers feel at ease. For example, I began the interview with generic, simple questions to establish rapport with participants. In the instance that social workers experienced difficulty during or after an interview, as I am a trained clinical social worker, my services were offered and debriefing part of the process at the end of each interview. No participant appeared to experience any challenge, but in each case all participants did have a desire to debrief and receive feedback from the interviewer. As I have been a child welfare worker myself, I know firsthand that working with women and children who are at risk of violence at the hands of a male partner can generate feelings of urgency and powerlessness. As previously mentioned, participants were given other options in regards to support, such as referrals to local Employee Assistance Programs. The EAP website address as well as telephone contact information were given for participants to utilize at their own discretion should they wish.

Initially, as I reflected on the interviews, I considered other ethical issues that could potentially arise. For example, feminist researchers are typically sharing intimate aspects of participants' lives. At times they may want to detach from their research participants, especially when they want to maintain their privacy in regards to their own personal experiences (Wilson, 1999). Two such issues I considered prior to the interviews were: will I keep myself in a position of neutrality, and how will I respond to questions about my own views on violence against women? After careful consideration, I decided I would not remain neutral, instead choosing to speak to any information I heard that seemed to condone violence against women. I viewed it as an opportunity to share my

views with other social workers who have not studied this subject as extensively as I have. In fact, when asked, I did share my views and experiences in practice even though initially I set out not to. Although I set out to not volunteer my views, I found myself doing so to support an answer from a participant if we shared a similar outlook. I did not volunteer my opinion, however, before a participant had the opportunity to share their own response or if our opinions differed. My rationale included not wanting to appear argumentative or confuse an interviewee's confidence in any way.

Discourse Analysis Methods – Documents

The first step in analysing the documents was to establish their history and context. It is necessary to do this in some detail to reflect the local and particular nature of the analysis, while at the same time providing an opportunity for considering larger forces and discourses that are at play in these particular documents coming into existence at a particular time. Each of the selected texts was then examined for the presence and/or absence of discourses specific to violence against a child's mother or primary caregiver. Where these were present, I examined specific language use and positioning. I noted which words, concepts and ideas were included and which were excluded in any references to violence against mothers, including references through concepts such as "domestic violence". Relying to some extent on the work of Strega (2004), the specific questions that I asked as I examined the texts included:

- Where did the texts require inferences to be made, i.e. where and how was the reader/listener/speaker required to 'fill in the gaps'?

- What assumptions were embedded in the texts?

- What other discourses was it necessary to draw on in order for the text to make sense?

I also utilized three questions suggested by Fairclough (1995) for textual analysis:

- Which ideas are foregrounded and emphasized?

- What are the implied or suggested meanings in what is present?

- What information is absent even though it would seem to be relevant?

Data Analysis Methods - Interviews

Although mechanisms through which discourse operates can be observed in both textual strategies and language practices, in my analysis of the interviews I was particularly interested in how social workers speak to their practice in cases involving violence against mothers. My intent was to uncover how the language we use reflects, supports, resists or questions father exclusion and mother blaming discourses and evidence of these discourses in operation. I looked for whether, and the extent to which, the participants referenced legislation or policy as the rationale for their actions, and which legislation or policy they referenced if/when they did so. How did participants' understanding of law and policy guide their practice in cases of violence against women? Did participants practice in contravention of law and policy? If the latter, how did they explain their practice?

I noted any instances where participants spoke directly of mothers 'failing to protect.' I paid careful attention to practices of inclusion/exclusion by social workers when working with fathers and mothers. Specifically, I searched for examples of mother blaming and father excluding such as:

- Instances where the mother is held responsible for the harm brought to her children even when an identified male is the abuser. For example, do workers hold women responsible, not only for the care and protection of their children but were mothers in any way held responsible for the violence itself, i.e. causing it or failing to stop it?

- Examination of the language workers use to describe wife abuse. For example, did participants refer to violence against mothers as "domestic violence" and/or 'family violence"?

- Attribution of responsibility. For example, did participants appear to be curious about why men hit mothers or only about why women stay?

- Comparison of workers' attempts to interview fathers and mothers when an allegation of domestic violence had been made made. Did social workers speak of men having rights, for example, did they reference men having the right to not talk to social workers? Alternatively, did participants appear to expect mothers to talk to them?

- Uncovering "fault lines" and gaps between rhetoric and reality. Child welfare practice states it is good practice to include fathers/men in their assessments but the literature suggests it rarely occurs. Did participants assess fathers/men as risks or assets or not at all?

- Did workers express fear of male perpetrators?

- Was there evidence of gendered power relations? For example, did social workers seem to be reluctant to speak directly of men's violence towards women?

My analysis began with describing what I observed and what I was told by the participants. I compared what participants said and looked for similarities in what participants shared as well as differences between participants. Particular attention was given to the participants' individual experiences as well as the presence or absence in their talk of discourses that allow or even mandate the practice of fathers being excluded and mothers being blamed to occur. I drew on the participants' narratives to develop a list of key words, phrases and relevant quotes. I also drew on my field journal, where I had recorded notes prior to, during and after each interview is completed. In presenting the interview analysis I relied heavily on representative quotes in order to allow the workers' voices to be highlighted in the analysis.

Assessment and Evaluation

This project employs a feminist poststructuralist discourse analysis to examine discourse in the field of child welfare where violence against women is present. I employed feminist research principles when collecting and analyzing both documents and interviews. Research conducted using feminist methodology "refutes the traditional patriarchal view that research must be truly objective" (King, 1993, p.20) and thus confirms Rosenau's (1992) ideas about the importance of intuition and emotion in analysis. King (1993) adds that feminist research must value the subjective and consider it essential to the research process. Therefore, I did not use so-called 'objective' means of assessing my research, but instead relied on feminist ideas about assessment and evaluation. The issues of rigour and validity in a poststructuralist project such as this one

also require a different lens, just like the idea of 'method' as used by poststructuralists is different from traditional scientific method. Poststructuralist inquiry does not follow a fixed, logical set of rules but instead looks more to personal experience, subjective judgment, emotion, intuition and imagination (Rosenau, 1992). I propose that my research can be best assessed and evaluated by considering its usefulness and reliability, as well as the extent to which I adhered to feminist research principles.

It was important to me to produce a work that could be useful upon its completion and provide the reader with constructive questions and ideas around men's violence towards mothers. I measure the concept of usefulness by the extent to which my research is able to offer insight, to both social workers and women around men's violence toward women and by the extent to which social workers take up my research in considering the invisibility of men and the responsibilities of mothers in their practice.

I addressed the issue of reliability through using a range of sources to inform my interpretations and analysis, including a thorough review of the relevant literature, consultation with participants to confirm or deny my own interpretations (a process sometimes referred to as member checking) as well as ongoing consultation with my advisor and another committee member. When interviews were completed and the personal stories of workers transcribed on paper, I asked respondents if the transcriptions accurately reflected their experiences and their perceptions of the discourse. A final means of testing reliability was leaving a clear audit trail, so that the choices I made in my data collection and analysis can be followed by the reader. An audit trail can be defined as "the detailed record of the methods and decisions made by qualitative researchers, before during and after the research process" (Holloway, 1997: 25). This

includes a description of the setting, events and activities as well as a rationale for the research being done. Margarete Sandelowski (1986) and Tina Koch (1994) call it the 'decision trail' because it traces the decision making process of the researcher. An audit trail consists of the following elements:

- A description of design with the aims and intentions of the research

- A record of the methods and procedures

- A description of the data collection and analysis processes

- A record of decisions about ethical issues

- Excerpts from the data (such as sections of quotes from interviews and field notes)

    (Holloway, 1997: 26)

An audit trail ensures the trustworthiness of a qualitative research project through detailed description of methods and procedures. A clear audit trail that documents the entire research process provides a guide for the reader to understand what was researched and how it was researched, establishing how the researcher reached the conclusions that she did. Beth Rodgers and K.V. Cowles (1993: 62) believe that through maintaining a quality audit trail, researchers can "demonstrate the quality, credibility and rigor of their work." I believe that I maintained a clear audit trail.

In evaluating feminist research, one must pay attention to the relationships and power imbalances that exist between the researcher and her participants. As stated earlier, feminist researchers work hard to minimize the hierarchical positions common to research relationships. This was realized through a number of different strategies. First, I acknowledged the privileged position I occupy due to my background, education and

social class. In the case of this project, difference in social locations between researcher and participants was minimal, as the social workers I interviewed occupy locations similar to my own. Secondly, participants were included in the choice of the setting in which the interviews were held. Thirdly, the use of member checks with participants was employed to determine if the analysis was parallel with the participants' notions of their reality. According to feminist theory, outsiders to a community, which often includes researchers, should not be determining what constitutes reality. As was mentioned earlier, I am a former child welfare worker myself, which gave me an insider status in the project. Many of these strategies I employed are not all that different in other forms of qualitative research, but a feminist project must begin with the premise that women as a group are oppressed and then develop a research framework that allows the researcher to analyze the problem within the context of women's oppression. In the next chapter, I demonstrate how I have done this by presenting my data analysis.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS- Responsibility and 'Missing in Action' Confirmed

In this chapter I demonstrate through my analysis that dominant discourses of 'fathers missing in action' and 'mothers failing to protect' are embedded in Manitoba child welfare legislation and policy and explicit in how workers speak to their practice. I explored these discourses by examining relevant legislation and policy coupled with an analysis of social worker narratives. I demonstrate that my early assumptions that the rhetoric and actions produced by these discourses are oppressive to women and lead to an ongoing failure to hold men who perpetrate violence against mothers responsible for their actions. I establish that fathers/men must be included in the frame of our child welfare lens in order to diminish risk and increase safety for mothers and children. Finally, I shed light on the inattention to fathers/men within the Manitoba child welfare system. I believe that men's 'missing in action' status creates injustice for mothers. My motivation for producing this research is to affect social work practice in child welfare to the extent that those working in this field will regularly include 'fathers in the frame' of their assessments and interventions.

It seemed likely from my discussions with colleagues prior to beginning this research that the results would demonstrate what I had predicted: that in the accounts of child welfare workers, men are not considered either as risks or assets in cases of woman abuse. I was uncertain, however, whether the gulf would be found in the policy and legislation that guide social work practice or uncovered in how child welfare workers spoke regarding their practice. As it turned out, I found both. Of particular interest, but perhaps not surprisingly, I found that all four study participants were unable to cite any

specific policy or law that guided their practice. Three were able to recall where relevant policy was located (for example, the Intake Module under Safety Assessments and Maltreatment Windows). Two participants stated they trusted that the child welfare mandate must include violence against women, their rationale being that child welfare agencies would not be acting upon this information if they were not required to do so. Two workers were able to recall that the Intake Module contained a Safety Assessment and Safety Plan that they were required to fill out, and they believed that there was some inquiry into woman abuse contained within this electronic document. Workers, then, did not view their practice as necessarily being guided by any particular policy, other than the Intake Module that contains the Safety Assessments and Safety Plans that are mandatory for child welfare workers to complete when there is any risk to a child. In other words, according to the workers themselves, legislation and policy did not define for them what their practice should be. In the absence of specific case direction from law or policy, workers rely on dominant discourses to guide their practice.

A not-so-unexpected finding was participants tended to concentrate their interventions on abused mothers as they saw them as primarily responsible for protecting their children from violent situations, much as I had speculated. Only one participant had actually included a father as part of her assessment and planning during a case where domestic violence was cited as a concern. Others acknowledged their lack of attention to the visible male perpetrator, even verbalizing how unfair this casework was, but readily accepting this as 'just the way it is.' Women have traditionally been held responsible for the emotional well-being of children, and as I noted in my literature review, this continues today. This discourse of women's responsibility is a significant influence on

how child welfare responds when children are exposed to domestic violence. To set the stage for an exploration of these key findings from participant interviews, I begin with an analysis of relevant child welfare law and policy.

The Documents: The Manitoba Child Welfare System

In Canada, under the *Federal Constitution Act*, provinces are assigned responsibility for child

welfare, including setting legislation and overseeing the systems that govern child welfare services. Provincial and territorial legislation governs child welfare services, which are provided by local child and family service agencies. In Manitoba, child protection legislation is primarily the *Child and Family Services Act*, although in some instances the federal *Criminal Code* is also relevant. These documents define what kinds of behaviour and which conditions are so harmful or potentially harmful that it is deemed necessary for the state to intervene in the family to protect the well-being of children.

History and Context

In order to offer some background into the shaping of the current system, it is important to explain that a significant restructuring of the Manitoba child welfare system occurred in 2003, before this research project began. The Manitoba Aboriginal Justice Inquiry concluded in 1991, (Hamilton & Sinclair, 1991) that Aboriginal people had not been well served by the existing child welfare system and recommended major changes to give Aboriginal people more control over the lives and well-being of children in their communities. In response, the Government of Manitoba formed the Aboriginal Justice

Inquiry-Child Welfare Initiative (AJI-CWI), a joint initiative with the Manitoba Métis Federation, the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs (representing the southern First Nations) and Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak (representing the northern First Nations). These groups worked together to jointly develop and implement a plan to restructure the child welfare system. As a result, services for First Nations and Métis children and families transferred from general child and family service agencies to Aboriginal agencies throughout the province.

Then, on November 22, 2003, *The Child and Family Services Act* established four child welfare authorities in Manitoba. The four authorities are responsible for the delivery of child and family services throughout the province. Now families have the ability to choose the authority that they prefer to provide them service through coordinated province-wide intake services. Each child welfare region in Manitoba has one agency assigned the responsibility for intake services and it is termed a Designated Intake Agency. That agency acts on behalf of all four authorities to conduct the Authority Determination Protocol to determine which authority is responsible for ongoing services, if necessary. Designated Intake Agencies also provide regular ongoing child and family services on behalf of the authority that governs them. One such designated agency is Child and Family Services of Western Manitoba, the agency which employed not only myself during my child welfare career but, more importantly, the participants in this project.

As a result of these changes, all Child and Family Service (CFS) workers must follow the guidelines set out in the Child and Family Service Standards Manual. Volume 1 of the CFS Standards Manual deals with Agency Standards. In this manual CFS

agencies are provided with practice standards that determine how a CFS worker will manage a case with any family or children who come into that system. Although I mention it here to give the reader an understanding of the overall system, this policy in its entirety is not examined as part of this project. Instead, the category of these standards most relevant to practice in situations of mother abuse was analyzed: the Safety Assessment and Safety Plan. My analysis in this section concentrates specifically on how the concepts of father invisibility and mother responsibility are positioned in legislation and policy.

The Child and Family Services Act

The Child and Family Services Act does not specifically refer to violence towards women. In fact, the only reference is an implied one found in the description of what constitutes a "child in need of protection." One item in this description is that "a child is likely to suffer harm due to behaviour, condition or domestic environment…" (Child and Family Services Act, Manitoba, pt.5 & 17, 2008). Terms such as "domestic violence" or "family violence" are not used.

   The Act opens with a "Declaration of Principles" that outlines the principles or values that guide services to children and families in Manitoba. These guidelines position families' and children's wellbeing as the first and most important consideration. Legislation, policy and practice standards are all oriented around the same set of Declaration of Principles, which include the following (Child and Family Services Act, Manitoba, pt. 1 & 2, 2008):

- the best interests of children are a fundamental responsibility of society.

- the family is the basic unit and its well-being should be supported and preserved.

- the family is the basic source of care, nurture and acculturation of children and parents have the primary responsibility to ensure the well-being of their children.

- families and children have the right, to the least interference with their affairs to the extent compatible with the best interests of children and the responsibilities of society.

- children have the right to a continuous family environment in which they can flourish.

- families and children are entitled to be informed of their rights and to participate in the decisions affecting those rights.

- families are entitled to receive preventive and supportive services directed to preserving the family unit.

- families are entitled to services which respect their cultural and linguistic heritage.

- decisions to remove or place children should be based on the best interests of the child and not on the basis of the family's financial status.

- communities have a responsibility to promote the best interests of their children and families and have the right to participate in services to their families and children.

- Indian bands are entitled to the provision of child and family services in a manner which respects their unique status as aboriginal peoples.

As already acknowledged, *The Child and Family Services Act* positions children's wellbeing as the most important consideration. Parents and legal guardians have the main responsibility for the well-being of their children. However, the legislation recognizes that families may need support and help in carrying out this responsibility, and that there are circumstances under which the state may need to intervene for the protection and safety of children, such as when there is maltreatment or the risk of maltreatment. What I found most intriguing is that the legislation points to the community as having the responsibility to step in should a parent be unable to provide for

what is in the best interests of that child. It does not directly cite the province's responsibility to ensure children's wellbeing. Strega (2004: 58) notes a similar finding in her research into the B.C. child welfare system, where the state began to "download state or provincial responsibilities onto communities."

I include these principles for two reasons: first, to set the stage for the values the Manitoba child welfare legislation is built on, and second, to point out some important themes relevant to my analysis. For example, talk about families having 'rights' is explained to the reader through the use of the word 'entitled.' But these rights are presented as gender neutral. There are no rights specific to mothers or to fathers per se. When rights are listed for 'families' it creates the impression that perhaps women and men are treated equally under the *Child and Family Services Act*. But as I will demonstrate, this is not the reality.

Immediately following these principles, there is a section of definitions regarding the best interests of the child legislation. I began my text examination with the most relevant sections of *The Child and Family Services Act*, starting with the definition of "abuse." One statute germane to my analysis is the reference "failure to protect." This discourse is enshrined as an operating principle in Section 1(1), "Definitions," where "abuse" means:

> an act or omission by any person where the act or omission results in:
>
> (a) physical injury to the child.
>
> (b) emotional disability of a permanent nature in the child or is likely to result in such a disability, or
>
> (c) sexual exploitation of the child with or without the child's consent. (Child and Family Services Act, Manitoba, pt. 1 & 2, 2008)

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The next section of the Act that points to violence against women, again not directly, occurs in the "best interests criteria" of subsection 2(1). It highlights that abuse directed towards a child's primary caregiver may put a child in need of protection. It states (Child and Family Services Act, Manitoba, pt. 1 & 2, 2008.):

> The best interests of the child shall be the paramount consideration to the director, an authority, the children's advocate, an agency and a court in all proceedings to determine whether a child is in need of protection, and in determining the best interests of the child all relevant matters shall considered including:
>
> (a) the child's opportunity to have a parent-child relationship as a wanted and needed member within a family structure;
>
> (b) the mental, emotional, physical and educational needs of the child and the appropriate care or treatment, or both, to meet such needs;
>
> (c) the child's mental, emotional and physical stage of development;
>
> (d) the child's sense of continuity and need for permanency with the least possible disruption;
>
> (e) the merits and risks of any plan proposed by the agency that would be caring for the child compared with the merits and the risks of the child returning to or remaining within the family;
>
> (f) the views and preferences of the child where they can be reasonably ascertained;
>
> (g) the effect upon the child or any delay in the final disposition of the proceedings; and
>
> (h) the child's cultural, linguistic, racial and religious heritage.

As the reader can see, no direct reference is made regarding abuse of a child's mother, father or other caregiver. However, it does cover "the mental, emotional, physical and educational needs of the child and the appropriate care or treatment," which can be and is used to describe how emotional and psychological needs are seen as part of "best interests of the child" criteria. For example, although it is not documented directly

in the policy, violence against a child's mother is considered emotional abuse of a child by Manitoba child welfare agencies. But one will not find a direct policy statement that mother abuse can be emotionally abusive to children, despite this being what I was taught and what I implemented as a child welfare worker. This discovery is also contrary to existing child welfare literature. In fact, the literature states that children who witness violence against their mother exhibit symptoms similar to children who have been physically, sexually or emotionally abused (Hershorn & Rosenbaum, 1985: Wolf & Mosk, 1983; Jaffe, Wolfe, Wilson & Zak, 1986, all cited in Echlin & Marshall, 1995). Research suggests that exposure to woman abuse can result in internalizing behaviour problems for children, such as depression, hyperactivity and delinquency (Jaffe, Wolfe & Wilson, 1990, cited in Echlin & Marshall, 1995). So then why is it not mentioned in the legislation?

I can only speculate as to the rationale for this contradiction between research and policy. Possible explanations include: the policy is outdated and has not caught up to current practice; and/or the policy is intentionally broad to allow child welfare agencies flexibility in how they work with children and families. Or could this be one of the gaps between rhetoric and reality that I thought I might find?

The next piece of the Act examined that pertains to violence against women is Section 17(2) of the Child and Family Services Act. It contains "Illustrations of a child in need" that outline a non-exclusive list of reasons why the child welfare system might intervene to protect children. Included in the list are cases when a child is considered in need of protection. Section 17 (1) states:

> A child is in need of protection where the life, health or emotional well being of the child is endangered by the act or omission of a person.

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Section 17 (2) further states:

> (1) a child is in need of protection where the child
>
> (a) is without adequate care, supervision or control;
>
> (b) is in the care, custody, control or charge of a person
>
>> (i) who is unable or unwilling to provide adequate care, supervision or control of the child, or
>>
>> (ii) Whose conduct endangers or might endanger the life, health or emotional well-being of the child, or
>>
>> (iii) Who neglects or refuses to provide or obtain proper medical or other remedial care or treatment necessary for the health or wellbeing of the child or who refuses to permit such care or treatment to be provided to the child when the care or treatment is recommended by a duly qualified medical practitioner;
>
> (c) is abused or is in danger of being abused;
>
> (d) is beyond the control of a person who has the care, custody, control or charge of the child;
>
> (e) is likely to suffer harm or injury due to the behaviour, condition, domestic environment or associations of the child or of a person having care, custody, control or charge of the child;
>
> (f) is subjected to aggression or sexual harassment that endangers the life, health or emotional well-being of the child;
>
> (g) being under the age of 12 years, is left unattended and without reasonable provision being made for the supervision and safety of the child; or
>
> (h) is the subject, or is about to become the subject, of an unlawful adoption under *The Adoption Act* or of a sale under section 84. (Child and Family Services Act, Manitoba, pt.3. 17, 2008)

One point of interest in Section 1 (b) (ii), which addresses emotional abuse of a child, alludes to parental conduct by stating, "whose conduct endangers or might endanger the life, health or emotional well-being of the child." It positions emotional

abuse as being of equal importance beside all other forms of abuse. Yet, I know from my practice experience that emotional abuse is not acted upon as intently as other, more obvious forms of child abuse. My speculations about the reasons for this contradiction in the text include: child welfare agencies lack training in how to intervene and assess for emotional abuse; or no clear policy exists linking emotional abuse of a child to violence against his/her mother. Or could it be that because of women's subordinate position in Canadian society it does not have to be mentioned?

The next section of the Child and Family Services Act is essentially silent with regard to references to violence against women. As previously stated, no direct reference to domestic violence appears. The only indirect reference to a child's domestic environment which I interpret as naming intimate partner violence occurs in Section 17 (2) (e):

> a child is in need of protection where the child:
>
> (e) is likely to suffer harm or injury due to the behaviour, condition, domestic environment or associations of the child or of a person having care, custody, control or charge of the child.

At first glance, one may not even interpret this policy as referencing violence against a mother but it is the closest the legislation comes to stating violence against a child's primary caregiver, usually their mother, constitutes a child in need of protection.

The next theme I scanned the legislation for was any direct reference to 'failure to protect' and any definition or example explaining what it means. I was surprised to find that no direct reference to 'failure to protect' even exists. So where did this concept come from if not from the law dictating child welfare? How did "failure to protect" become the standard concern when child welfare intervenes in cases of violence against

mothers? How did a man beating a mother transforming into a mother's 'failure to protect' – a transformation that results in changing mothers from victims into abusers. Although it is theoretically possible for men as well as women to be accused of 'failure to protect' when policies like this are in place, researchers in the United States, where this term is more widely used, did not find a single instance of a man being prosecuted for his failure to protect his children from an abusive mother (Davidson, 1995, cited in Strega et. al., 2007). In the Canadian context, Lothian (2002) searched for examples of failure to protect in Canadian criminal prosecutions and also could not find a single instance where this strategy has been used in regards to men (cited in Strega, et. al. 2007). To begin to answer these questions, we must consider how such discourses become dominant, continue and how this blends into violence against mothers in child welfare.

Dominant Discourse

A discourse becomes dominant when it is accepted as truth and accepted as 'common sense.' The discourse that has been accepted and functions as 'true' and common sense when mothers are abused is the discourse "mothers failing to protect." Workers and others participate in the creation of this as a common sense discourse by making a series of links to other ideas, concepts and discourses in order for the concept of failure to protect to make sense. For example, in my time as a child welfare worker, I fully accepted a mother's 'failure to protect' as the appropriate response to domestic violence right from the first time I was provided direction to assess if a mother was prepared to ask her violent partner to leave and how this would become the deciding factor of her ability to protect her children from witnessing violence. As I reflect back, I remember that

domestic violence was only seen as harmful to a child's wellbeing if children witnessed the abuse; by hearing or seeing it. Mothers who did not keep the perpetrator away (so he did not have an opportunity to beat her in front of her children) were considered 'non-protective.' It was not until I learned of an alternative discourse that I began to question "so why don't we evaluate and offer assistance and ultimately hold accountable the visible male perpetrator who is causing the risk in the first place"? From this standpoint, I began to see case planning that involved fathers/men in these cases to make much more sense. Clearly, as Scourfield (2003) illustrated in his research and as I discussed previously, child welfare workers must be relying on *something* besides law and policy in order to blame mothers and ignore men. This project found this to be true as no reference to failure to protect in the legislation or policy exists, yet participants consistently indicated that it is the dominant way to intervene. Strega (2004: 213) notes "when policy fails to contain explicit directions, workers rely upon and draw upon hegemonic and dominant discourses in order to know how to proceed correctly."

A foundational assumption of discourse analysis is that language is constructive and not just descriptive. In other words, language constructs how we understand 'reality' rather than just providing a description of 'reality.' In the case of violence against a child's mother, the reality that is constructed is one of a 'mother's failure to protect' rather than 'a man assaulting a mother' or any other alternative perspective. A basic assumption of feminist discourse analysis is that language constructs reality to the advantage of the dominant and the disadvantage of the marginalized. Taking these assumptions together allows the observation that the discourse of 'failure to protect' ultimately exists to serve men rather than mothers.

Science is a powerful discourse and it is no surprise that it is the discourse most drawn upon to justify the "failure to protect" perspective. For example, although we know that each child's response to violence varies and that children are harmed by witnessing other modes of violence such as playing violent video games or being exposed to dangerous and often violent neighborhoods, studies alleging particular harm from 'witnessing' proliferate (Magen, 1999). A second example is found in how the theory of an intergenerational transmission of abuse is used to create anxiety about children witnessing: if boys see their fathers beating their mothers they will most likely grow up to abuse their wives, or if girls witness their mothers being beaten they find themselves in similar circumstances in adulthood. Having worked in the area of violence against women most of my career I have found this not to be true – some people end up repeating similar patterns but more do not. My experience is confirmed by considerable research (see, for example, Kaufman and Ziegler's (1987) meta-analysis of several studies), yet the intergenerational transmission of abuse is consistently presented as scientific fact.

Dominant ways of describing reality are but just one way of understanding a phenomenon and not necessarily the best or the only way to understand it. For example, domestic violence can be constructed as men beating mothers in front of their children rather than mother's failure to protect her children. But because violence against a child's mother is routinely transformed in child welfare into a mother's 'failure to protect,' I suggest that there is a dominant discourse at work. The particular way of looking at men's violence against mothers that is embodied in 'failure to protect' is never seen as only one way of looking at a phenomena, but instead is seen as 'common sense.'

In the next section, I examine the second policy document, the Safety Assessment and Safety Plan that is used to determine the level of risk to a child who may be in need of protection. This particular text makes direct reference to domestic violence and provides an example to back up my earlier argument that the problem of violence against women in child welfare is indeed gendered.

Safety/Risk Assessment

Child and Family Services social workers are expected to assess the level of risk to children throughout the case management process to determine the priority that a case should be given. The purpose of the Safety Assessment is to assign cases to particular risk categories so that plans of action may be developed and a child welfare agency can ensure they have met minimum standards to protect children. Workers are obliged since the inception of the electronic Intake Module to initially enter all cases onto this system and complete electronic Safety Assessments depending on the issues brought forward in the case. But it can also provide other comforts in reassuring child welfare workers that they are meeting minimum standards. As Strega (2000: 38) points out, applying risk assessment, risk management and risk reduction strategies may provide workers with some insurance against being blamed "should something go awry." This begins with the Safety Assessment at Intake when issues and concerns presented are said to indicate whether a child is at risk of suffering harm or injury and therefore whether a child may be in immediate need of protection. High, medium, low and no risk categories determine a worker's expected response time as do client contact standards based on the level the case is assessed at. Once entered into the electronic Intake Module system, the program sets

firm guidelines for workers to follow in regards to case planning and practice as well as standards for case documentation. The form consists of eighteen items, only one of which makes specific reference to violence against women. This lone reference is worded as follows:

> 16. Caregiver(s) may be a victim of domestic violence that affects caregiver's ability to care for and/or protect children from imminent, moderate to severe harm.

The categories of 'yes,' 'no,' 'not applicable' or 'more information needed' are offered as choices. Once a category is selected, the Intake Module automatically provides case standards in the form of drop-down windows to ensure child safety is being addressed and child welfare worker response is appropriate, given the category in which the risk falls. This piece of policy provides an excellent example of how the problem of domestic violence is gendered. The language of caregiver implies a woman (usually), and she is only seen as having rights when issues in the home affect her parenting abilities. It would appear that a woman being beaten is only seen as harmful when it affects her ability to care for a child. Beating and victimizing a woman in and of itself does not appear to require child welfare intervention, at least according to policy embodied in the Intake Module.

As mentioned previously, risk management involves measuring risk and assigning cases to various categories of risk, and by doing so it also extracts families from the social and political context in which they live. As Strega (2004:100) points out, "it is difficult, if not impossible, to 'insert the social' into risk assessment techniques. Therefore, matters of poverty, race and gender can disappear, and the child welfare gaze remains firmly fixed on the individual failures of individual parents—usually mothers."

In addition, gender neutral terminology such as 'domestic violence' makes it impossible to notice who is committing the violence and who is being victimized.

At first glance, this reference to domestic violence seems appropriate and most likely helpful in keeping women safe. But as is necessary with discourse analysis, I spent much time poring over these items. As my feminist research lens developed, I began to see this criterion from a different vantage point. Was it possible that this focus on the victim, who the majority of the time is the mother, contributes to the child welfare inquiry focusing most of the time on women? I began to speculate how different practice might look if the policy required that the inquiry begin with the person who is perpetrating the violence in the first place. Is this, yet again, the gap between rhetoric and reality I thought I might uncover?

At the same time, the Safety Assessment and Safety Plan does contain a category that can be used to assess a violent perpetrator's behaviour towards his partner. Category 4 states: "The behaviour of the caregiver(s) is violent and out of control." I only faintly recall this category from my time in practice, as it was not used in my experience as a child welfare worker, confirming in my mind its lack of authority. Also, I cannot recall ever choosing this category for a case that involved violence against a mother. If it is chosen for cases involving violence towards mothers, the gender neutral term "caregiver" nonetheless gives the worker an image of a mother, as 'caregiver' is not a term usually assigned to fathers (an interesting point in itself). I suggest that the gender neutral language of 'caregiver,' rather than being gender inclusive, actually contributes to the child welfare focus on mothers and rendering men and fathers invisible.

Language in the Documents

One area where policy is consistent is the use of gender neutral language throughout. In the Child and Family Services Act, the term "person" is used when describing what constitutes a child in need of protection and in the Safety Assessment "caregiver" is used when referring to either who is a victim or a perpetrator of violence. The gendered terms 'mother' or 'father' are never used and, as a result, the gender specificity of woman abuse remains hidden. Strega (2004: 165) stresses that the neutrality of language "masks subtle inequalities and the existence of parenting relationships which are often divided by gender, and allows child welfare to avoid turning their gaze towards men." She adds that these same men may be considered to be parents when their right to contact, custody and access to children is under consideration (Strega, 2004).

At the end of my analysis of the text, I had discoveries I expected to find and others which came as a surprise. I set out expecting to find gender neural language to describe violence against women. What I did not expect was no direct reference to domestic violence at all within the current statutes. In other words, I expected to find domestic violence mentioned as being emotionally abusive to children, but did not. What I have come to learn with certainty is a dominant discourse is at work when child welfare practice does not follow legislation because it is so powerful it does not have to. This lack of clarity speaks to what and who is considered a priority and the current child welfare policy proves parallel to the dominant discourses; mothers themselves are only in need of protection and have rights in their homes when abuse they are subjected to impairs their ability to parent. Ultimately, the legislation and policy supports the dominant discourses of mothers being responsible and men being excluded and how child

welfare workers speak to their practice also contain these themes. But they do not view their practice as being guided by any particular text.

Several findings confirmed my earlier assumption that I would uncover the gap between rhetoric vs. reality. The first example comes in no direct mention of domestic violence in the Child and Family Services Act despite what the current literature contains. Secondly, no legislation exists that defines violence against a child's mother as emotional abuse of a child, again despite current social work practice and current literature. Thirdly, the term 'failure to protect' does not appear anywhere in the Act or policy. Finally, the language of intimate partner violence found in the policy focuses on the victim's behavior (usually the mother) and the use of gender neutral language means the gender specific nature of domestic violence which is essentially violence against women remains hidden.

What the research uncovered was there is a lack of a policy framework for violence against women situations in the legislation as well as policy. The majority of the literature reviewed suggests that the discussion of violence against women in the child welfare frame concentrate on practice. However, some authors (Strega, 2004; Nixon, 2001; Magen; 1999; Edleson 1998) point out the need to examine policy issues to improve practice.

Other researchers caution more macro level changes in policy are needed. For example, Humphreys (1999: 84) advocates the need for a legislative context that acknowledges and acts upon issues of violence against women. She feels policies combined with programs that effectively confront male violence and provide support for women and children are necessary to bring about a change in orientation. Miccio (1995:

1105) believes that because child welfare policy is child-centred, violence against a child's mother becomes beside the point so the protection of mothers becomes a non-issue. She suggests that a public policy that attempts to protect only one part of the familial unit (children) becomes counterproductive. Therefore, she feels because the underlying premise of child welfare legislation is flawed, amendments to current law can only act as an interim strategy until transformation is possible.

Child welfare legislation provides the ability for intervention by legally outlining what constitutes a 'child in need of protection.' It is these statutes that provide a foundation for child welfare intervention. In Canada, child welfare guidelines are organized provincially. At the time this work was written, six of ten Canadian provinces and one territory have expanded their statutory definitions of child maltreatment to include a child's exposure to domestic violence. They include Alberta, Saskatchewan, Prince Edward Island (P.E.I.), Newfoundland, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Northwest Territories. But they do not present it uniformly. For example, Alberta considers children to be at risk when they have sustained an emotional injury and the injury was likely as a result of exposure to domestic violence (Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act, 2000). In contrast, Saskatchewan includes that the exposure is "likely to result in physical or emotional harm to the child" (Child and Family Services Act, 1989-90), introducing the possibility that, although there is no current obvious physical or emotional harm, this might occur in the future. At the time this research was completed, four Canadian provinces (British Columbia, Manitoba, Ontario and Quebec) and two territories (Yukon and Nunavut) have not explicitly defined child exposure to intimate

partner violence as a form of child maltreatment within their child welfare legislation (Nixon et al., 2007: 1475).

Some jurisdictions have attempted to protect children from exposure to domestic violence by expanding their definition of emotional maltreatment to include children's exposure. For example, in Ontario child exposure is not included directly in the legislation, but instead uses a risk assessment tool that includes domestic violence as an issue and guides child welfare workers to intervene in some cases. On an international scale, the United Kingdom, parts of Australia and Puerto Rico have some reference to children being in need of protection as a result of being exposed. So interestingly, lack of policy, such as exists in Manitoba, exists on a worldwide scale as well as being a micro level problem.

I feel it important to mention that some of the jurisdictions that have expanded their definition of child maltreatment to include children being exposed to intimate partner violence have experienced significant repercussions. When Minnesota Child Protection agencies broadened their practice scope to include a child's exposure to domestic violence, they did not anticipate the substantial increase in referrals and had no funding in place to meet the sudden demand. Their system was overwhelmed as domestic violence referrals from professionals in the community obligated by law to report increased by 100% (Nixon et al., 2007: 1477). Due to the large increases in resources dedicated to assessment and investigation, fewer resources were available to serve children and families most at risk (Edelson et al., 2006).

I hesitate to suggest inserting violence against women as a child welfare concern within legislation and policy as this one-way approach does not take organizational

constraints into consideration. For example, such constraints can include not having specially-trained staff, lack of resources and inability to hold male perpetrators accountable. These obstacles need to be addressed when viewing violence against women as a form of child abuse so it does not evolve into yet another way for the system to hold mothers responsible and seen as 'bad mothers' for not leaving controlling, abusive men.

My findings offer the reader a close view of the child welfare law currently in place in Manitoba. No direct reference is found in the legislation for domestic violence and as a result, the gender specificity of domestic violence remains underground. I believe that gender neutrality contributes to and supports the child welfare focus on mothers, essentially creating invisible perpetrators of violence. Finally, rights that families are assigned are also explained within these gender neutral terms. When domestic violence is described in this manner, no specific rights exist for mothers or fathers per se and it creates the impression that mothers and fathers are equal under child welfare law. This is not what I found to be true within policy or current practice.

I must admit that I was surprised to not find any direct references to domestic violence or text confirming that violence against a child's caregiver is considered emotionally abusive to children and therefore constitutes them as in need of protection. Interestingly, I did not set out with any clear expectation of what I might find in the legislation and policy, aside from expecting some references to exist. My surprise comes from the contradiction not only within the body of child welfare literature but also how I was supervised and trained as a child welfare worker. Despite emotional abuse being

presented as equal to other forms of abuse a child may endure, it is not acted upon as are more obvious forms of abuse. This is evidence of the gulf between rhetoric and reality.

Finally no mention of "failure to protect" in the presence of practice that is all about "failure to protect" affirms the argument that a powerful discourse is at work. The clearest evidence to provide proof of women's oppression in child welfare occurs when a woman only appears to have rights when issues within the home affect her ability to parent. Abuse of mothers at the hands of their male partners is only seen as harmful when it affects their ability to care for a child - at least as far as the policy is concerned.

In the next section I look to how social workers spoke to their practice regarding violence against women and how this does and does not mirror policy. I begin with an examination of how workers interpret legislation and policy, followed by an analysis of how they speak to their practice in situations of violence against women.

The Interviews

As I anticipated this project and how it may unfold, I looked forward to what child welfare workers had to say about practice and any ideas they might have into what we could do to improve, if any. I expected worker's language to reflect and support the dominant discourses of mother's failure to protect and father's invisibility. As I began to sit down with the interviewees, I was curious what language they would use to describe wife abuse and if they saw their practice as being guided by and particular policy.

Workers' Understanding of the Policy

As previously mentioned, none of the child welfare policy documents I analyzed make a clear, uncomplicated statement that violence against mothers is wrong or unacceptable, reflecting a seeming inability to acknowledge that abusing a child's primary caregiver may, in and of itself, be harmful to children. I argue that this lack of recognition may diminish a worker's ability to intervene in these cases.

What I discovered was that participants held mixed understandings of the law and policy that guides their practice. Three participants were familiar with the Safety Assessment and Safety Plan as part of the intake module that directed their practice but could not recall any other policy or legislation that directs them. Tammy had this to say:

> *We do maltreatment windows in the Intake Module… but I don't remember if one item specifically references domestic violence or not. [Tammy]*

Similarly, I had this exchange with Barb:

> *Well as a general rule, the Intake Module. As soon as one of your issues is that there has been violence in the home that then spawns Safety Assessments, it spawns maltreatment windows; it spawns how quick you have to respond… [Barb]*

> *So, by the sounds of it, it's pretty structured as to how you are to respond to various issues. Can you think of any specific items on the Intake Module, say, in the Safety Assessment that would look for domestic violence? [Interviewer]*

> *It asks that question specifically. [Barb]*

> *Can you recall any law in child welfare that guided your practice when domestic violence was involved? [Interviewer]*

> *Nope. [Barb]*

> *What guides your practice as a social worker in these cases? [Interviewer]*

> *Talking with my supervisor. Just your education as a social worker as a whole. Looking at the safety of those children as a whole, whether it is domestic violence or otherwise. [Barb]*

It seems that these child welfare workers do not perceive a connection between their practice and policy. After reading these passages I wondered if it had not been for the recent 'overhaul' of the current child welfare system and the inception of the provincial-wide Intake Module, would child welfare workers recognize any connection at all? It would appear that at least one participant had a similar experience to my own practice; learning how to manage violence against women cases through case consultation with a supervisor. I have to admit that when I worked these front lines I cannot say I thought about connecting practice to policy. Other researchers in this area have similar findings. Whitney and Davis (1999) found that social workers rarely refer to policy manuals or protocols when there is an emergency or when they are out on a home visit.

What child welfare workers did connect is a recognition that values and education play a role in their practice as evidenced by one worker discussing how if we do not have clear policy guidelines, we fall to our own values and opinions to guide us. This may or may not serve the client's best interests. Because anti-oppressive ideas are becoming so central to child welfare practice, a contradiction between rhetoric and reality does exist. Earlier, I cited Scourfield's (2003) contention that although social workers in child welfare are aware of and speak to feminist practice, they act in ways (excluding fathers, making mothers responsible) that they know contradict feminist practice.

One participant (Tammy) explained that she was aware that the *Child and Family Services Act* is an important piece of legislation that instructs her practice in these cases. She summarized by saying she could not remember "off the top of her head" a specific part of the Act that mentions domestic violence but she trusted that it must be in the legislation, her rationale being child welfare would not act in these cases if they were not

required to do so. When asked about her awareness of policy, Kate commented: "*I'm not too sure… I don't know if there was anything written in regards to policy.*" Later in the interview Kate recalled: "*I did the formal safely assessments and notes but I never did other paper work.*" Sarah also commented:

> *I don't recall any policy that I saw. And I don't know if it was there or not but I don't ever remember it ever being explained to me or locating it on my own. [Sarah]*

Later in the same discussion with Sarah, when I spoke about the Safety Assessment and Safety Plan along with the Family Service Assessment on the Intake Module as a matter of policy, she had this to add:

> *When you talk about it in that sense, there's a lot of leading in assessments. Within the agency that I worked for, definitely there was. I think the trend was to look at moms as the main provider of providing that protection [from domestic violence] for the children. [Sarah]*

The 'leading' that Sarah is referring to is the mandatory electronic Intake Module system. The system brought in measurable accountability to child welfare agencies to enable them to produce a consistent child protection response province-wide. This excerpt from Sarah reinforces that a mother-focused response begins at intake even though workers are not specifically directed to make this kind of response. Strega (2004: 171) summarizes: "one finds child welfare workers deficient in resources to assess each and every child along with lacking a clear policy decree that all instances of violence against women are destructive to children, the child welfare worker's focus is directed to a familiar target—mothers."

Legislation and policy discourse do not, on their own, either enable or prevent actions that run counter to dominant discourse (Strega, 2004). As noted earlier, in Manitoba no written policy exists specifying that 'failure to protect' is a child welfare concern. Yet, all the participants were familiar with the concept and understood it to describe situations where mothers fail to protect their children from witnessing violence enacted against them. When asked for examples of "failure to protect", Barb and Sarah had this to say:

> *If her children are repeatedly seeing the abuse. [Barb]*

> *If Mom continued to allow that [domestic violence] to happen and we need to be cognitive to the fact that whether its happening directly to the children or not they are still witnessing it and being impacted by it. [Sarah]*

These comments reflect two dominant societal discourses: that it is mothers who are primarily responsible for protecting children; and that women bear some responsibility for a perpetrator's behaviour as well. But where does this guidance for practice come from as it is clearly not provided in law or policy?

So, Why Doesn't She Just Leave?

As the interviews unfolded, strong themes common to all participants began to emerge. One example I found was workers repeatedly questioned why mothers stayed in abusive relationships (dominant discourse) but did not once question why men beat mothers (non-dominant discourse). Talk reflecting this mother/victim blaming discourse occurred regularly in the interviews, as reflected in the following excerpts:

When I interviewed her, the option of having her partner leave the home or staying in the home, she couldn't make a decision, which made us feel that she wouldn't be able to protect her children if she is unable to protect herself. [Kate]

You know, if you [mom] loved your kids then you know what you need to do and you are the only one that can do that [end the relationship]. [Tammy]

And in the situations I've seen, you [Mom] are being abused and your kids are being

abused. I'll be honest, I don't understand. I don't know how you don't see this has to

end. I really don't. [Barb]

I was intrigued by Barb's response in particular to this question. She verbalized how difficult it was to understand how a woman in a violent relationship could not perceive that she must leave for her own as well as her children's well-being. I interpreted this response as an example of the rationale Saunders (1994) offered, as mentioned in the literature review section: workers in child welfare pride themselves on being 'copers' and become frustrated with the inability of battered mothers to 'cope'. In this case, coping may be seen by this participant as having the good judgement and strength to end an abusive relationship. I think what the participant might have been doing was putting herself in the client's shoes and thinking if she was in similar circumstances, she would only see that solution. Again, this illustrates my argument that our focus is on the woman to take action and resolve issues in families and interpersonal relationships, even when she is not the source of the problems.

Along this same vein, although participants pointed out their understanding of the obstacles women face with staying or leaving an abusive relationship, they did not seem to question the violence of fathers/men in the same way as they questioned the actions of mothers. Their focus in the issue appears to automatically begin with the mother and what she is willing to do to rectify the family's situation. For example:

I had been called to the school to interview a child about not wanting to return home because he was hit by his father. I went and interviewed the children at school. Through that I learned that they were being abused and so was their mother. From there, myself and another worker went to the house to talk to the mom and we talked to her about what was happening. We told her that she either needed to leave the situation with the kids or we would apprehend the kids. She chose to leave with the kids so we took them to the shelter. [Kate]

Another participant was quick to explain her rationale for not involving men as part of her assessment:

We turn to the mother and we put all these restrictions on the mother, not restrictions I mean expectations on the mother... We think if you loved your kids then, you know, what you need to do and you're [the mother] the only one that can do it. [Tammy]

As I read through the transcripts, I could not help but reflect on my own practice. As I read their descriptions of their practice, I began to become aware we all practiced fairly consistently. I too, judged a mother's commitment to her children based on what action she was willing to take to remedy what we considered, her unhealthy relationship.

At the same time, all the child welfare workers interviewed were aware and well versed in the impact violence against a mother has on her children. For example, when they were asked why the child welfare field considers domestic violence a child welfare issue, they had this to say:

I think that domestic violence is considered a child welfare issue because domestic abuse affects children, so therefore it is a child abuse issue. The trauma that this can do to them [children], I mean, sometimes physically, but emotionally can be life altering, even from a very young age. So, yeah, I think that another thing is them seeing it, them hearing it and as kids they don't have the ability to comprehend all that and they're left with pieces of it. You don't have the ability to comprehend what it means, you know? So, yeah, that's why I think, from what they're seeing, witnessing, hearing. Any kind of violence like that is child abuse. [Barb]

Children being exposed to chronic domestic violence is a child protection issue because of what it does to them emotionally… I think the exposure to the domestic violence, the emotional impact and the mental impact, constant walking into situations like that in their home, what does that do to their daily routines? What does that do to their schooling? What does that do to their own emotional health and well being? [Tammy]

I think emotionally, when kids are exposed to that [domestic violence] it's very difficult for children to, um, deal with and manage emotionally at a young age… My experience in child welfare showed me that it also impacts kids developmentally, emotionally and cognitively. We see issues with attachment in kids being exposed to domestic violence; most often you see that come out at school. [Sarah]

With the consistency of the above responses, which accord with findings of similar research cited in my literature review, it may be safe to speculate that all child welfare workers were trained much the same way I was: violence against women is considered a child welfare issue because exposure to a mother being abused is emotionally abusive to the child. Yet, as I have already presented, there is no explicit definition within the Child and Family Services Act nor the Safety Assessment and Safety Plan. Therefore, this direction need only come from a dominant discourse to instruct social worker and their supervisors how to respond.

Putting Children First

All four participants had parallel definitions of a mother's failure to protect, even if they did not agree philosophically. All empathized with the difficult situation a mother must face in these situations, yet the only viable solutions presented for this problem became leaving the relationship or asking the perpetrator to leave the home. One of the dominant themes woven into this discourse is the expectation of mothers having to 'choose' to put

their children first, which mothers 'prove' (to child protection workers) by leaving the relationship. All participants were familiar with the term 'failure to protect' and the power of the concept even though it is not contained in the Child and Family Services Act nor the Safety and Risk Assessment. This is illustrated in the following comments:

> *Well, I guess in the cases that I had talked about the abuse was occurring with the children and she was not able to protect them from that. When I interviewed her, the option of having her partner leave the home or staying in the home…she was unable to make the decision….which made us feel she wouldn't be able to protect, as she was unable to place the children first to make sure they were safe. Again, the concern is that the mother may not be able to have the power to protect her children if she is unable to protect herself. [Kate]*

> *Well, a situation where I've apprehended children because of a domestic violence situation is that, you know, supports have been put in place and Mom keeps letting the dad back in the house when there is a protection order in place. So then there's the case where Mom ends up leaving the kids at home alone, young, you know, not age appropriate, so that she can go see so-and-so and the next thing you know so-and-so is back in the house. [Tammy]*

Also embedded in these quotes is the lack of expectation for men to be protective, either to women or to children. Are they not failing to protect as they are hurting their child's primary caregiver? I am struck by the de-contextualization embodied in the comment "Mom keeps letting the dad back in." Is it not likely that a controlling, abusive man is not about to take direction from his victim? I was also struck that none of the participants mentioned exploring with a mother her reasons for staying in the relationship or continuing to cohabitate with a violent partner, even though they directly or indirectly stated that they did not understand "why women stay." Child welfare workers speak about options they see available to women in violent relationships and their goals of providing supportive practice to mothers and children, but I could find no evidence that this type of practice was occurring. This particular worker refers to the mother "letting"

the perpetrator back in the home, another illustration of the intent focus on what the mother does and does not do. My sense of worker expectations of mothers was they do ideally believe in gender equality in families, but the families they work with were seen as so far from equal it is the woman/mother who is expected to make changes and responsible to make the choice to stay with abusive men or leave them.

I cannot help but think back to Julia Krane's (2003) work and how my findings are equivalent in that child welfare transforms women into what she calls 'mother protectors'. Much as she uncovered a strong theme that mothers are expected to put an end to the sexual abuse once they know, domestic violence is seen in the same way. These interviewees expected mothers to take action once domestic violence is present in their home. But, as Krane cautioned, turning these moms into 'mother protectors' may seem successful at first, as it is able to quickly ensure that something is being done to ensure children's safety, but it is ineffective as the person responsible for the violence is not being dealt with. I echo Krane's (2003) concern that this approach is so widely used not only because it is quick and effective, but also cost-effective.

One worker began her discussion by empathizing with a mother's challenging dilemma when she finds herself in an abusive situation as we discussed her understanding of 'failure to protect' concept:

> *I think it is all tied in together. Do I think it's intentional? No. I mean the continuous abuse, like staying in that relationship and your child or children continuing to witness and hear that, is just a mother's failure to protect? No. I totally don't think so. I think that it's a two parent family, as the abuser or the abused, you are both failing. Your child continuously seeing that is how conflict is dealt with I mean to me you're— [Barb]*

> *There's a responsibility as a parent— [Interviewer]*

There's a responsibility as a parent—both parents. And as the person that's being abused, I mean, that becomes so minuscule in the grand scheme of things because of all they are concerned about is that the children are not going to be abused. And in the situations I've seen you are being abused, and your kids are being abused. I'll be honest; I just don't get it. I don't get how you don't see that this has to end… I really don't [Barb]

But in the next comment, the worker sees it as the woman's responsibility to end the relationship or leave. She starts out empathizing with an abused woman's plight but the focus remains consistently on what a woman needs to do to end the abuse.

Yeah. You do not think that you can survive on your own. It's safer and easier to deal with the abuse because you've got a roof over your head. In many ways they don't have control over money. How do you move yourself let alone one, two or three out with nothing? A shelter…stigma, like, particularly when, I mean, I hate to say this, but if you're from an upper class – even middle class family, you're not going to a shelter. No way are you, unless it becomes that bad. [Barb]

If we are to practice in accordance with anti-oppressive strategies, we would not depend on the mother to keep the abuser out of the home. As I noted earlier, this practice strategy assumes that the woman has the ability to keep the abusive partner away. It is important for us to question the likelihood that a woman involved with an abusive man has the resources or the power to carry this out. We must also consider that even women who have resources and money persistently return to men that abuse them, so other factors keep women in these relationships. Within the dominant interpretation of 'failure to protect' a good mother appears to be one who is willing to leave the relationship. This places the child welfare focus on assessing whether a mother is a protective or non-protective mother and how her actions or inactions place the child at risk and in need of protection without any attention to the abusive, violent father/partner. In sum, child

protection turns into what a mother does or does not do to create a 'child in need of protection.'

Two participants pointed out the unfairness of placing all the responsibility on a mother to protect children when she herself is a victim of violence. Yet, they continue to see it as Mom's responsibility with statements such as 'you're the only one' and 'you have to make sure' pointing to what mom must do to protect her children. The following may help illustrate the dominant discourses that participants reference to ensure this persistent focus on Mom and ignorance of Dad continues.

> *Like it's hard because you place all this emphasis on the mother to be the one that has to, you know, okay you're the only one that can make this happen, so you have to make sure that he stays out of the house. You have to ensure that and if you don't then we're taking your kids… and we do. [Tammy]*

> *Why do you think Child Welfare looks to the mom to be responsible to keep the children safe? [Interviewer]*

> *Because we look to the one that is supposed to be there to nurture the kids. [Tammy]*

> *When we talk about a failure to protect, I think what we're trying to say is that parents, whether that's mom or dad, in this case it's mom, fails to keep her children safe from a situation that they should have been kept safe from. I think our system puts a lot of emphasis on mom protecting and whether that is right or wrong… I'm not entirely sure. [Sarah]*

These statements demonstrate how and why men are not made responsible for staying out of the home. Are men not responsible for their own violence? Of course, but the discourses used by workers make it appear they are not. One can reason that because the systems in a patriarchal society are constructed to protect men's rights, they are not held accountable for their 'bad behaviour' as a male dominated culture ensures male privilege, not equality for the sexes. When Tammy refers to a mother's responsibility to 'nurture

the kids' shouldn't fathers have the same responsibility? Rather than question this

dominant focus on mothers, it seems to be accepted as 'just the way things are.'

Sarah goes on to describe what 'failure to protect' means to her personally:

> *A mom's failure to protect in a case of domestic violence would be to continue to allow that to happen without seeking out some sort of help or some sort of support. And another area that I would see it [failure to protect]) is if violence was also being carried out to the children and Mom wasn't again seeking out some sort of support or help for that issue. [Sarah]*

Two phrases that stand out as reinforcing the mother's responsibility are that a woman

continues to "allow that to happen" (referring to woman abuse) and "Mom wasn't again

seeking out some sort of support or help for that issue" (referring to domestic violence).

But when asked if she would see it as 'failure to protect' on Mom's part if the children

are not being physically hurt Sarah had this to say:

> *I don't think so, initially, no. I mean, every circumstance is different, you know, and it is hard to put a label on every family. But if Mom continued to allow that to happen—and we need to be cognitive to the fact that whether it's happening directly to children or not, they are still being impacted by it. So, if Mom were to allow this to go on for a period of time, without seeking some sort of support to try and resolve that issue… I would see it eventually having the potential to being a failure to protect because of the ongoing impact it's having on the children. [Sarah]*

The phrase within this quote which is particularly noteworthy for analysis is "allow that

to happen," implying that the woman who is being victimized is the responsible party if

the abuse against them continues. Woman are seen as having the control to stop the

abuse and if they do not put an end to it, for example, by leaving the relationship or

kicking the abuser out, they are labeled non-protective.

But what we know now is that when alternative ways of speaking or writing about

a topic are excluded then alternative ways of thinking and knowing are excluded as well,

or at least pushed to the margins to the extent they cannot and will not be considered

legitimate knowledge. That is why dominant discourses are legitimate and non-dominant discourses are illegitimate and are therefore marginalized.

Not only did the majority of child welfare workers I talked to view it as a mother's responsibility to protect their children but they also saw it as a woman's responsibility to seek services for the family to deal with domestic violence. Two workers I spoke with stated that they saw the responsibility of protecting falling to both parents. That being said, one worker still felt the solution to the issue was for the mother to leave the situation, not for the perpetrator to stop the abuse. When women stay in abusive relationships, this 'inappropriate choice' of a male partner over their children is often assessed as a personal limitation (Strega, 2004: 180). In fact, in my years in child welfare, I recall mothers making this choice—or what we considered a "choice"—to stay in a violent relationship being taken as clear evidence that she lacked parenting ability. The following comment illustrates the expectation for the mother to leave:

> *In the cases I have talked about, the abuse was occurring with the children, not the mother. And she was not able to protect them from that. When I interviewed her, the option of having her partner leave the home or staying in the home…she couldn't make a decision. Which made us feel that she wouldn't be able to protect, as she was unable to place the children first to make sure they were safe. Again, the concern is that the mother may not be able to have the power to protect her children if she is unable to protect herself. [Kate]*

The last four words of Kate's statement are worth noting. Kate talks about a mother being "unable to protect herself," implying that a mother is expected to and should be able to protect herself from men's violence. This notion is totally unrealistic given that one person cannot be responsible for stopping another's behaviour, especially in the instance of being victimized. Would we expect a person who is the victim of a robbery to

be able to stop the other person from robbing them, and if they were unsuccessful would we see them as deserving the consequence of losing their possessions as a result?

Women who are failing as mothers are dually seen as victims of oppressive men, yet weak or unnatural in refusing to leave such a man "for the sake of the children." In a couple of instances during the interviews, as already noted, social workers referred to mothers' poor choices when they stay in an abusive situation. They did, however, work hard to understand and empathize with mother's dilemmas:

> *When I interviewed her, I gave the option of having her partner leave the home or staying in the home… [Kate]*

> *Yes, thinking about it, it is a very hard thing to have a woman whose life has centered around her partner, making him happy for family, asking her to leave. They are afraid and do not have confidence in most cases that they are able to parent alone. [Kate]*

> *And I mean realistically, I don't think Mom had a lot of options or anywhere else to go… I can only imagine what it must feel like for Mom to try and figure out what to do. [Sarah]*

If a mother is not able to stand up to her partner, leave and/or protect self, how can she protect her children? It would appear from these interview excerpts that women are constructed by child welfare workers as if they have free choice in these situations, even though we know that few supports exist to support women in leaving. Proof of the scarcity of these supports is described earlier in the literature review, within the mothers' failure to protect section. Despite being oppressed by social forces, the above quotes show that mothers are seen as ultimately making free choices to stay with abusive men or leave them. Furthermore, if we assume that an abused mother should leave her partner, then we as child welfare workers are implying that stopping the violence is the woman's

responsibility. Not only is this perspective problematic, because it puts the focus on the woman's behaviour, but it also implies that leaving is always a viable solution, an appropriate option for all women. As I have previously mentioned, in some cases leaving may put a woman at even greater risk. Others may be financially dependent on their partner for survival and may not have access to affordable housing in their area. If this is the case, leaving may mean living in poverty for a mother and her children.

Father Exclusion

In Scourfield's (2003) research, he found that perpetrators of violence against women are rarely interviewed by workers. Even when men are parents (i.e. biological or step fathers), the visible perpetrator within the home and the catalyst for the child welfare intervention, they are usually spared an interview by workers. In my research, I found the same to be true. When I asked participants what their practice with perpetrators looked like, one worker disclosed that in five years of practice she had never assessed a father or man—even when he was the known perpetrator in the home. Two participants said they had conducted an initial assessment with a perpetrator, but admitted this did not occur in the majority of investigations. When a man was interviewed, it was only to assess his level of cooperation (determine risk) or hear his side of the story as it pertained to an investigation of child protection. These assessments were limited. They did not include an assessment of the father's parenting abilities and skills or his willingness to develop new skills, nor did they assess attachment between father and children. All of these matters are routinely assessed for mothers. I interpreted this as evidence of McMahon and Pence's (1995) comment: that men are constructed as having rights and

women are constructed as having responsibilities. Participants illustrated this argument in the following quotes:

> *So what were you looking for with Dad... What were you assessing? [Interviewer]*
>
> *I guess his cooperation. How he was in terms of remorse, if there was any remorse. [Kate]*
>
> *Any assessment of his parenting? The reason I ask is you had mentioned completing that with Mom so I was wondering if that same process happened with Dad? [Interviewer]*
>
> *You know what, not really. [Kate]*
>
> *Do you know why as a child welfare worker you wouldn't be assessing Dad when he is the perpetrator? [Interviewer]*
>
> *I'm not too sure. Maybe because the focus tended to be on the mom. When I was getting direction it was kind of 'what were her parenting skills' because she was the primary caregiver. I didn't tend to do that with him. [Kate]*

When Kate replies with a 'you know' this is important to pay attention to. What Kate is implying is that I understand—which I do—that men are not assessed in the same way and this is considered acceptable practice. As most child welfare workers can attest to, men are not held under the same level of accountability or offered the same services and interventions as women. When services are offered to fathers, there are very little to choose from. My sense of this 'you know' is that child welfare social workers are practicing in a way that they know is not effective but it is essentially the 'fault line' we fall into; such as what Scourfield estimated in his research of the 'occupational culture' of a child welfare office. Occupational discourse, as described in the literature, review refers to ways of talking about clients that are and are not considered acceptable within the social work team, including approaches that become taken for granted. As is evident in the above quotes, the workers I interviewed, despite possessing a feminist

consciousness, were quick to see women's role as being responsible for children's wellbeing in a way that men are just not. All the participants were asked why they did not conduct the same assessment of the father's parenting as they did of the mother, especially when the man was both the identified perpetrator and living in the home. In two of the interviews, when the father/male figure was assessed, it appeared to be limited to determining if he was a risk to the children or the mother's ability to care for the children. No assessment appears to be done with the motivation of determining if the father is an asset in the situation. Other participants had this to say:

> *He was interviewed… but he was a very hostile person. I tried to engage him but he was uncooperative. I finally got him to sit down for the interview… I did not give him a choice… Mom had taken off so I needed to assess things because we were concerned if he had been violent with Mom… [Barb]*

> *I met with him and did an offender interview; got his side of the story and then gave him some resources and some phone numbers to call and that was it. [Tammy]*

When I examined these quotes I was again reminded of Jonathan Scourfield's (2003) research. He found that workers tended to expect more from women. He said social workers would appear to adopt a working hypothesis regarding challenging men but after being worn down when finding this approach unsuccessful, they would make a decision about what will be successful – working with mothers. Kate's quote illustrates this point well:

> *That was what happened. I hadn't met with him during that period; it wasn't until a week later, actually. I'd been trying to contact him, but it had been hard to find him. I think he had been living in hotels and we didn't know where he was. He came into the office and I remember my conversation with him because I remember him saying he*

had addiction issues and he said how it had not always been this way but he wanted his family back and wanted to know what he had to do to get them back.

Kate goes on to explain how this case continued and how once she engaged with the father, he became cooperative with her interventions. But shortly after he came on board with the plan his case was transferred to an on-going family services worker (as she was on Intake) and she does not know what happened after that. One thing she was sure of was he did not get to see his children in a long time. I interpreted this as evidence of the argument that men are seen as having rights in child welfare. Despite this father being a high risk to his partner and children, as there had been domestic violence and physical abuse towards the children in this case, Kate still felt he had a right to see his children in a relatively short period of time. This case did end up with the police charging and the perpetrator being removed from the home but I want the reader to keep in mind that clear physical child abuse was present and the system responded accordingly. I would put forward that if this case involved solely domestic violence and not physical child abuse, my experience was the police may have acted differently.

Finally, Tammy provided an example of how a typical child welfare case involving violence against the mother would unfold in the child welfare agency she now practices in. It backs up the argument that fathers are 'missing in action' when it comes to the violence and crisis that they so clearly create:

> *I just had one [case] where there was domestic violence and a kid ended up getting hurt and 'cause the guy had grabbed the kid by the neck on his way out. Dad was pounding on Mom in the apartment. The kid starts running and yelling at Dad. Oh, sorry, it was Mom's boyfriend who grabbed the girl by the neck and dragged her back in the apartment. She proceeded to watch the entire thing unfold. And basically, I did lots of work with the mother and the daughter. And with him [the boyfriend]—nothing. [Tammy]*

Tammy goes on to explain that she was required to sit down with this Dad and complete an offender interview which is essentially an interview to get his side of the story in regards to the violent episode. The main objective is to get his side of the story, essentially looking for an admittance of guilt and taking responsibility for his actions, but she added she offered him resources and phone numbers and that was the last she saw of him. This part of the interview ended with Tammy offering her rationale as to why more work is not completed with fathers. She said, "it's a time issue." She added, "because caseloads are high and you do not have time." I would argue that if we took the time, these efforts could provide more assurance to ending the violence in the family.

But Women are Violent Too…

Arguing that men and women are equally violent is the most significant and frequent strategy used for degendering the problem of violence against women (Berns, 2001: 267). One participant reinforced this point in her interview. When asked to provide examples of cases she had worked with where domestic violence was present, she recalled two cases where, from her perspective, the man and woman were abusing each other.

> *It was a mom and dad who had a fairly lengthy history of abuse. And I think it was both of them; this was more of a mutual abuse, not just a one-sided abuse. For them, it was the only way they knew how to deal with conflict and with real issues. And so I think one could almost egg the other one on, for a lack of technical terms. But that was how they chose to deal with very serious things that needed to be discussed. [Barb]*

Later on in the interview, when asked if there were any other examples she could recall involving domestic violence, the worker reinforced the picture of what she referred to as 'mutual abuse.'

I had one other one [case], and it was a situation again where Mom and Dad were physically abusing each other. I would say that Mom—this one was very challenging as we received reports from another child welfare agency out of province. The documentation came back that Mom was assaulting Dad as often as Dad was assaulting Mom. I would say that Mom was probably guilty of giving some abuse herself but more from defending herself. She just wasn't going to be smacked around. [Barb]

Alternatively, when I asked this participant who she believed was the catalyst for the violence, she was quick to point out that she believed it was the man. Although no other participants discussed women being violent, one participant did point out to me in one of our initial meetings (before we began the tape recorder) that we could not forget that women have the propensity to be violent as well.

I found it a point of interest that women felt compelled to make this point even though those of us who have worked in the violence against women field know this is rarely true. Experience has taught us (and research confirms) that women have much more to fear from their male partners than vice versa. The reason women may feel compelled to make this point lies in the dominant discourse that Nancy Berns (1999: 85) calls the "individual perspective of domestic violence that places responsibility on the victim and normalizes the idea that victims should be held responsible for solving the problem." It does what I believe it is intended to do: keep the focus of the problem of violence against women off the male perpetrator and fixed firmly on the female victim and what she must do to stop it.

Even though Murray Straus and Richard Gelles (1995) maintain that women may be violent in the home, they agree that women sustain more physical injury, lose more time from work and require more medical care. Furthermore, as Berns points out (2001: 268) Gelles et al.'s (1995) survey data focused on counting acts of violence and did not

consider other strategies of control and intimidation, such as psychological, sexual and verbal abuse and the use of threats against children and pets. Similarly, Emerson R. Dobash and Russell Dobash's (1998) research concluded that empirical and theoretical approaches to violence against women must take into account the fact that men and women interpret their victimization differently and that an understanding of woman abuse must be located within the broader context of other intimidation and control strategies and the gendered context in which they occur.

Although theorists like Gelles take a perspective that frames domestic violence as a human issue and argues that women and men are equally violent, when it comes to discussing responsibility for ending abuse, one persistent focus is the culpability of women (Berns, 2001: 269). Interestingly enough, although violence is usually degendered, blame is usually gendered. For example, popular women's magazines frame domestic violence in a way that normalizes the victim's responsibility, while ignoring the role of the abuser and of society (Berns, 1999 cited in Berns, 2001: 269). In the women's magazines she studied that published articles on women's experiences with domestic violence, one of the dominant themes Berns uncovered was how the women described the problems with an ex-partner and the steps they took to rectify the problem. As the main audience for these magazines is women, no wonder we have all been conditioned that intimate partner violence is a problem we (women) must solve.

Reluctance to Name Men's Violence

As mentioned in the methodology chapter, Scourfield (2004) points out that given the high profile anti-discrimination frameworks currently have in the social work profession,

workers may already know they are doing what is wrong when they ignore male perpetrators and focus on mothers. One participant provided a clear example of her reluctance to speak directly of men's violence toward women; there appeared to be almost a reluctance to speak directly of men's violence towards women by framing it as both partners being equally abusive. She stated:

> *A mom and dad who had a fairly lengthy history of abuse. This was more of, almost a mutual abuse, not just one-sided abuse. [Barb]*

Other interviewees were reluctant to name men's violence against women as well. For example, the following phrases were spoken by the participants:

> *My kids are safe here, you know, they're not being abused. We have a roof over our heads, clothes on their backs, so suck it up because I'm not going to be able to provide for them on my own. Because your self esteem is gone; you don't see yourself being able to do anything for them outside of the home. And I think the pull that the abusing spouse can have on you, they can tell you they are changing and they aren't going to do this anymore then it happens again [violence against a mother]. Each time you just pray to God this is the last time. So you keep going back. [Barb]*

> *We told her that she needed to leave the situation with the kids or we would apprehend. [Kate]*

Previous research may provide some answers for this reluctance to name men's violence. For example, McMahon and Pence (1995) suggest that men are constructed as having rights (to stay in his house, have access to his children) and women are constructed as having responsibilities (emotional and physical caretaking of men and children). Child welfare workers are hesitant to infringe upon men's rights but are quick to expect women to fulfill their responsibilities as evidenced in how they speak to their practice.

> *It impacts attachment. I guess the other thing is that it makes you concerned if someone is abusive to a partner that they are supposed to love, then what would stop them from abusing their child?[Kate]*

This quote, with its gender neutral language, clearly illustrates reluctance on the part of social workers to name men's violence against women. Kate refers to the perpetrator as 'someone' and the victim as 'partner.'

The evidence of reluctance in speaking directly of men's violence found in the interviews speaks to evidence of a dominant discourse at work. I speculate that we have been so programmed by the dominant discourse of 'failure to protect' that an alternative discourse such as 'men beating women' or any alternative perspective appears awkward at best. Barb stated her perspective on including men:

> *I say 'dad' but not all abusers are dads, and it's not what they want to do necessarily; it's what they know how to do. And instead of pointing the finger and say how can we help you to stop abusing your family? But I mean that's ideal.*

Barb spoke to the importance of engaging fathers, being careful balance that with the statement that not all abusers are men. I interpret this as evidence that workers are aware of the importance of being fair to men. Sarah is aware that the lack of expectation of men to be protective sets up a situation of exclusion which in turn creates an imbalance for accountability.

Fathers in the Frame

Although violence on the part of a male perpetrator is a common reason for child welfare intervention, men are usually treated as if they are entitled to not participate in assessments and investigations. It would appear that working with men can be described

as extra work and not mandatory. Child welfare workers commonly cite lack of time due to caseload size and as a result they are more concerned with meeting the more immediate priorities of ensuring a mother and children are safe and supported as reasons for excluding men from assessments and investigations. Kate and Sarah had this to say for the reason they did not assess men:

> *It never really crossed my mind to interview him. I think I was just more concerned about her safety so I focused my energy on her and the children. [Kate]*

> *By not having an expectation for men to be protective, this is another way men are excluded from the process. We are excluding them from the opportunity of being protective. [Sarah]*

The workers appear for the most part to feel men are unfairly excluded and do not receive the same support services in the child welfare process as mothers do. So, for example, they believe it is a good idea to include men but in reality this practice does not happen (rhetoric vs. reality gap). What the above quotes also illustrate is that workers see men has having the 'right' not to be interviewed and the 'right' to not be accountable and participate with the child welfare intervention even if they think it is a good thing to do in the ideal.

Workers also provided evidence in their interviews that the workload they were plagued with coupled with ensuring the immediate priorities of safety for women and children made including men just 'one more thing to get to.' Tammy had this to say when asked why she thought we don't get around to including fathers :

> *That's a time issue… because the caseloads are through the roof and the expectations are basically told to you as long as the kids are safe. [Tammy]*

So, what you're saying is we've got Dad over here with, say, a protection order so I don't have time to do any social work interventions with him? [Interviewer]

Exactly. [Tammy]

This quote correlates with a point I made earlier regarding workers citing that due to caseload pressures, they are unable to spare the extra time it can take. But I make the argument that we make the time when we are required by law to locate a father to serve him court papers so why couldn't the same rigour be applied to include fathers in the frame of our current practice? To summarize this section, I would like the reader to keep in mind we do not allow a mother the same concession – the option of not cooperating with child welfare interventions.

Exceptions

I also found exceptions in the interviews to typical social work practice. One participant identified engaging with a father so she could include in her assessment his parenting abilities as well as how his children responded to him. This suggests that some workers feel it is important to focus on fathers/men, at least some of the time, as an equitable way to deliver service. Sarah shared:

> *When we initially learned of the incident that happened [wife abuse], my primary focus was of course Mom and making sure that she and the kids were okay. I confirmed with Mom that she felt it was important for the kids to have some exposure to Dad, keeping in mind that he was incarcerated… My first steps with Dad were going out and interviewing him and getting his take on what happened… Mom felt that it was important that the boys have contact with Dad and Dad really wanted to have the same contact with the boys [his biological children]… We did arrange about three or four visits in entirety while he was incarcerated. [Sarah]*

This worker, along with the prison chaplain, arranged supervised visits between the children and their father. She went on to say what she took away from this experience:

> *He [the chaplain] and I were a part of it [the visits] and they were very positive. I think the thing that you have to keep in mind is, and it's sometimes a hard thing for us to get our heads around, but domestic violence doesn't necessarily equate being a bad dad. And, that was something that I needed to get my head around because to those kids that was still their dad, and to him that was still his children and he loved his children and I believe he wanted what was best for his kids. My observation during those visits, they were supervised, was… I really had only positive things to say about the visits. [Sarah]*

Sarah continued to discuss her father inclusive practice, noting that her assessment of the father included attention to parenting, attachment and willingness to change and take responsibility. She was proud to say that when she initially began to work with Dad, he was minimizing his violence towards his wife and had entered a plea of 'not guilty.' But as this intervention continued, she explained CFS would view it as protective measure if he took responsibility for his actions (assaulting his wife) and as a result he would stand a greater chance of returning to the home after his incarceration. Much to her surprise, this father changed his plea with the courts to 'guilty' and took advantage of all clinical services offered to him during his incarceration. She notes that this was not standard practice amongst her colleagues at the time, but took away from this some useful experience:

> *We need to try our best to include dads and I do believe that some onus needs to be put on moms, but I also believe some onus needs to be put on dads. I think we need to say at the end of the day the children are not just mom's, they are mom's and dad's. We need to be looking equally at both of them and whether or not a child welfare agent intervenes and puts some sort of boundaries on their relationship or whatever… We need to try and include dads and ask them what their plan is… What are their kid's needs and how are they going to meet those needs? I also think there are situations where we do need to be careful about how we involve dads and that would be situations where they are also perpetrating violence towards the children. I wanted to know what parenting skills he had… I*

wanted to know about his attachment to the children, see if it was healthy or not…
I wanted to get a sense of what Dad's thoughts were about how his children's
needs get met. [Sarah]

When I look at this quote I am reminded of my original argument for completing this
research project: we must include fathers/men in our child welfare interventions when
assessing risk to children, in order to realize a feminist perspective in our work with
families. Clearly, by Sarah practicing with this father, she was able to confidently re-
establish the family with the knowledge that the parent who had caused the need for child
welfare intervention in the first place was getting the help that he needed. In the end, this
reduced the risk to the mother and ultimately their children.

Issue of Consistency

The findings in this project are consistent with recent research projects with a similar
focus, all conducted in Canadian child welfare jurisdictions with legislation similar to
Manitoba (Alaggia et al., 2007; Nixon, 2001; Strega, 2004). Kendra Nixon's (2001)
thesis research into Alberta's child welfare policy regarding violence against women
explored the current amendments to the Alberta child welfare legislation that came into
being with the hopes of addressing risk to children who are exposed to domestic violence.
However, as a result of her research Nixon criticizes these amendments as being
"problematic in regards to failing to protect children, further victimizing battered women
and ignoring abusive men" (2001; iii). Nixon's findings are consistent with my own, in
that participants she spoke to viewed children as their primary clients and believed the
most effective way to protect children in these situations was to focus on mother's
behaviour. She also found that a mother's "failure to protect" her children from

witnessing the violence was seen as a legitimate basis for child welfare intervention. Peled (1993: 48) echoes these findings in her work and concludes "while the responsibility for the violence might not be attributed directly to the mother, she is likely to be accused of failing to protect her children by having a relationship with an abusive man." This mirrors dominant discourse in that it positions women as not only primarily responsible for children, and therefore liable to be held responsible for "failing to protect" them, but also responsible for the behaviour of the man who is victimizing them.

Ramona Alaggia's (2007) Ontario study set out to explore what impact child welfare policy had on abused mothers accessing services for themselves and their children. Through looking at policy as well as practice, Alaggia set out to better understand the implications child welfare reporting policies had for professional practice, for mothers' willingness to disclose intimate partner violence with the knowledge that child welfare involvement may be an outcome and the experiences of mothers with the child welfare system. Predominant themes in Alaggia's (2007: 2) work were the reluctance of abused women to disclose or seek services for their families, isolation between helping professionals from different sectors, increased demand for services, increased surveillance of mothers and decreased accountability of perpetrators. Alaggia (2007) adds that more consideration needs to be given to how changes in legislation have impacted on disclosure of domestic violence; on the help-seeking behaviours of abused women and on those who provide child welfare and violence against women services.

Currently several jurisdictions across Canada are moving toward a differential response models, including Ontario where this model has been explored through a recent roundtable of child welfare reforms. Differential response (Waldfogel, 1998) is an

approach that relies on accurately classifying cases into varying levels of risk wherein children referred to child welfare as a result of exposure to domestic violence would be initially screened as low or high risk and referred accordingly. For example, more serious cases go to child welfare agencies and lower risk cases are referred to community based service (Alaggia et al., 2007: 287).

Resistance

I found evidence of resistance to the dominant discourses in my interviews in the way workers recognized an abused mother's difficult dilemma to leave an abusive relationship because few supports exist for them to do so. The participants showed true courage in how they challenged violent men in some cases only to be threatened and put in fearful situations. Finally, workers wanted to appear like they were being fair to men in their assessments, going against the instruction of dominant discourse to exclude them.

Within existing policy, I would argue that we have enough guidance and permission to intervene directly with men. Workers wish for more specific direction because at a gut level they already know they will face difficulties when trying to carry out feminist practice with mothers within the existing policy. Despite their best efforts to engage, violent men will continue to ignore their authority because they can and law enforcement and the justice system is unlikely to enforce the crime of domestic violence any better than they do currently.

Thus, Strega (2004: 220) concludes that the problems with child welfare intervention in cases of domestic violence mirrors other problems of men's violence towards women and children. For example, if more perpetrators of sexual abuse towards children were arrested, convicted and held accountable, this problem in our society could

be significantly reduced. Strega (2004: 220) summarizes that this is yet "another example of how the issue is not so much the absence of policy or law but whether or not existing statutes will be enforced."

Conclusion

Child welfare workers spoke to their practice in a way that reflected and supports the 'mothers failing to protect' and 'men missing in action' discourses I estimated I would find. Workers did question father exclusion, stating they believed they could do a better job of including fathers in case practice. Workers spoke to men having rights and were hesitant to speak directly of men's violence towards women (evidence of gendered power relations) and continually highlighted a mother's responsibility to protect her children.

All saw 'putting children first' as a standard expectation of a protective mother, which they prove to workers by ending abusive relationships or asking their male partners to leave. There were no expectations for fathers to stop being violent and therefore 'protective.' Workers language validated that they were hesitant to speak directly of men's violence towards women and if they engaged men it was to assess their risk, not measure their assets. Evidence of the gulf between rhetoric and reality was found in the following ways:

- workers believed it was a good idea to include men but did not routinely include them in their practice.
- workers acknowledge that they are aware they are practicing in a way that they know is ineffective in violence against women cases.

- workers speak to feminist practice found in the current anti-oppressive literature but practice in ways that contradict this (excluding fathers, making mothers responsible).

Workers pointed out that due to the inception of the Intake Module they have no other choice but to have their practice in these cases dictated by policy and legislation. All appeared to have a high regard for ethical sound clinical practice and wanting do the right thing when it comes to helping women and children.

The dominant discourse regarding violence against women and mothers which can be found within my analysis of text and interviews continues to demonstrate that there is an affinity when violence occurs and continues to position women as being mostly responsible for violence and failing to control the behaviour of the perpetrator. Evidence for the presence of the dominant discourses of 'mothers' failure to protect' and 'men missing in action' was confirmed from the lack of evidence found in legislation and policy directing practice in this manner. Although lack of a clear reference to domestic violence was confirmed in legislation and only gendered references are found within the policy, I would conclude that enough text exists for us to intervene in a way that holds men responsible for their violence.

At the time I met with these child welfare workers, they were dedicated to protecting children and open to sharing reflections of their practice in cases where violence against women was present. They were aware and concerned about the contradictions found in their practice. All were interested in the research and keen for ideas of change. Even though all spoke to the pressures of the work and lack of resources

to make this successful, all were eager to understand how practice could be improved.

Their courage to expose their thoughts and actions were admired and appreciated. In the

next chapter, I will reflect on my findings and explore implications for practice and

suggestions for further research. It was Strega (2004: 207) who summarized:

> a man hitting a woman is persistently constructed as an act without an agent, a
> woman being battered by a non-existent perpetrator, as illustrated by the existence
> of the concept of 'battered woman' without the existence of a resulting concept of
> 'battering man'. We cannot say 'battering man', because such as concept does
> not 'make sense'.

These workers were aware that we cannot look to what men are doing in these cases – we

are only to notice what mothers are doing. As workers, if we are "hesitant to speak

directly of men's violence, it impossible to resist against it." (Strega, 2004: 220).

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house.
Audre Lorde

My intent for these concluding remarks is to bring some closure to this work while acknowledging that by no means were all the answers found. Analyzing the accounts of four child welfare social workers provided insight into how law and policy, coupled with child welfare's dominant discourse, form the foundation for how the Manitoba child welfare system intervenes in cases of violence against mothers. Examination of the texts and language usage by professionals revealed how these cases get "worked out" in current practice. By searching for the dominant discourse enacted through the concepts of 'invisible fathers' and 'mothers failing to protect,' this project demonstrated how these concepts contribute to the failure of the current system to hold perpetrators accountable for their violence. As discourse determines the ways a topic can be talked about as well as influences the way ideas are acted upon, how child welfare workers spoke to their practice provided a rich area to explore how men are excluded and how women are made responsible. This research confirmed the criticism found in the current literature that child welfare ignores the perpetrators of the abuse and over focuses on mothers. Participants recognized this may not be successful practice but saw it as 'just the way things are,' feeling the only way to protect children was to focus intervention efforts on mothers. The analysis confirmed my contention that men must be included in the child welfare frame when assessing risk for children in order to realize a feminist perspective in our work with families, and in the end improve overall practice with women, men and

children. The participant experiences were compared to the current research and body of literature concerning the child welfare systemic response to violence against women. Mostly, participants' responses were parallel with the criticisms of child welfare in cases of women abuse.

This project argued, from a feminist perspective, that fathers need to be included in the frame of the child welfare lens when assessing safety for children in cases of violence against women. Although it is important not to overvalue the importance of fathers, it is equally important not to dismiss their significance (Silverstien, 1996: 10). That being said, what might this practice look like? What strategies could be developed to make feminist child welfare practice a reality? Child welfare research and practice do not take place in a vacuum; they reflect the ways in which our society constructs mothers, fathers and families. To move towards a father inclusive practice, local child welfare policy makers, administrators, supervisors and workers must take steps to promote healthy father/child relationships. This can be accomplished by supporting the development of programs that assist men to be good parents, helping controlling fathers improve their relationships with the mothers of their children and improving the child support system (Sylvester & Reich, 2000). But most importantly it involves helping to prevent fathers from abusing children and mothers. It is essential that research efforts be relocated to investigate fathering from the perspectives of men themselves and, in this case, from the perspectives of violent men. Most child welfare writing and research continues to focus on mothers (Risley-Curtiss & Heffernan, 2003) with only a few theorists taking up the issue of violent men as fathers (see, for example, Ferguson & Hogan, 2004; Peled, 2000).

Increased gender competency in child welfare agencies would also contribute to more socially just child welfare practice if workers made a commitment to address their own gender biases and increased the inclusion of fathers in their programs and case planning. One way to accomplish this is to change case documentation requirements to ensure that all men involved in the family are included. Secondly, supervisors must teach and model the value of routinely including both parents (and/or a partner that currently lives in the home and has contact with the children) in assessment stages as well as in intervention planning. From an educational perspective, social work programs have a responsibility to remove gender-biased materials from their curriculum and add father-inclusive materials to curricula and in class discussions.

In order to accomplish this reform, Scourfield (2008) contends that we need to know what works when intervening with men. He advises that this may mean any number of different approaches. Interventions he recommends on the basis of research include "family group conferences and pro-feminist education for violent men" (Scourfield, 2000: 8). Practical skills of engaging clients and facilitating change, the same ones that are important in work with all social work clients, must be brought to bear in our work with men. One vehicle Scourfield (2008) believes will be helpful to accomplish this is for child welfare social workers to be trained in motivational interviewing. It can be defined as a directive, client-centred counselling approach for assisting clients to explore and resolve ambivalence. Motivational interviewing has proven to be successful in working with pre-contemplative clients, that is, clients who are not entirely convinced they have a problem or need to change, a description that often applies to men who are violent.

The absence of clear policy and practice guidelines for child welfare workers uncovered in this project contributes to workers not knowing how to respond in these cases. In the U.K. and Ireland, some social service agencies have taken a more pro-active approach in recognizing woman abuse as a problem in its own right that is worthy of intervention. They have developed an overall policy in addition to step-by-step practice guidelines and comprehensive documentation systems.

But what if the policy and practice required to successfully intervene in cases involving violence against women already exists and only needs to be properly utilized to ensure the protection of mothers? Why not use existing legislation that provides child welfare workers the ability to remove the perpetrator from the home instead of removing the children or their mother? As I demonstrated in my analysis chapter, workers seem unaware of the provisions that already exist in legislation and policy that allow for direct intervention with perpetrators. Another legislative provision that could be of use in situations of mother abuse is the "Application for an Order to not Contact a Child" contained in Manitoba's *Child and Family Services Act.* In my own experience, this provision is typically used to remove a perpetrator who is living in the home and abusing a child. But it could also be utilized when violence against a child's primary caregiver is occurring. For example, Section 20(1) states:

> Where an agency has reasonable grounds to believe that a person has subjected a child to abuse or is likely to subject a child to abuse, it may apply to court for an order that the person:
>
> (a) cease to reside in the same premises in which a child resides;
>
> (b) refrain from any contact or association with a child (Child and Family Services Act. Manitoba. pt. 20 & 1. 2008)

What this policy makes clear is that child welfare workers already have the authority to remove the perpetrator from the home; yet, as my research demonstrates, they instead resort to insisting that the mother make the perpetrator leave. Therefore, I conclude that some of the tools to support a change in practice are already in place; workers only need to change whether and how they are utilized. Notably, none of the child welfare workers I interviewed could recall a single case where this strategy had been utilized, either in one of their own cases or that of their colleagues. But the authority and ability to remove a perpetrator of violence against a mother exists. In fact, Alaska has led the way in carving out new legislation that moves to exclude the perpetrator of the violence from the family rather than putting the burden on the victims to flee with their children (Edleson, et al., 2006).

Existing legislation is clear about Child Welfare's responsibility to serve parents notice of all court proceedings involving their children. Section 20(2) of The Child and Family Services Act, "Notice of Application" states the following:

The agency shall give 7 clear days notice of the hearing on a prescribed form to

(a) parents or legal guardians of the child;

(b) any adult residing in the same premises as the child;

(c) the person against whom the order is sought; and

(d) the child where the child is 12 years of age or more.

I suggest that child welfare agencies could apply the same rigour to contact men and holding them accountable for violence as they do when workers are required to serve men with court papers. In my own practice experience when it came to serving fathers notice, all avenues had to be exhausted in out attempts to find a father, regardless of his

involvement in the child's life. When a worker could confirm that s/he had tried everything possible, an ad was usually placed in the newspaper in the hope that the father or someone he knew would see the notice. I suggest that the rigour applied to locating men in order to notify them of court processes supports my contention that Child Welfare views men as rights-bearing individuals. The shift that must take place is to also view men as having responsibilities, including for addressing and ameliorating the effects of violence they have perpetrated.

Other researchers on the subject have made recommendations for how to proceed in situations where men are violent to mothers. For example, Glenda Kaufman Kantor and Liza Little (2003) call for a review of the currently broad definition of the concept of "failure to protect." Randy Magen (1999) advocates the development of new concepts that capture the co-occurrence of violence against women and child abuse in ways that refrain from reproducing mother blame. Harry Ferguson and Fergus Hogan (2004) call for the examination of father exclusion in child and family work and the identification of steps that must be taken to ensure fathers and men become users of child and family services.

Linda Mills (2000), in her training sessions with child welfare workers, found they held strong views about the liability of abused mothers. She noted that workers hold strong views about how abused mothers should respond to the abuse in their relationships, namely, that they must permanently leave their abusive partners (Mills, 2000). If mothers fail to respond to this mandate, some workers believed that abused women should be held responsible for the abuse inflicted on their children (Magen, 1999). This line of thinking holds that if mothers were not allowing themselves to be

abused in the presence of their children, then their children would not be exposed to abuse.

In order to change this focus, Nicky Stanley (1997) proposes that child welfare must deal with the issue of "invisible men" as an effective way to reduce risk a view supported by my research. To make this shift successfully, Jeffery Edleson (1998) recommends a sustained focus of intervention with perpetrators, while Randy Magen (1999) suggests instituting protection orders against perpetrators instead of removing children,. Finally, many researchers have called for child welfare workers to receive specific training in violence against women and the routine inclusion of domestic violence screening in child welfare assessments (Magen, 1999; Mills et al., 2000). To ensure training will be successful, violence against women specialists need to be integrated into local agencies to give workers case consultation, support and practice guidance. Training must recognize that there is often no easy answer for how best to proceed when a child's mother is the victim of abuse. Prior to implementing these changes, most child welfare systems, including that in Manitoba, need reorientation towards preventative and inclusive intervention rather than the current investigatory orientation of practice (Shepard & Raschick, 1999). Case load sizes must be kept to manageable levels for social workers to have the opportunity to implement these new practice strategies.

Alternatively, writers such as J.S. Milner (1993) believe practice in these cases can be improved through a few simple policy and practice changes, such as the inclusion of father's information on all forms and case documentation and the encouragement of initiatives aimed at working with fathers separate from mothers. She suggests that child

welfare agencies have to begin to "behave less like critical fathers and more like supportive mothers" (Milner, 1993: 60).

My contention is that none of these practice shifts can be accomplished without a paradigm shift in current child welfare systems. Supervisors and administrators in the field must be brought on board to assist development for a feminist shift in practice. A common theme among the social workers I interviewed was that they learned to intervene in violence against women cases from the direction of their immediate supervisors. It would appear that training in the area of violence against women would not only benefit front-line staff but supervisors and administrators as well. Practice with mothers, fathers and children where violence against women is present will require more reflection and clinical supervision for social workers who take on this difficult and demanding work (Davies & Collings, 2004). This is likely to require more resources than the system currently has, meaning that funding allocations must take into account violence against mothers as a priority for expenditure.

Research shows that mothers contending with violence are grateful for the support and assistance of workers when it is offered. Randy Magen, Conroy and Alisa Del Tofo (2000: 203) found that mothers appreciate when child welfare workers inquire about current or past domestic violence and felt better protected from their abuser when they disclose the abuse to the child welfare worker. Randy Magen et al. (2001) found that addressing violence directly with abused women both enhances the worker's connection with the client and increased the abused woman's confidence to address the abuse. Mills (2000) points out that the interests of abused mothers and their children are best served when contact by child welfare social workers is direct, empowering and cognizant of the

abused mother's predicament. Child welfare workers may be uniquely positioned to intervene in families where domestic violence is occurring as their interventions appear to be child-oriented and therefore less likely to raise the perpetrator's suspicions. This sort of intervention can 'buy time' to help an abused mother formulate plans that respond to conflicting emotional, cultural and safety concerns in a manner that reflects her own pace of healing (Mills, 2000).

Ultimately, partnerships need to be established between child welfare and violence against women systems. Given the multifaceted nature of violence against women, many different services are required to deal with it. These entities must work together to develop strategies and interventions that provide protection to both women and children without blaming mothers who have been victims of the abuse. If these partnerships can be successful, multidisciplinary teams consisting of child welfare, legal, justice and battered women's shelters could be devised and hold abusive men accountable as well as deliver holistic family practice efforts. Interagency initiatives have proved successful for responding to child sexual abuse and similar models could be applied to domestic violence.

Feminist constructs of woman abuse are not new. For example, many feminist researchers have documented inequality in household division of labour and men's power over women and children in the home. Feminist perspectives have not, however, made the impact that many had hoped for, as I have demonstrated in analyzing discourses operationalized when men beat the mothers of their children. While abusive men are now seen as a danger to women and children that should be removed, it continues to be the responsibility of women to do this. Failure to do so constitutes "failure to protect" in

child welfare terms and it is women's actions and attitudes that are scrutinized by child welfare workers. The perspective of workers seems to be that female clients would be better off without these men and little empathy is shown when they do not wish to be.

I will even go a step further and echo a point made by Strega (2004) in her research on the same topic. She states, "While the number of men who perpetrate abuse is large, and the number of men who are held accountable is small, I believe that white men with money and connections are able to insulate themselves from the consequences of their actions" (89). She might be on to something, as child welfare scrutiny only involves certain men. These men include men who tend to be marginalized, such as the poor, addicted and/or mentally ill visible minorities. These inconsistencies in accountability have also been found in men who beat women and find themselves in the judicial system. Elizabeth Comack and Gillian Balfour's (2004) research demonstrates class and race bias in how the justice system charges and sentences male perpetrators in domestic violence situations. They explored ways in which defense lawyers use strategies that ultimately undermine legislative reform efforts. They discovered how questions of class and race interact to excuse certain kinds of men and provide a convincing argument that strategies lawyers utilize are saturated with race and class based stereotypes. They ultimately ask the question is law a fair and unbiased mediator of social conflicts or is it a location that produces gender, class and race inequalities?

It is my position that social workers in child welfare agencies need a forum in which they can have open discussions regarding their opinions of the role a father or a mother's current partner has in the lives of the children they are assisting. Some of the topics can include workers' own difficulties in engaging, communicating and intervening

with men. At the same time, it would be helpful to address explicitly the problem of the current 'failure to protect' discourse within their work. Finally, agencies must recruit social workers who are willing to include fathers, which may mean having the flexibility to work outside of regular business hours when men may be more available. Workers must speak with fathers directly, instead of relying on mothers to persuade men to participate in meetings or speak to their partner's thoughts or actions. It is unrealistic and socially unjust to expect that a woman in this position will have any influence with a man who is controlling and/or abusive.

When I first came to child welfare social work, I believed—much the same as the child welfare social workers I interviewed—that if a mother could not let go of her relationship with her abuser, she might possess an inability to make good decisions for herself and her children and therefore her parenting may be questionable and would require further assessment. Since spending these past two years researching and contemplating this issue, I have further refined my attitudes towards women in violent relationships. I now can see the "fault lines" that occur in practice and policy and how we can work towards more socially just practice in child welfare. I designed this project to increase awareness of the experiences of abused mothers and their children and the importance of their difficult dilemmas. These dilemmas are complex and unique to each individual woman's circumstances and are strongly influenced by emotional and cultural concerns that place an abused mother in difficult position: insist your abusive partner leave or risk losing your children.

The most disturbing realization that came with completing this project is the influence of dominant discourses in no longer seeing abused mothers as victims but as

abusers. Strega (2004: 224) points out that "women are transformed into abusers, and the abuse they are guilty of is 'allowing' their children to be exposed to their victimization despite practice efforts of child welfare workers." If child welfare is to succeed in reducing risk to children and their mothers, workers must include in their assessment and interventions the person who is perpetrating the violence

Parallels

What has evolved from this research is the idea of a parallel in existence: child welfare social workers are in the same sort of position as women who are abused within the family – relatively powerless but still to blame (Eveline Milliken, personal communication, February 3, 2009). At the same time, it is important to recognize that numerous macro systems weigh heavily and influence child welfare. According to Julia Krane (2003:67) "child welfare is not responsible for changing the current distribution of power that maintains hierarchical and oppressive gender relations….nevertheless it can and must do its part."

Implications for Further Research

While this project has demonstrated how 'men missing in action' and 'mothers' responsibility to protect' have come to dominate current child welfare policy and practice in situations where men beat mothers, it also offers insight into how these areas may be improved. One of the significant lessons impressed upon me in doing this research is the need for further research into violent fathers and how social workers can effectively intervene with and support this population. Research on men is needed because it will not

only give child welfare social workers effective practice techniques for working with fathers but will also adjust the dominant focus on mother's responsibility to protect. The work of Peled (2000) and Scott and Crooks (2004) provide useful examples. Not only must we continue to explore how child welfare systems support and maintain rather than reduce men's violence against women, but how other systems in our culture, for example, the legal system in the areas of child custody and divorce, maintain women's oppression. While violence against women is recognized in child welfare, it is seen through the neutral description of 'domestic violence' and the perpetrator is ascribed the gender neutral descriptor 'that person.' As a result, we are only allowed to understand violence against women as women's victimization but not as men's perpetration. We can begin to make needed changes by including fathers in the frame of research and practice as well as through clearer policy directives and accountability.

It would seem clear that there are also a number of issues facing fathers today that require further attention and inquiry. These should include research into the mental and physical health needs of fathers as well as how fathers can be supported in developing safe and positive relationships with their children. One of the greatest lessons I will take away from this research is that those in more privileged populations in a society, in this case men and social workers, have less research completed about them as they are not as accessible as less powerful populations, such as abused mothers and children.

Scourfield (2008) in a recent paper cites Harry Ferguson's argument for participant observation of the home visits child welfare workers conduct with their client families. This 'liquid social work' as he calls it envisions researchers going out in the car and into the homes with social workers rather than staying in the office (Ferguson &

Hogan, 2004). To be able to observe what actually occurs between workers and their clients would be enormously helpful and insightful in terms of not only the challenges faced by clients, but social work judgments as well. For example, the child welfare social workers studied by Donald Forrester (Forrester et al., 2002, cited in Scourfield, 2008) did not use open-ended questioning and did not display empathy towards clients. One could conclude that conversations with clients are not about any therapeutic encounters but rather narrowly-focused information gathering and telling clients what to do. Jennifer Reich (2005) found that outcomes in child welfare were primarily dependent on the extent to which clients displayed deference to workers and accepted worker interpretations of problems and solutions. These findings suggest that some gendered practice issues may not be so much due to a lack of knowledge or require further training. It may be more a problem of social work skills; in other words, some workers may be not very good at talking to people. If we are only talking to workers about their perspectives on how they perceive their practice, they may not describe or view themselves as not being good at it.

Julia Krane and Linda Davies (2006) caution that workers must first develop a deep understanding of women's experiences of abuse and experiences of mothering in order to develop sensitive and effective collaborative interventions. They add that researchers must begin to examine and acknowledge the various ways women resist violence in the relationship. They also have introduced the concept of incorporating "a mother narrative" in current social work practice (Krane & Davies, 2000) through which women can begin to tell their own personal stories as mothers. They attest that this narrative approach allows child welfare workers and mothers to collaborate on the

subjective experiences of mothering, the stresses and emotional intensity. It is hoped that these discussions will lead to collaborative relationships between child welfare workers and client mothers that moves beyond blame or being what Krane and Davis (2006) call being "pressed into service" prematurely in the protection process.

Finally, Alaggia et al. (2007:287) cautions future research should focus on establishing the effectiveness of the differentiated response models I spoke of earlier before being implemented. Although she states that Ontario is moving ahead with differentiated response, she strongly recommends " these models should be introduced as pilot projects, rigorously evaluated, and only implemented when there is evidence to support adequate, appropriate and effective services available to meet the complex needs of the populations they are intended to serve".

Alaska has led the way with designing new legislation that removes the perpetrator from the home not the victims. But as I have pointed out earlier, Manitoba already has policy within their Child and Family Services Act – workers just need to utilize it.

A Final Note

I have learned tremendously from this research, not only from the background review of literature and policy, but from the thoughtful responses and professional experiences of the child welfare workers who generously agreed to participate. Having worked in the field of child welfare, I can fully appreciate and empathize with the pressures of the job in keeping children and families safe. As a result, I have come to better understand my own experiences as a child welfare worker.

If I was to choose the greatest lesson, it would be to learn where one can find the possibilities for resistance when it comes to men's violence and control over women. Workers can begin to ask 'why does he hit her?' instead of 'why does she stay?' and say the problem is 'men batter women' not 'women are battered' and know it as such. At the conclusion of this project, I have dedicated eighteen years of my career to this work, and can visualize for the first time a clear path to improving social work practice on this issue. Once I could see how the dominant discourses of 'fathers missing in action' and 'mothers failing to protect' worked, I started to see women's inequality in other areas. With the completion of my research comes the confidence that child welfare workers have choices and need not be oppressed by the dominant discourse of 'mothers' failure to protect.' If we (particularly female social workers) do not help the women who come into our practice, then who will?

Lastly, this experience has reinforced the need for a better understanding of women's oppression in all areas of society and the challenges and possible successes associated with women's resistance. A feminist poststructural discourse analysis afforded a useful framework and context to understand the complicated phenomena of women's oppression and ways to work against it.

Despite risks, other researchers continue efforts to explore discourses regarding men's violence in child welfare. In Canada, social work theorists such as Strega (2004), Callahan et al. (1998), Krane and Davies (2000) and Swift (2001) have developed theories as to how violence against women is constructed in child welfare work and suggestions for change in the areas of both policy and practice. Holt (2003) in Ireland along with Daniel and Taylor (1999), Milner (1993), Scourfield (2003) and Featherstone

(2001) in the U.K. continue the same work there. Perhaps one day 'fathers included in the frame' will become standard child welfare practice.

We must keep in mind that just because it is 'the way things are' does not mean it is the way they should be.

Appendix 1

INFORMATION/ CONSENT SHEET FOR SOCIAL WORKER INTERVIEWEES

THESIS TITLE: Fathers in the Frame: protecting children by including men/fathers in cases of violence against women.

RESEARCHER: Carla Navid, Social Work Master's Student with University of Manitoba, Faculty of Social Work

RESEARCH SUPERVISOR: Dr. Susan Strega, School of Social Work, University of Victoria

Let me begin by thanking you for your consideration in participating in this research project.

INTRODUCTION TO THE RESEARCH: This project will examine how child welfare practice is implemented in cases where fathers physically abuse mothers. I am most interested in learning more about the stories social workers share about their experiences in working a case where domestic violence is present.

Purpose of the Research

There are two main sections to my research. In the first, I will interview social workers regarding their practice in cases where violence against women is present. My goal is to expose social workers' own accounts of their experience. The second section will involve examining policy documents in the Manitoba child welfare system. By piecing this data together, I hope to reveal the 'big picture' regarding the nature of child welfare policy and practice in cases of domestic violence.

WHAT DOES THE INTERVIEW INVOLVLE?

Research Procedures

The interviews will be quite informal and I will utilize the use of an interview guide containing some general questions to be covered. My wish is that rather than follow a strict question and answer format, we can talk together. Interviews will be conducted at a time and location that is most convenient for you, such as your home or a venue that allows for your confidentiality to be maintained and quiet enough for us to have a conversation. All interviews will be completed individually.
I will ask a number of questions involving your professional experiences in child welfare. Depending on your interest, I will ask questions like:

1. Could you share how you came to work as a social worker in the field of child welfare?
2. What is your understanding of why domestic violence is considered a child welfare issue?
3. Without providing names, can you recall specific cases you have been involved in where violence was directed at the mother?

Interviews will last anywhere from one to two hours, depending on how much you have to share. Time will be set aside at the end of the interview for a debriefing period.

Recording Devices

Before we begin, I will ask your permission to tape record the interview. I would like to record our conversation as I believe it will allow for your experience to be better represented. Please know that the tape recorder will be within your reach at all times and you may turn it off at any point.

Potential Risks

Finally, sometimes talking about stressful crisis-oriented work situations can bring up a range of emotions for all of us. If this happens to you, I will ask you if you are willing to continue the interview, pause for a break or discontinue completely. Please be aware that you do have the right to end the interview at any time during the process or not answer any questions you are not comfortable with. A list of community referrals for additional support such as local Employee Assistance Programs or free support services for women will be provided to you should you want the opportunity to discuss any issues you find upsetting in more detail.

WHAT HAPPENS TO INFORMATION AFTER THE INTERVIEW?

Follow up and Confidentiality:

If you agree to be interviewed, the material you provide will be used in a published Master of Social Work thesis. This thesis will be published and be available to the general public. It will contain direct quotes of what you have shared, but it will be impossible to identify you by it. I will not use your real name but ask you to provide a pseudonym name I may use instead. If you do not want me to use other identifying information such as your current occupation or age, please let me know this prior to beginning the interview.

After the interview is recorded, I will have another person transcribe the taped interviews for this project into written form. This person will sign a form that requires that they keep this information confidential. This is so you as well as other people you may mention will not be identifiable. Everything that you share in the interview will be treated as confidential information. The transcriber will be instructed to replace names

with codes. For example, if you use a colleague's name, it will appear in the transcript as {colleague}. If you use the name of either your current or previous supervisor, it will appear in the transcripts as {supervisor}. After your interview has been transcribed, I will provide you with a copy in order for you to go over it to ensure authenticity. You are free to make any revisions. You are also free to withdraw any part of the interview or the entire piece if you so choose.

The tapes and all written material for this project will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in this researcher's home office to which only I have access to. All electronic material will be stored on my personal laptop computer that requires a password to operate. Only I will be in possession of this password. All electronic documents will be stored on a memory stick which will also be stored in a locked file cabinet along with the other documents and tapes. All materials will be destroyed once the project is completed which is anticipated to occur in May 2008. This will involve shredding hard copies of any confidential data (eg. transcripts and consent forms). If you wish, you may have your own copy of the completed thesis.

Informed Consent

Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project and agree to participate as a subject. In no way does this waive your legal rights or releases the researchers, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. As has already been stated, you are free to withdraw from the study at any time, and /or refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

WHAT TO DO IF YOU WISH TO PARTICIPATE: It is important for you to know that your participation in this research project is strictly voluntary. You will not be paid monetarily for your contribution. But with your participation, you are helping to build knowledge in an area where little research has been published. Your stories will assist social workers and researchers to understand more about child welfare practice with men when violence against women is identified, and possibly enhance services available. If you agree to be interviewed, the information you provide will be used in a published Master of Social Work thesis.

Giving your Consent

I agree to take part in this research entitled Fathers in the Frame: Protecting Children by Including Men/Fathers in Cases of Domestic Violence. I have had the project explained to me and I have read the above statement that I may keep for my records. I understand that agreeing to take part means that I am willing to:
- Be interviewed by the researcher

- Allow this researcher to quote me directly – as long as this does not publicly identify me or a named associate; and
- Have my comments and stories used in a Master of Social Work thesis that is available to the general public

I am aware that his interview is being conducted for research purposes, not counseling or employment support.

Please complete the following:

I **do/do not** permit the researcher to identify my age, occupation or marital status, etc. (circle your preference)

Please read the following statements, and if you are in agreement with them, place an **X** in the box at the end of each statement.

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the Information sheet for the above study. ☐

2. I confirm that I have had the opportunity to ask questions and find out more about the study. ☐

3. I understand that all the information I give to the researcher will be kept confidential and my real name will not appear on any written materials. ☐

4. I understand that my participation is strictly voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time and I do not need to supply a reason. ☐

5. In the event that I do withdraw, I give permission for the information I have provided to this point to be used in the project. ☐

6. I give permission for the interview to be audio-taped for the purposes of research. ☐

7. I agree to take part in this study. ☐

This research has been approved by the Psychology/Sociology Research Ethics Board. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact the Human Ethics Secretariat at 1-204-474-7122 or email margaret_bowman@umanitoba.ca. In addition, this project is supervised by Dr. Susan Strega at the University of Victoria and she can be reached at 1-250-721-8333 or email sstrega@uvic.ca. A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your own records and reference.

Do you have any questions or is there anything you can think of that was not covered? Are there any concerns that you have about participation that you wish to discuss? If you think of anything, please do not hesitate to contact me. I can be reached by phone at 1-204-XXX-XXXX or email.

Thank you once again for taking the time to review this information. If you are willing to participate, let's go ahead and schedule a time and place to conduct the interview.

---------------------------------- Signatures as Required----------------------------------

Participant's Name -- (Print Name in Full)

Date --

 (Participant's Signature)--

I would like to receive a summary of the preliminary research findings ____Yes ____No

If yes, I would prefer to receive these by _____email ____mail

Please provide email or mailing address:

I would like to receive a copy of the completed thesis ____Yes ____No

If yes, I would like to receive the thesis by _____email ____mail

Please provide address:

Researcher's Signature ---
Date   --

CONSENT FORM FOR INTERVIEW

Title of project: **Fathers in the frame: protecting children by including men in cases of violence against women.**

Researcher: Carla Navid, BSW, MSW (Cand.)

Please read the following statements, and if you are in agreement with them, place an X in the box at the end of each statement.

8. I confirm that I have read and understand the Information sheet for the above study. ☐

9. I confirm that I have had the opportunity to ask questions and find out more about the study. ☐

10. I understand that all the information I give to the researcher will be kept confidential and my real name will not appear on any written materials. ☐

11. I understand that my participation is strictly voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time and I do not need to supply a reason. ☐

12. I give permission for the interview to be audio-taped for the purposes of research. ☐

13. I agree to take part in this study. ☐

Name --- (Participant)

Date --

Signature --- (Participant)

Signature --- (Researcher)

Date   ---

Interview Guide

1. I would like to start with you telling me how you came to working as a social worker in child welfare? Probes: How long have you been doing this type of work, and if you do not currently work in this field, how long did you?

2. If you are no longer employed in child welfare, do you mind explaining what contributed to your decision to leave?

3. Could you describe your experience of domestic violence being present in a family you worked with as a child welfare social worker?

4. What is your understanding of why domestic violence is considered a child welfare issue?

5. There is a concern that 'children witnessing violence is harmful.' What is your understanding and experience of this effect on children?

6. Without mentioning names, could you provide some examples of cases you have been involved with where violence was directed at the mother?

7. What is your understanding of a mother's failure to protect when domestic violence is present in the home?

8. Could you describe for me in your own words your practice with fathers/men when woman abuse has been present in the family?

9. Do you believe that this practice, in your opinion, is adequate to intervene and improve situations where violence against women is present?

10. In what ways, if any, do you think that this practice can be improved?

11. What is your understanding of the policy and legislation that is in place in your agency to address a case where domestic violence is present?

12.Can you recall any specific policy you relied upon to guide your practice in domestic violence cases?

13. What is your understanding of the legislation of the policy and legislation that directs your practice when working with perpetrators?

14. Finally, is there anything I have not asked that you would like to share or add to this discussion?

15. Would you like a copy of the final draft of this project?

TRANSCRIBER CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

The purpose of this document is to protect the anonymity and confidentiality of interview participants in the **Fathers in the Frame: Protecting children by including men in cases of violence against women** research project.

I understand that in the course of preparing transcripts from participant interviews that I will have access to confidential information in the course of that work. Examples of confidential information include names of participants as well as names of colleagues or clients mentioned during the audio-taped interview.

I understand that in the course of preparing the transcript I will replace names of social workers and clients with code names as directed by the researcher, Carla Navid. For example, names will be replaced by a pseudonym name chosen by the participant [Jane], for workers, and [mother], [daughter], etc. for clients.

I further understand and agree that I will not disclose to anyone at anytime any confidential information that I may be privy to as a result of my transcribing work.

_____
Print Name

_____   _____
Signature   Date

_____
Print Name

_____   _____
Witness   Date

Signed at _____ this _____ day of _____, 2007.

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