

Separating From Violent Male Partners: A Resistant Act in the Midst of Power Relations.

By Vivienne Elizabethⁱ

Abstract

This article draws on Foucauldian feminist theory to conceptualize separating from violent male partners by women as an act of resistance. Thus conceptualized, leaving takes on a new meaning as a strategy used by women to disrupt abusive power relations, but not necessarily to end their relationships. It is argued that attempts by women to transform their lives through separation needs to be located within a wider social context and that this context needs to be analyzed from the vantage point of power. Such analysis points to post-separation identities and needs as significant sites of struggle between women and members of their social network. The exercise of power within these broader social contexts has important consequences for the effectiveness with which women can use separation to resist abusive male partners; hence, researchers and practitioners in the field need to pay much more attention to these relationships and the meanings given to abuse and leaving within these relationships.

Key Words: *separation, domestic violence and resistance*

ⁱ Lecturer, Sociology, The University of Auckland, Auckland, Aotearoa New Zealand. This article was written with the partial support of a grant from the Health Research Council of New Zealand. I would also like to thank the following people for their input into the development of this article: Jennifer Hand, Tim McCreanor, Carolyn Coggan, Colleen Ivory, Shona Selby, Marilyn Burton, Luisa Falanitule, Jo Elvidge, Shona Thompson, and Wendy Larnier.