



## No To Violence

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## Domestic violence perpetrator programs: Education, therapy, support, accountability 'or' struggle?

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There is a diversity of approaches and models aimed at changing men's behaviours and attitudes in the context of domestic violence perpetrator programs.<sup>1</sup> Duluth, Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, narrative approaches, strengths-based models, emotion-focused and other more controversial approaches (for example, psychodynamic) appear in the program literature at an international level (Aldarondo & Mederos, 2012; NSW Department of Attorney General and Justice, 2012; Phillips, Kelly & Westmarland, 2013). While many program providers would describe their work as 'eclectic', or that they draw on more than one model, this diversity reflects differences in the programs' underlying philosophies, particularly their positioning in relation to feminism (or feminisms), gender, and a systemic 'versus' clinical or psychological focus.

For practitioners, there are both promises and pitfalls in drawing on multiple models. Given the highly challenging and demanding nature of the work, learning from different approaches can help practitioners to benefit from the particular strengths of each, or to 'plug the gaps' when the predominant model has some specific weaknesses that are constraining program effectiveness.

The danger, however, is falling into the trap of unsystematic 'technical eclecticism', where the underlying philosophies and values of the program become inconsistent and confused (Lazarus & Beutler, 1993), and its integrity and coherency become watered down. This can result in the poor translation of program theory into practice (Day, Chung, O'Leary, & Carson, 2009; Wales & Tiller, 2011).

Without strong and consistent program underpinnings, practitioners lack a solid base not only to design a program, but also to be flexible and to make best use of 'the moment' in group work. An overly pragmatic approach of 'taking a bit from here, and a bit from there' can also make it difficult to develop a sufficiently detailed and clear program manual, ensure consistency of approach among practitioners in the team, and support practitioners to become increasingly skilled in their work over time (Slabber, 2012).

This article invites readers to consider the different threads that can make up the fabric of men's behaviour change work, to support an *intentional weaving* that enables practitioners to have a firm footing when considering which model(s) to adopt or combine. The article is based on the author's experiences in running the No To Violence professional development workshop *How to weave education and therapy, accountability and support, in men's behaviour change work* at different locations in Victoria.

## Education

A core thread in the development of perpetrator programs has been the intention to help men unlearn violent behaviours and underlying attitudes, and to learn non-violent alternatives. The Duluth and other feminist approaches emphasise that men's choices to use violence are socially constructed through wider gender-based relations involving male privilege and entitlement, and that the change process involves men learning to identify and transform their use of power and control to make better choices. Cognitive-behavioural approaches also draw heavily on education practices and metaphors, including the use of social learning theory, and practices that support men to learn new skills about taking responsibility for their behaviour. Indeed, many programs loosely describe themselves as Duluth-influenced, cognitive-behavioural approaches, adopting a curriculum based on a series of learning objectives. This is often referred to as a 'psycho-educational' approach.

Few program providers and practitioners would see no role for education in men's behaviour change work. A key question, however, is what is meant by education, and what it means for the practitioner to wear the educator hat in this work.

### Adult learning principles

Most men's behaviour change facilitators do not have a background or formal qualifications in adult education, in the learning principles to adopt when teaching adults particular knowledge, understandings and skills. However, facilitators are impelled to consider these principles to create a constructive learning and skill acquisition environment for program participants. These include:

- identifying the competencies, or elements of *praxis*, that program participants are expected to develop in order to cease their use of violent and controlling behaviours and attitudes. A recent Australian men's behaviour change program (MBCP) practice guide encourages agencies, during program planning, to identify and delineate these key elements of praxis, and to specify what would need to be observed (in a group, and at home as reported through partner contact) to demonstrate that a participant has developed a particular element (NSW Department of Attorney General and Justice, 2012)
- understanding that MBCP participants, like all adults, have diverse learning styles and preferred modalities to engage with new information, understandings, beliefs, attitudes and skills. While historically group-work processes have relied heavily on learning through talking, conversation and listening, some men learn more effectively through the modalities of watching, experiencing, moving, doing and/or creating. Indeed, the skilled use of multiple modalities in group work involves not only varying them within and between sessions, but also integrating them within a particular activity. The concept of graphic conversations, for example, emphasises the participatory creation of visual diagrams and cues to create anchor points and depth for subsequent dialogue and conversational reflection (Mackay & Telford, 2013)
- accommodating diverse learning styles as a result of participant differences in age, life experience, social class, ethnicity, educational levels and other key variables (NSW Department of Attorney General and Justice, 2012)

- acknowledging that some participants might require greater amounts, or different types, of *scaffolding* when engaging in a group or individual learning activity. For example, some participants might require a process to be broken down into a greater number of concrete and fairly bounded steps while others might respond to a more open and reflective approach
- giving sufficient priority to men's *social learning environments*, and that conversation and practice within the group are not sufficient. McMaster (2003), for example, describes a three-step social learning sequence, where participants initially explore and rehearse a new attitude(s) or behaviour(s) in the group environment, put it into practice in their family and/or other real-life social environments, and finally reflect on this *doing* in the group environment (what worked well, what didn't, what was hard about the doing, what to remember for next time, etc.)
- sequencing and reinforcing activities focusing on particular elements of praxis so that understanding and competence builds over time. Many issues require seeding in planned and opportunistic ways at various points in a program before they are introduced in a more concerted fashion as the focus of a particular session, followed up by regular attempts to bring them back into focus in future sessions. This revisiting will enable men to engage with issues more deeply as they progress through the program (NSW Department of Attorney and Justice, 2012). Furthermore, often in adult education an activity is deliberately designed to support or reinforce learning across two or more competencies simultaneously, providing an opportunity to revisit previous learning while introducing a new topic
- making use of analogies commonplace in men's working and personal lives, to help them relate to new concepts
- creating learning environments that acknowledge that change is not just a cognitive or behavioural process, but also involves core issues related to identity, meaning, emotion and connectedness.

A more thorough outline of the application of adult learning principles is beyond the scope of this article, and readers can no doubt add greatly to this list. While the professional backgrounds of most MBCP practitioners do not involve formal, tertiary qualifications in adult education, we are nevertheless called to consciously develop these and other adult education skills.

### **Critical reflection**

A further consideration of the education element in men's behaviour change work is which *pedagogy* is adopted as the philosophical basis of learning. In relation to issues of power and control, Brazilian educator Paulo Freire's (1970) concept of critical pedagogy potentially offers much to family and domestic violence work.

Freire criticises the 'banking' metaphor used in many educational settings, where participants are assumed to be 'empty vessels' that require filling with the 'true' information and knowledge possessed by educators. He argues that this predominant form of pedagogy is used by authoritarian (and authoritative) structures and institutions to dominate and control the space of ideas, attitudes and narratives, thereby keeping particular populations oppressed. Alternative pedagogies involving critical reflection attempt to remove the constraints that prevent people from co-creating knowledge and understandings about injustice and oppression, and to support their own active engagement with, and development of, ideas around power, ethics and fairness. Here, learning is not only participatory and experiential, but also generative.

Freire's educational philosophies can be seen through invitational approaches to domestic violence perpetrator work developed by Alan Jenkins and other narrative-oriented practitioners (Jenkins, 1990, 2009; Dolman, 2013). These approaches assume that perpetrators can, through skilled and careful facilitation, generate their own ideas and commitments concerning non-violence and the injustices caused through the oppression of others, and indeed might have taken a stand against these injustices and oppression in some contexts in their lives. The direct use of critical reflection can also be seen in some domestic violence perpetrator work in Chile, as Carlos Clavijo describes elsewhere in this journal.

Importantly, feminist writers such as bell hooks<sup>2</sup> have also written extensively on educational processes based on promoting critical consciousness around issues of oppression, power and privilege (hooks, 1994; Florence, 1998). For example, hooks (1994) writes:

To educate as the practice of freedom is a way of teaching that anyone can learn. That learning process comes easiest to those of us who teach who also believe that there is an aspect of our vocation that is sacred; who believe that our work is not merely to share information but to share in the intellectual and spiritual growth of our students. To teach in a manner that respects and cares for the souls of our students is essential if we are to provide the necessary conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin. (p. 13)

While these reflections are based on educational processes with communities marginalised by gender, race and other forms of oppression, they invite practitioners and activists attempting to engage those with privilege to consider education as involving much more than providing information.

## Therapy

References to the experiential, generative and holistic nature of learning point to one of the fundamental tensions in domestic violence perpetrator programs – is this work education 'or' therapy? Cagney and McMaster (2012) outline a history of program development and evolution in New Zealand (with many parallels to Australian and other jurisdictions), emphasising that the work involves an integrative 'both/and', rather than an 'or'.

Central to these tensions and debate is the exploration of what exactly is and isn't meant by 'therapy' in the MBCP context. The unpacking of the therapy element in this work is crucial, including how it weaves together with other elements, particular accountability to, and solidarity with, those affected by men's perpetration of violence.

A common metaphor used with reference to therapy, more generally, is *healing*. Much of psychotherapy is traditionally about healing, focusing on intra-psychic wounds due to poor attachment-based experiences during childhood, family of origin or other trauma experiences, or more collective forms of pain due to social dislocation and cultural colonisation.

Aspects of healing can in some circumstances play a role in or be an outcome of a man's long-term change journey. Healing can also have a more central role for Indigenous offenders who have suffered inter-generational experiences of genocide and forced removal from family and land (Mosby & Thomsen, 2013).

However, Australian minimum standards of practice do not view therapeutic healing as having a central place in MBCP work (No To Violence, 2006; Queensland Department of Communities, 2007; NSW Department of Attorney General and Justice, 2012). This is because a focus on healing can:

- support men's 'victim stance' that can lie at the heart of their violence-supporting narratives, strengthening their justifications and rationalisations for their use of violence
- centralise the 'triggering' of (undeniably) intense emotions due to attachment-based or other interpersonal experiences, rather than men's use of gender-based privilege and entitlement to perpetrate violence and control as a way of coping with these emotions
- lose focus on the central place of women's and children's needs and voices
- take too long if it is viewed as an essential component of change – those affected by his use of violence can't wait for the years of healing to occur before there is a significant reduction in risk.

Importantly, MBCP practice can acknowledge and work, to a limited extent, with family-of-origin and intra-psychic issues without necessitating a healing approach. This can extend to working with men's emotionally maladaptive reactions (as distinct from behavioural responses) without a focus on healing the psychological hurts that might in part be feeding these reactions (Mills, 2013).

Indigenous practitioners have emphasised that healing can have a more prominent and up-front role in work with Indigenous men who perpetrate family violence (Mosby & Thomsen, 2013; Thomas & Thomson, 2013). This is due to the collective trauma and the disruptions and dislocations from the cultural, spiritual and community-based foundations for non-violence that Indigenous peoples have suffered. The adaptation of mainstream MBCP standards and underlying principles into Indigenous worldviews by Indigenous practitioners is still relatively new, with several programs having recently emerged in different parts of Australia. The Cross Border Program in the Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (NPY) Lands of central Australia, for example, has constructed a locally and spiritually grounded conversion of a typical Duluth and CBT-based curriculum to work with central desert men in remote communities (Frances & Forrester, 2013).

However, an Indigenous focus on healing is not the same as healing in a Western psychotherapeutic sense. The latter tends to be more bounded within an intra-psychic context focusing on past and current individual relationships or family-of-origin issues. This is distinct from collective trauma-based issues resulting from attempted genocide, and the attempted severing of the lifeblood of Indigenous ways of being and relating through land and spirit.

If there is a limited role for healing in men's behaviour change work in non-Indigenous contexts, does this correspond to a limited role for the element of therapy? Further unpacking of what is meant by therapy suggests other ways in which this element can be applicable, consistent with feminist principles and the centralisation of women's and children's voices, needs and human rights.<sup>3</sup>

### **Therapeutic tools**

In addition to a program's underlying principles and conceptualisation, practitioners come into this work with their own training, skills and experiences regarding what supports the change process. Whether one enters the work from a background of psychology (clinical, counselling or forensic), social work,

criminology, community welfare or another human services or justice tradition – or from a completely different pathway – practitioners bring with them theories, models and a 'toolkit' of strategies and tactics that they believe will facilitate change.

Each practitioner's unique experiences and professional development as a change agent can potentially contribute to the program's effectiveness in supporting change. However, it is important that a practitioner's toolkit aligns with the program's philosophical and conceptual underpinnings. It is possibly even more important that there are opportunities to discuss similarities and differences in toolkits among practitioners within a perpetrator program or broader family violence team (Geraghty, 2013).

It could be argued that there is an element of therapy in domestic violence perpetrator work through each practitioner's 'tricks of the trade'. As with change endeavours in many contexts, it is ultimately each man's responsibility as to how hard he will work at the change process. The tricks of the trade that a practitioner brings into the work – influencing the micro-detail of how a particular question is asked, through to the 'bigger picture' of how an activity or session is designed – can influence the likelihood that more men will make use of these invitations to work hard towards non-violence.

Furthermore, a section of our therapeutic, psychologist's or change agent's toolbox concerns our tricks of the trade in facilitating change-supporting *group* cultures and environments. Whether drawing on models of group psychotherapy (Griffiths, 2012), or group work development processes (Hamer, 1997), practitioners intentionally and/or indirectly draw on their experience and skills to support the group's ability to become a medium that facilitates rather than hinders change. This can be a large, though sometimes insufficiently considered, section of the toolkit, given the groundwork that is often needed to support men's sense of safety, connectivity, relatedness, care and active desire to participate in the group context.

### **Change processes as the starting point**

Morran (2011, 2013a, 2013b) has argued that perpetrator program design has often been based on considerations of how to structure the program according to content, issues and activities, rather than on the *processes* that will support change. His qualitative research with perpetrators who have embarked on very long-term journeys and commitments towards non-violence reveals that long-term change can involve:

- changes to the man's identity and sense of what it means to be a man
- maturation towards responsibility taking in a number of life areas, including a greater willingness to engage emotionally
- changes to social networks and friendship circles that are more likely to support newly constructed or transformed identities
- new interests and endeavours
- an active meaning-making process concerning why violence was used, and what the move away from violence means for his life and for those he cares about

- ongoing support for the journey towards non-violence, including long after program completion.

Morran suggests that these change processes, spanning the man's personal, interpersonal and social spheres, form some of the building blocks of long-term, sustainable change; and that programs should at least in part be structured around the question "How does change occur?" He argues that programs that focus exclusively on educative outcomes at the expense of change processes can lose potential impact, particularly in the long term.

### **Not about doing therapy with the men**

The above considerations, however, do not mean that domestic violence perpetrator work is about *doing therapy* with the men. This is more than a matter of pedantry or semantics. Utilising therapeutic tools, learning from group therapeutic principles, reflecting on change processes as a starting point in program design and delivery, taking care with the relationships between the facilitators and participants, and scaffolding a journey of self-discovery for the men, do not necessarily mean that men's behaviour change is primarily a therapeutic process.

A number of risks can arise through privileging therapy above the other elements of the work, and in failing to ground the use of therapeutic tools within conceptual underpinnings that centralise the needs and voices of women and children. First, as mentioned previously, metaphors of healing can creep into the work, undermining other aspects of the program.

Second, a focus on building a 'therapeutic alliance' between the facilitators and program participants – an important building block in many therapeutic contexts – can take priority over women, children and others affected by the man's violence being the primary clients of the program. While nurturing rapport, trust and emotional safety within facilitator-participant relating is vital, and while facilitators can be allies to men in their attempts to change, this is not necessarily the same as building an *alliance*.

Third, there is the danger of men's genuine experiences of victimisation (particularly family-of-origin) being highlighted and privileged over their feelings or beliefs of being victimised based on male entitlement and privilege. Men's genuine experiences of victimisation can provide important 'grist for the mill' in men's behaviour change work. However, for many men, the most potent contributor to their 'victim stance', and their feelings of righteous anger, is when their partner, children or others act or fail to act in ways that the man expects, with these expectations being unfair, unjust and fuelled by male entitlement and privilege. Doing therapy runs the risk of marginalising the vital work needed to address this latter sense of perceived/felt victimisation that is based on men's recruitment into exercising patriarchal power and thinking.

Fourth, facilitators might become caught up in the enthusiastic participation and engagement by the men with particular therapeutic processes, and the perceived value and impact, without linking this back to women's and children's voices and needs. This can lead facilitators to perceive that the activity is 'it' – the pinnacle of the session – rather than a part of a process towards family safety and the human rights of family members.

In practice, this means grounding the activity with processes before and after that enable the men to reflect on and work through what the discoveries or impact of the activity might mean for how they can support their family's safety and dignity. Whether it be through invitational questioning, small-group work or creative visual or movement-based exercises, processes that link the 'therapeutic' activity to

commitments, beliefs and actions that the men can take towards other-centredness are vital. Otherwise, the self-centring nature of many therapeutic activities may strengthen men's self-focus at the expense of the voices and needs of others.

The difference between adopting therapeutic processes and tools, and doing therapy, can be seen in how facilitators contextualise a particular activity within the group setting. Mills (2013), for example, has outlined an emotion-focused approach to men's behaviour change work, which on the surface could be seen as doing therapy. This approach assists men to become aware of maladaptive emotional reactions that in some cases might stem from family-of-origin attachment based experiences, or genuine experiences of victimisation based on social class, race or violence by other men. It does not, however, attempt to address or heal these hurts. Rather, it works with men to take responsibility for these emotions, to not draw on their male privilege and entitlement to use these emotions as an excuse to choose violence.

Mills and his colleagues draw on emotion-focused techniques due to a concern about the limitations of relying solely on psycho-educational or cognitive-behavioural tools, though these are woven into their program. Therapy is not done with the men, rather, emotion-focused approaches are used to work towards men taking emotional responsibility and to choose non-violence.

### **Individual case formulations**

While MBCP work might not necessarily involve 'doing therapy' with men, there is scope, and a need, to consider complementing group-work processes with an individualised approach that involves case formulations and case planning with each man. As a New Zealand practitioner and trainer focusing on what community-based programs can learn from those implemented in a criminal justice system setting emphasises: The provision of a generic intervention, with the idea that some ideas will stick, is a poor use of precious and limited resources (McMaster, 2013, p. 10).

Individual work with men, such as combining group-work programs with periodic individual sessions to address barriers and enablers of each man's participation in the program (Buckley & Schar, 2010) might not amount to 'doing therapy' but nevertheless draws on individualised case formulation considerations. So too does adopting a more comprehensive case planning approach involving individual sessions and other interventions to help tailor the group-work program to each man's risk, criminogenic needs and responsivity issues (McMaster, 2013). Unfortunately, community-based and even correctional programs are rarely funded in a way that enables this potential to be explored fully.

Acker (2013) articulates some of the trickiness involved in opening up DV perpetrator work to include a focus on other elements that might be influencing, though not causing, an individual perpetrator's particular patterns of using violence and coercive control:

It's essential to understand ... what makes some men more likely to become abusive than others. Unfortunately, a more nuanced understanding of individual risk factors has been beyond the scope of many batterer intervention programs.

For some activists and practitioners, even considering family history, trauma, addiction or mental health was viewed as a dangerous diversion, undermining the goal of helping men take responsibility for their violence ... while I agree that it is critical that abusive men understand that their behaviour is always a choice, helping them understand all the contributors to their

violence can make our work more effective ... focusing on the dominance and privilege conferred by sexism, while important, [is] not comprehensive enough. But striking a balance between sexism's role in men's violence and individual factors based on family background, trauma exposure, substance abuse, and mental health remains delicate. (pp. 26–27)

A key issue arising from these considerations is whether 'balance' is the right, or most useful word to apply here. A technically eclectic approach of balancing some intervention processes based on an analysis of sexism and gender-based power, and others focusing on individual contributing factors such as those listed above, can potentially confuse clients and limit program effectiveness. Rather, conceptual clarity is required to more properly *integrate* a case planning and intervention focus on individual needs and risk factors within an underlying approach centred on men's gender-based power, privilege and entitlement.

## Support

Support is another somewhat contentious term in men's behaviour change work. Providing men with support, when disconnected from the elements of accountability and struggle on behalf of women and children, can place men too much into the centre of the work. Women's services can be rightfully wary of practices that centralise men's change journeys over the needs of women and children.

Unfortunately, in the US at least, some proponents of strengths-based approaches (see, for example, Lehmann & Simmons, 2009) are attempting to locate support-based interventions as an alternative to gender-based models, rather than exploring how they can be utilised in the context of feminist underpinnings. Without the deliberate integration of strengths-based practices within underlying foundations rooted in an analysis of gender-based power, privilege and entitlement, using these practices can result in the voices of women and children being de-centred, and possibly lost, in the process.

Similar to the element of therapy, unpacking and delineating what is meant, or could be meant, by support is crucial. In particular, what exactly are we looking to support through men's behaviour change work?

Various strengths-based, invitational and narrative approaches have a common focus on:

- separating the man from the behaviour, and supporting him to take responsibility for his violent and controlling behaviour
- assuming that there is something more to the man than his behaviour, and that this 'something more' could be used as an ally in moving towards non-violence (Jenkins, 2009)
- assuming that men have some competence in areas that will help them to move towards non-violence
- unearthing men's existing, or latent, ethics and motivations to take a stand against injustice, and potentially, their own use of violence (Jenkins, 2009)

- helping men to identify existing or previous strategies that have been useful in choosing non-violence
- identifying the honourable intentions, goals and needs that men are attempting to pursue in their lives (Ward, Mann, & Gannon, 2007)
- assisting men to remove the constraints, or restraints, which work against them utilising these various strengths and supports
- identifying social supports conducive of movement towards non-violence.

Strengths-based approaches have an important place in MBCP work. A key consideration, however, is how to bring in other perspectives when men provide accounts of situations where they were at risk of using violence, but didn't do so. While some of these accounts might be genuine, without weaving in elements of accountability and solidarity with victims, facilitators can stop short of asking crucial questions such as:

"How did your partner experience what you did?"

"What might she have felt afterwards?"

"If you were to keep responding in that way, what might that mean to her?"

"What if she still did not feel safe after you handled the situation that way – what would that mean to you?"

"What was so important for you at that time, so that you decided not to use violence?"

"Where was the desire to hurt your partner on that occasion – how did you put that aside?"

"If you were to keep making this choice, what might you gain for your own life?" ... "What might you need to give up?" ... "What might you no longer be able to avoid?"

Questions, or small-group or other participatory processes, which consider issues such as these, are important to keep women's and children's voices and needs at the centre of strengths-based activities. They are also important to bring men back to how violence is a choice to maintain certain (often self-defeating) privileges or entitlements. Regarding the last question, for example, men could be invited to explore how continuing to use this strategy might expose them to emotional responsibility, rather than using violence and fear as a means to avoid unpleasant emotional experiences at great cost to their family members.

### **Readiness to change**

Given the significant proportion of men who are mandated, actively or formally referred to a domestic violence perpetrator program, or who feel 'pressured' to attend by their partners, many commence this work with quite a low readiness to change. Indeed, at a more elementary stage, many have low levels of readiness to participate in a service.

This has given rise to literature and practice concerning how to facilitate, or support, men's internal motivations for change. The intention here is that over the course of the program, men become more focused on this work because it matters to them and for their care for others, rather than the external motivators to comply with court-ordered or probation conditions, or to satisfy child protection authorities. This has included the application of stages of change theories, and the use of motivational interviewing approaches (Murphy & Maiuro, 2009).

Related to this is research demonstrating that men with a 'low stake in conformity' – who are not in a current relationship, are unemployed, etc. – tend to drop out more readily from perpetrator programs (Slabber, 2012). Promoting readiness to change among men in these contexts has proven particularly challenging.

As US Batterer Intervention Program specialist David Garvin has recently stated:

I believe it is the job of the criminal legal system to "make him" be in a batterer intervention program and it is the job of the batterer intervention program to make him want to be in the program. This is best achieved by creating something that is tangible, intriguing, engaging, motivating, challenging, inspiring, etc. (Aquila List, 10 December 2013).

The resulting focus on how programs can more effectively *support* men to develop a stronger readiness to change, and internal motivations for doing the work, raises issues about how to do this in ways that keep women's and children's voices central. If supporting readiness to change means focusing, for some men, on their *starting points* in terms of what matters to them in their lives, then a tension arises when these starting points do not centralise their family's welfare, or do not acknowledge their use of violence. While there are no easy answers about how to address this tension, supervision and accountability processes through which practitioners can explore and reflect on the details of creating links back to women and children appear essential.

### **Change sustainability revisited**

As highlighted previously, many men's journeys towards non-violence are very long-term, and might require more than participation in a three, six or even 12-month program (Government of Scotland, 2009; Laming, 2009; Morran, 2013a, 2013b). Indeed, in Morran's sample of long-term domestic violence desisters, many of the men reported that they had actually not left the program, despite completing it two to seven years previously. They expressed the need for regular 'top-ups' by maintaining some contact with the program. Some had also made significant changes to their lives, interests and networks to immerse themselves in a social milieu supportive of non-violence, and to express the still newly forming identities based on a different sense of what it means to be a man, partner, and in some cases, a parent. In stories compiled of men committed to sustainable change journeys in the U.S., Acker (2013) found common themes of the need for continual vigilance, and deep explorations of what it means to be a man, and the desire to be a better man.

Given the need for men to be almost constantly vigilant about the many issues around their change journey, within the context of what should be a life project, Morran (2011) controversially asks whether interventions with perpetrators have an element of 'recovery' work. This is in the sense of each man

needing a 'sponsor' (in the style of Alcoholics Anonymous) or peer support, and/or ongoing links to the program.

In relation to this, peer support or mentoring initiatives associated with domestic violence perpetrator programs have been difficult to implement (Hart, 2009). For resource-strapped programs, the time required to recruit, support and manage peer mentors, and to conduct ongoing contact with the mentors' partners, is often prohibitive. Nevertheless, it is clear that developing innovative ways to provide men with support for ongoing change journeys towards non-violence is worth further consideration.

### **Deconstructing choice**

Fundamental to MBCP work is that men make a choice to use violent and controlling behaviours. This is critical to differentiating these programs from anger management programs, and in working with men to take responsibility for their behaviour.

While not at all rejecting this platform, there has been a lack of critical interrogation concerning the possible dangers of conceptualising choice in a decontextualised fashion. Reflecting on this issue, Frank and O'Sullivan (2011) argue:

What is more accurate is to say that for a man *not* to abuse his partner, whether with physical force or psychological undermining or assertion of dominance, is a choice. Perpetrating domestic violence is so embedded in a sense of entitlement, hierarchical beliefs, and cultural devaluation of women that it "comes naturally". Resisting those habits, norms, and absorbed models of male behavior requires a conscious, deliberate decision. Giving into them does not. To insist to men that they are making a choice when they use tactics of power and control can befuddle them rather than enlighten and help them struggle against normative male behaviour. (p. 10)

Frank and O'Sullivan invite us to consider not only how the concept of choice is constructed in the detail of men's behaviour change work, and the possible lack of congruence with how men experience their acts of choosing, but also the social constructivism of choice. They and others have highlighted the danger that by focusing solely on men's individual acts of choosing, the social and institutional pressures that provide men with unearned privilege, and that support their choices to use violence and gender-based power, fade away from the picture (Pease, 2004/2005).

While men ultimately still have the choice, and need to exercise this choice for the safety and human rights of others, minimising the immense pressures they face to continue with violence as the default option can result in perpetrator work adopting a notion of choice based on neoliberalism and individualism.

### **Addressing the constraints to non-violent choices**

Criminology-based approaches towards domestic violence perpetrator programs emphasise assessment, mapping and intervention with an offender's criminogenic needs, or dynamic risk factors (Colorado Domestic Violence Offender Management Board, 2012). These can include substance abuse, mental health issues, unemployment and weak social supports networks.

These risk factors do not have a causal association with men's use of domestic violence. Men can still choose not to use violence despite the presence of these risk factors, and indeed, working in solidarity with women's and children's struggles to live their lives free from violence requires practitioners to expect this of men.

However, while the choice to be non-violent is ultimately each man's to make, practitioners can work towards making this choice easier for men. If a man is abusing substances, has an untreated depression, and is losing considerable money through gambling, the chances of him adopting the victim stance, and exercising his unearned male privilege and entitlement to feel better (or right) irrespective of the costs to others, might be higher. While men's behaviour change work needs to work on the fundamental processes through which men adopt the victim stance, feel righteous anger and then choose to use violence, programs can address other factors that can make the task for men to choose non-violence more difficult than it would otherwise be.

Case management work – where the perpetrator program is supplemented by interventions that address important dynamic risk factors for the man – can work in an integrative fashion with underlying principles that centralise a gendered understanding of family and domestic violence. A key factor in this weaving, yet again, is the extent to which this work is linked, both conceptually and in practice, to the safety of women and children. For example, what might it mean if an alcohol and other drug practitioner, case manager or the MBCP provider itself, spends a 50-minute session focusing on the man's substance abuse with no mention or reflection on issues related to his family's safety? Is there a danger that women's and children's voices might be lost, if the practitioner doesn't at least ask "What effect could the work that we've done today have on how your partner and kids might experience this coming weekend? Would it be different for them?"

### **Compassionate challenging**

Acker (2013), drawing on the stories of approximately 25 male participants in a batterer intervention program in the US, writes about the importance of men's experiences of feeling cared about in group work:

Interestingly, many of the men ... talked about how their groups were a place where they actually felt *cared* about. Instead of feeling stigmatized because of their unacceptable behaviour, they could see it was a problem for many other men as well. They could see they weren't alone and that other decent men struggled with the same issues. They felt *supported* while they were being challenged.

I believe that it is this balance between confrontation and caring that carries with it the greatest potential for transformation. Abusive men are more than the sum of their worst behaviours. They are best served in programs that simultaneously challenge them and believe in their inherent ability to do better. Such groups can become a brotherhood of the best kind: one where confrontation can be balanced by compassion, accountability coupled with support. (p. 139)

Acker also argues that as sustainable change requires processes of men repeatedly and with increasing depth examining their past and current behaviour, understanding its impact on those they care about and the damage they have done – processes that can take many months or several years – many men need to hit 'rock bottom' emotionally to do this work seriously. She suggests that it is difficult for men to

achieve long-term change in peeling back the layers of their destructive masculinities without an internal crisis, a degree of 'falling apart'.

Rather than burden the victims of their abuse – their partners – by going to them for emotional support, the program can serve as an important means through which men take responsibility to find their support needs arising from the change process elsewhere, through the other men in the group and the co-facilitators. Acker emphasises that the support that men can provide each other to use their internal crises towards productive change for their families' (and their own) benefit is crucial. This is particularly important in the context of many of the men not having had many, or any, close friendships with men involving vulnerability and conversations about issues of real depth – developing support networks with other men towards nonviolence is vital. As Acker emphasises, however, this needs to be done in a way that does not centralise the men's own emotions above the impacts and experiences of women, children and others affected by their violence.

## Accountability

Terms such as 'accountability to women and children' and 'holding perpetrators accountable' are commonly used in domestic and family violence policy documentation. But what exactly do these mean, particularly in the context of MBCPs? A core issue here is to define the fundamental goal, or aim, of this work, which is to work towards the safety, human rights, freedom and autonomy of women, children and men affected by men's use of domestic and family violence (Vlais, 2010a; NSW Department of Attorney General and Justice, 2012).

While this might seem an obvious definition, it is important to differentiate this fundamental goal from the strategic objectives that work towards this. It can be argued that achieving immediate and long-term behavioural change, and reducing recidivism, are important strategic objectives that work towards this goal, but are not the aim of MBCP work in and of itself. Furthermore, these programs incorporate other, equally important strategic objectives that work towards this fundamental aim, including:

- enhancing women's and children's safety and agency directly through partner contact, and through any associated services that work with children
- supporting women to construct meaning out of their partner's attempts to make changes, including if he doesn't change (or change sufficiently), and decision-making processes concerning what this means for their relationship and their family
- assisting with multi-agency risk assessment and risk management processes, including in situations of high risk
- working with child protection authorities as part of a collaborative effort towards child safety; and with the father, if possible, to become a safer parent so that the burden of responsibility does not fall onto the non-offending parent through a 'failure to protect' paradigm (Western Australia Department for Child Protection, 2012)
- monitoring men's behaviour through the program and partner contact, and reporting protection order breaches and violence-related crimes, thereby supporting a civil and criminal justice system response to the man's behaviour.

Providing relatively equal weight to each of these strategic objectives puts domestic violence perpetrator work into a different context than if behaviour change were singled out as the predominant reason for doing the work. It raises questions, for example, about the relative resourcing of partner contact work in relation to the group work with the men (Smith, Humphreys, & Laming, 2013), and the opportunities for community-based specialist domestic violence programs or agencies to work closely with corrections or probation officers in ways that are accountable to the safety of women and children (O'Malley, 2013).

The New York Batterer Intervention Program model exemplifies an approach that prioritises perpetrator and systemic accountability above strategic objectives related to behaviour change and recidivism reduction (see [nymbp.org](http://nymbp.org)). Proponents of the model argue that the power of these programs lies in the ability to support criminal justice system responses towards domestic violence, thereby helping to establish social norms that these crimes will not be any less tolerated than other crimes against the person.

In this sense, situating MBCPs as part of criminal and civil justice system responses to domestic and family violence is not about punishment, nor about pretending that jail time contributes to positive behavioural change. Rather, the connections between programs and the justice system, whether direct or indirect, serve the dual functions of helping to provide protection and safety for those experiencing violence (for example, through placing constraints on high-risk offenders), and assisting primary prevention initiatives that seek to change community attitudes.

### **Accountability to a systems response**

Gondolf's axiom, *the system matters*, is a well-accepted antidote to the limitations and problems associated with stand-alone MBCPs (Gondolf, 2002; Humphreys, Laming, & Diemer, 2013). As Graham Barnes of the Duluth approach emphasises, a good enough perpetrator program located within a strong community-coordinated system is likely to produce better results for women and children than an excellent program working within an average system (Vlais, 2010b).

Strong coordinated or integrated systems can place women's family violence services at the centre or hub of the system, with other systems agencies accountable both to the women's service and to each other. This involves more than establishing a partnership approach, but rather processes and structures that enable women's advocates, and the women and children they represent, to be central to the workings of the system. The question here becomes not so much about whether DV perpetrator programs change men's behaviour, but the more wide-ranging consideration of to what extent do they add to, or contribute towards, coordinated community responses focusing on women and children's safety, wellbeing and human rights.

Included in this are processes that enable MBCP providers, and practitioners, to be transparent and accountable to women's services. Existing examples include:

- opening up group sessions to observers, including from women's services, and inviting their reflections as part of post-session debriefing
- inviting women's services practitioners to provide team and individual supervision to MBCP staff (see Machen & Eva, 2013, for a current example of this)

- structuring MBCP work as part of an integrated stopping violence service that also includes specialist women's family violence outreach and children's counselling programs, all run within a team environment in the same agency (as is the case with some New Zealand models)
- strengthening the role of partner contact, such as through the provision of face-to-face sessions or home visits dispersed with telephone-based contact, and follow-up contact after the man has exited the program.

### **Accountability web**

Smith, Humphreys and Laming (2013) write about the importance of partners' own attempts to hold men accountable for their violence and controlling behaviour. In their qualitative work with women partners of MBCP participants, they found that some women, particularly with support through partner contact, developed the courage and strength over time to 'draw the line in the sand' about their partner's behaviour, and to communicate what was and wasn't acceptable. They further find that accountability for a perpetrator was particularly strong when both the formal civil and/or criminal justice systems, and his partner's informal accountability measures, worked together to form an accountability web around his behaviour. Smith and her colleagues emphasise that current funding arrangements for partner contact, in Australia at least, do not enable sufficient intensity, longevity and follow-through to support women's informal accountability measures, and to minimise the risks of doing so.

In addition to extending the capacity of partner contact work, and invoking a reframe that puts this work more at the centre, a range of systemic governance, policy, training and research considerations require addressing to enable the system to support women's informal accountability measures. Some of these are delineated by No To Violence (2013).

Cagney and McMaster (2013) propose a range of possible processes (for example, accountability forums, conjoint work) that provide support for partners, family members and other persons with a stake in the man's behaviour, to hold him accountable to his commitments and promises to change. While insufficient work has been done on how to prepare and conduct these accountability processes safely, the authors argue that formal, or justice system accountability processes cannot be relied on alone to bring the voices and needs of women and children sufficiently into the centre. This is not least the case with Indigenous family violence offending, where community-based accountability processes that give voice to collective strivings for dignity can be essential in addressing violence through non-colonising processes (Albert, Simpson, & Haimona, 2013; Richardson & Wade, 2010; Yarram & Yarram, 2013).

### **Accountability for one's actions**

It can be argued that for a man to cease his violent and controlling behaviour in the long term, he requires a strong and detailed understanding of his 'past' behaviours, in the sense of what these looked like, and his goal or intent in using them (Cape & Garvin, 2009). Such understanding can be important to lay the necessary foundations for him to make different choices in the future, based on goals more aligned with what he wants for his relationships and himself as a person and as a man.

Program providers differ in how they work towards each man taking a concerted look at his past violent and abusive behaviours and the goals/intent of these behaviours, both in terms of the amount of time,

depth and scaffolding given to these explorations, and the timing of such within the program. Multiple and valuable perspectives here include the need for detail, specificity and creativity to ensure that these explorations are not glossed over; the importance of careful attention to working with men's shame and resistance (Kulkens, 2013); and the dangers of using coercive practices to force men to 'face up' to their behaviour from an external, moral vanguard, rather than from their own ethical strivings and understandings of justice and fairness (Jenkins, 2009).

Our expectations of men to be accountable for their behaviour, and for their future choices, are necessarily high. As Canadian practitioner and trainer Vikki Reynolds (personal communication, 9 October 2013) emphasises, for men to offer a real apology for their behaviour they need to work towards, among other things:

- acknowledging with specificity and directness, and without minimisation or justification, the fullness of their violent and abusive behaviours (for example, "I raped Jane in the room next to our children's bedroom where they were almost certainly lying awake, have terrified her and our children on many occasions through physical threats and breaking household items, have over 100 times called her a ... and ... directly in front of our children, choosing these exact times to have the greatest impact to belittle her and to make our children ashamed of her ...")
- understanding the possible consequences ("My actions have terrified and traumatised Jane and have affected every aspect of her life ... my daughters are now rightly terrified of men, and my son has been socialised to believe that being a man involves using violence and power to get what one wants at the expense of others, and that women are incompetent and inferior ...")
- planning how to stop perpetuating the damage ("I will attend a men's violence program, and will ask Jane about whether it's best for her and our children if I find somewhere else to stay, at least for now ...")
- engaging in repair work ("I need to work hard on treating Jane with respect so that our daughters can develop some sense of trust that not all men rape and dominate women ... I will draw on every positive, non-violent male role model I know or can introduce into our family's networks, as I can't repair the damage I've done to my son's socialisation into manhood alone ...").

These considerations of what constitutes a real apology, explored also by Alan Jenkins (2008) through the concepts of restitution and restorative practice, are important beyond their contrast with the more self-focused apologies sometimes offered by men during the remorse phase of the violence cycle. They provide potential benchmarks of what men might need to work towards, and to demonstrate, in order to be on a genuine pathway towards long-term change.

Indeed, it might be hard to envisage, or trust, a man's long-term commitment towards sustainable change if he has not deeply examined what might be possible in terms of repairing (at least some) of the damage he has done. Even if opportunities for repair are understandably limited, the process of giving this examining his committed attention, and of finding respectful and empathic ways to explore what he can do, appears vital in terms of accountability. As Jenkins (2009) emphasises, this examining can manifest a passionate interest in otherness so crucial to nonviolence.

Mike Cagney and Ken McMaster (2013) argue further that accountability for men's future intentions – for their expressed promises to cease their use of violent and controlling behaviour and to strengthen non-violent ways of relating and being – can benefit, *when safe and appropriate to do so*, from carefully constructed and supported accountability processes where those affected by his violence can have a strong voice in providing feedback about whether these promises are being met. Some of the considerations and steps involved in carefully preparing for accountability conversations between perpetrators and victims are explored by Acker (2013, p. 150-155). In some Indigenous and other cultural contexts, relevant community members or friends of the family might be involved in these processes to consider the man's efforts in working towards his promises.

### **Practitioner accountability**

Accountability to the voices of women and children can be brought into men's behaviour change group-work practice in many ways: contributions from the female and male co-facilitator about the experiences of women and children (in general) affected by violence; processes that invite other-centredness among group participants; activities that support men to be accountable to the language of responsibility during check-ins; role plays and internalised other interviewing practices that invite concentrated reflection on the experiences and needs of women and children ... the possibilities are numerous. Furthermore, careful program and session planning can ensure that accountability underpins the diverse range of activities based on educational, therapeutic or supportive elements (for an example of this see the Q&A interview later in this journal with David Garvin and Jeffrie Cape).

Weaving strong threads of accountability through a program involves more than session planning or technique, however. For male practitioners involved in running MBCPs, processes that support our own journeying to identify, monitor and transform our male privilege and entitlement can help us to be accountable to our female colleagues, and to the struggle to unhinge patriarchy more generally (Vlais, 2013).

Indeed, Atherton-Zeman's (2011) Power and Control and Accountability Wheels for aspiring male allies provide us with an opportunity to reflect on whether we are making the political both personal and professional through our work. If men embark on their own processes of transforming their use of male entitlement and privilege, to listen more to the women and children in their lives, and to work towards more intimacy and richness in their own lives through liberation from malestream norms, they will possibly be more effective in inviting men in the program to do the same.

Weaving accountability through a program can also benefit from a *mindset* that draws on broader social justice struggles. It is this final element to which this paper now turns.

### **Solidarity and struggle**

This final element invites us to consider what it means for women, children and men affected by men's use of violence to be our main clients in domestic violence perpetrator programs. When thinking of this, practitioners often assert that they are our main clients because their safety is the fundamental reason for doing the work. While men can make vital and positive changes to their lives and relationships through a journey towards non-violence, ultimately, we are working on behalf of those affected by their violence.

We also know that women who experience violence are not passive victims; they actively respond to and find their own ways to resist the perpetrator's domination. Women engage in their own struggle towards safety, human rights and dignity for themselves and their children, in similar ways to marginalised groups or ethnocultural communities who face colonisation or occupation by a dominant force (Coates & Wade, 2007; Todd & Wade, 2004).

In this sense, it could be argued that MBCP practitioners – regardless of our clinical, community development or other professional and personal backgrounds – act as *allies* to women and children in *their* struggle for human rights and dignity. Could it be that our role is to use our position and privilege, our educational skills and therapeutic tricks of the trade, to 'fight' on their behalf, so that they can reclaim the voice and space denied them by the perpetrator?

Rather than 'empowering' women, is our role to actively and respectfully intervene in men's lives, often against their (at least initial) wishes, so that we can work with them to stop the oppression that's limiting their partner's space for action (Westmarland, Kelly, & Chalder-Mills, 2010)? Rather than focusing all our efforts on 'empowering' those struggling against oppression, is our role to respectfully and strategically involve ourselves in the lives of those who are exercising their privilege to cause the oppression? (Pease, 2010).

In this sense, domestic violence perpetrator work can be seen as a non-violent social justice struggle, where we act in solidarity with those affected by men's violence. While the welfare, dignity and wellbeing of the men in the programs matter, and while there are potentially real gains for men if they work hard through the program, it could be argued that our work is primarily about assisting women's existing resistance, struggle and strivings for dignity.

What could be the effects of adopting this mindset, or social justice 'fire in the belly', for how we go about men's behaviour change group work? What might it mean when we channel our solidarity work through a philosophy of non-violence, of separating out the man from his behaviour, and realising that we too (particularly male practitioners) have work to do to identify and transform the forms of privilege that we might occupy?

Seeing this work through the eyes of oppression and privilege might also help practitioners to understand the intersectionalities that affect men's experiences. Some, perhaps many, participants in perpetrator programs, while utilising gender-based and other forms of privilege, have experienced oppression in other ways – based on social class, ethnicity, sexual identity or disability. While these cannot be seen as an excuse for their use of violence, helping men to understand their struggles and resistance for dignity in the face of these experiences might be important, in some cases, for helping them to understand the effects of their violence and controlling behaviours on their family.

To take this analogy further, are we also inviting men to engage in what is quite a radical act to resist the cultural and social pressures that have recruited them into living out dominant, hegemonic forms of masculinity (Jenkins, 2009)? Are we using education, support, therapy and accountability measures to encourage men to *non-comply* with the default choice, as Frank and O'Sullivan (2011) describe it, to choose violence? What might it then mean if we (male practitioners) are inviting men into this struggle, for the benefit of their family as well as themselves, if we ourselves are not engaged in a parallel struggle regarding the forms of privilege that we might utilise in our professional and personal lives?

Indeed, DV perpetrator work is, in some ways, not all that different from the work that all men need to do to understand our use of male privilege and entitlement, and to peel back the layers of our violence-supporting masculinities. While men in the programs generally use quite severe and multiple forms of coercive control to entrap their partners lives, it can be argued that many, or even all, men use our privilege to affect women's lives for our benefit.

### **Points of intervention**

The struggle and solidarity elements of work with domestic violence offenders can be described further according to the points of intervention framework proposed by Canning and Reinsborough (2010). This framework was designed to encourage social movements to consider different points of intervening – through community mobilisation, media-friendly stunts, lobbying campaigns and non-violent direct action – when trying to prevent or stop a social or an environmental harm. The framework focuses on possibilities for interventions at the points of destruction (for example, to occupy a coal exploration site), production (picket lines and union-led efforts), consumption (as in consumer boycott or disinvestment campaigns), decision (lobbying governments), and assumption (community education efforts to change particular attitudes or beliefs related to the issue of concern).

Work with men who perpetrate family and domestic violence occurs at a number of these points of intervention, particularly when seen from an integrated systems perspective. We intervene proactively and assertively with men to attempt to stop their destruction of women's and children's freedom, dignity and safety – rather than just standing by. We involve ourselves – as practitioners, the justice system or child protection agents – in men's lives, even though we are often not welcome. Through both our MBCP work with men, and in community-based primary prevention efforts, we attempt to address some of the assumptions, beliefs and attitudes that condone men's violence against women, and keep men's privilege and entitlement invisible and uncontested. We attempt to influence the decision-making of governments, corporations and other large institutions which contribute towards embedded patriarchy within their organisations and in society as a whole.

In this sense, our work to end men's violence against women is part of a collective struggle working at various points, to support women's and children's resistance, and – at least potentially – guided by their voices and needs.

### **The weave**

The above considerations beg the question of what an intentional weave of these five elements of our DV perpetrator program work might look like. And of course, there are multiple answers to this, multiple weavings that could be the focus of a distinct article in itself.

In lieu of such an article, three suggestions will be briefly offered here. First is the concept of critical consciousness education, or social education, dipping into therapeutic practice. In our session activities and overall curriculum focusing on particular learning objectives or taking men through a process to understand something new (or more deeply, or more personally), points of group or personal resonance can occur that become therapeutic moments. In the process of grappling with a concept, perspective or

skill, a moment can arise where something starts to shift within the man, a layer of understanding that starts to peel back, or a point of being unsettled about something that was previously taken for granted. A point that has personal and possibly collective resonance within the group.

As program facilitators, what can we do to identify and thicken these potential moments. What (therapeutic) models of change do we draw upon to help men engage with the personal change ramifications of this grappling with educational material? How we can facilitate this 'dropping down' of social education into 'therapeutic moments'?

A second strategy, mentioned previously, is to not lose sight of an educational, therapeutic or support process in terms of women's and children's experiences. Inviting both ourselves as practitioners, and men in the program, to process what they are learning or discovering in terms of their family's experiences, is a vital accountability process. For us as practitioners, this means keeping in the back of our minds the different and individual voices of each (ex) partner and her children. Two men might participate in and process a particular group activity in very similar ways, yet the meaning for their partner and children of this might be quite different, depending on their individual circumstances and needs. Our struggle is to advocate for each individual woman and her children, for each individual woman and child to be *seen*.

A third consideration is the importance of case management, case planning, and in some or many situations, supplementary individual work to predominantly group-based programs. It is difficult to weave together the five elements when there is little or no space to give towards individual case formulations for each man. The therapeutic moments, change support processes, and accountability opportunities obviously overlap significantly between men, but do not follow exactly the same path.

### **Wearing multiple hats ... all at the same time**

Practitioners come into men's behaviour change work from a variety of backgrounds, clinical and non-clinical. The demands of this work on our emotions, mind, body and spirit are considerable. We are challenged to wear many hats, to develop skills in a range of areas – to be an educator, therapist, coach, systems worker and social justice advocate all in one.

As Sara Elinoff Acker, author of *Unclenching our fists: Abusive men on the road to nonviolence*,<sup>4</sup> concludes about her research and practitioner-based observations of men in engaging in long-term change processes:

What we are trying to "sell" is a vision of nonviolent egalitarian relationships and healed masculinity. I also believe that the most effective approach to abusive men has to be compassionate and kind while holding them accountable for their behavior. What I have discovered from my interviews with abusers who have changed is that they have all said they needed to be educated about what abuse really is (the emotional and controlling aspects, attitudes toward women); they needed to have their denial and minimization consistently challenged – AND they needed to have a vision of what this work would bring to them – the better lives, better relationships with partners and children, more intimacy, more wholeness, healed masculinity. That's what gets them to want to do the work, and to hang in there for the number of years it realistically takes to peel back all the layers of the onion and have comprehensive change. (Aquila List, 22 October 2013)

In this paper I have argued that wearing these multiple hats involves something different than a technically eclectic approach, of 'using a bit of this, and a bit of that'. Technical eclecticism can not only confuse the men in the program, but also result in us losing sight of the centrality of women's and children's voices.

Intentionally weaving together the elements of this work is important not only for conceptual clarity and integrity. It can assist MBCP facilitators, women's advocates, coordinators and managers to prevent burnout and to work towards self and mutual care. As Vikki Reynolds argues, seeing our efforts as part of an expression of collectively held ethics, backed up by collective solidarity processes and a striving to be allies in the struggle for social justice, can nurture and sustain our efforts over time (Reynolds, 2011). This is less possible when we lose sight of who we are struggling for.

This losing sight isn't a binary issue. It's not something that particular programs and practitioners do, and others don't. Losing sight is a dynamic factor that's a danger in much of our work, much of the time. The multiple forms of privilege that some of us occupy can blind us to noticing the effects of this privilege on others, individually and structurally, which can feed the notion of losing sight. An intentional weaving helps to make use of our adult education skills, therapeutic tools and support processes within accountability and social justice underpinnings – to help us notice, reflect on and minimise this losing sight.

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> The terms 'domestic violence perpetrator programs', 'perpetrator programs', 'men's behaviour change programs (MBCPs)' and 'batterer intervention programs' will be used interchangeably in this paper.

<sup>2</sup> bell hooks prefers de-capitalisation of her name as a deconstruction of predominant narratives concerning personal identity.

<sup>3</sup> The terms 'women and children', 'women, children and men' and 'those affected by men's use of violence' are used interchangeably in this article, to acknowledge that while women and children are by far the most common victims, men can also be affected by men's family violence (for example, in same-sex relationships).

<sup>4</sup> See <http://unclenchingourfists.org>

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