

'Using it' or 'losing it': Men's constructions of their violence towards female partners

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This is the first in an occasional series of papers through which the Clearinghouse will present original Australian research on domestic and family violence. The research described in this paper is the result of a partnership between domestic violence practitioners and academics. Collaborations such as these are increasingly recognised as essential to ensuring that research is grounded in the experience of those delivering and receiving domestic violence services, and that the findings contribute to more effective intervention. In this project, the research team used qualitative methodology to explore in depth the ways in which men who use violence in their intimate relationships, understand the experience of violence, with the goal of assisting practitioners to develop and refine their interventions. Although the findings of qualitative research cannot be generalised to the wider population of men who use violence against their intimate partners, they provide a depth of understanding which complements the findings of quantitative research. While this research focuses on the experience of men who use violence, the authors stress that this exploration occurs within a therapeutic context which prioritises the safety of women and children and which holds men accountable for their abuse and violence.

Introduction

This study aimed to explore men's experience of their violence towards women in the context of their own lives. To date, men's perspectives have received minimal attention from researchers (see, for example, Eisikovits & Enosh 2001; Hearn 1998; Dobash & Dobash 1998). We agree with Hearn when he states that: 'In order to stop men's violence towards known women, it is probably useful to

understand how men understand violence' (Hearn 1998, p.60).

Initially this paper addresses the context in which this research was conducted, including the limitations of current interventions into men's domestic violence, and the need to tailor services more specifically to engage men in a change project. The research outcomes are described, with a focus on men's experience of their own violence and how this connects to their relationships with their partners and their family of origin experience. Other areas explored in the research, such as the impact of restraining orders and drug and alcohol use, will be the focus of separate publications.

Context of the study

As domestic violence research and intervention work has progressed, it has become clear that recognition of the complexity of the issue and multiple responses, at the macro and micro levels, are needed. There is now a focus on developing a continuum of responses, that, while clearly prioritising the safety of women and children and >>

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insisting on the responsibility of perpetrators, also address prevention, early intervention, criminal justice, crisis intervention, recovery and rehabilitation. Service providers and the community as a whole, by taking account of men's constructions of their own violence, will be able to implement strategies to target more precisely the various contexts in which men's violence towards women is supported and nurtured. These contexts include family relationships, peer group cultures and the broader societal discourses and practices that promote or support violence against women. Having understood men's experience, couple and family therapists may be more able to engage male clients in the pursuit of non-violence and early intervention into violence (in all of its manifestations) developing in a relationship. Before such an ideal can be achieved, service providers have to be more effective in engaging men in the pursuit of non-violence in their intimate relationships.

Currently, programs for perpetrators of violence do not achieve a consistent rate of success and frequently fail to assist men to reduce or cease violence beyond the period of their active participation (Gondolf & White 2000). In addition, there are many men who are violent who do not pursue help of any kind. We hypothesise that part of the difficulty in engaging men may be due to the fact that services have tended to provide 'one size fits all programs', i.e. psycho-educational programs in which the focus is on ensuring men understand that their violence arises from their power over women, and on challenging pejorative attitudes towards women. While these are laudable goals, they may not be sufficiently tailored to men's experience to initially attract and hold a diverse range of men. Even the 'cycle of violence', which has been a cornerstone concept for understanding men's violence in male intervention programs, was originally constructed from women's accounts of men's violence (Walker 1979).

In reality, men's violent behaviour has been analysed from a number of theoretical perspectives including structural feminism, systemic, psychodynamic, social learning, socio-biology, as well as from women's accounts. Each of the above theoretical perspectives, while seemingly contradictory, offers a different way of understanding and intervening to effect change. Researchers and practitioners suggest that, in order to gain a richer understanding of men's violence towards women, we need to adopt what Goldner has termed a 'both/and' position (Goldner et. al. 1990; Goldner 1999). This position admits to 'holding simultaneously contradictory models of wife abuse and while tolerating their contradictions and oppositions, focusing attention on how these different positions can enrich each other, to more fully explain a particular instance of violence' (O'Neill, 1998). This richer understanding enables us to devise a wider range of interventions with which to reach more

men. For us, understanding what meanings the client gives to their behaviour is a critical dimension of effective intervention.

It was with this context in mind that we decided to explore men's own understanding of their violence, in order to better assist them to take responsibility for, and cease perpetrating that violence. As 'counterpoint' to valuing men's perspectives (to use Goldner's apt musical metaphor for the interaction of lenses), we simultaneously employ the perspective of structural feminism which reflects the experiences of women. From this perspective, men's violence is an intentional strategy to maintain control over their partners, a control that is given social legitimacy by entrenched patriarchal structures. The prioritising of women's and children's safety, and the holding of men accountable for their abuse and violence, and the criminality of violence has been the basis for policy development in Australia since the late 1980s. This perspective is a 'given' in our own work.

Our desire to understand what could have assisted these men to not embark on a trajectory which led to violence, lent importance to their accounts of their childhood experiences and relationships, their experience of violence, loss, parental conflict, separation or neglect. We wanted to understand what importance men would give to attachment disruptions, not so much as a direct explanation of their violence, but as a contributing factor to current issues in their relationships. We also wanted to understand more about their attitudes towards women, and the genesis of those attitudes from their experiences in families, peer groups and masculine culture. Men's relationships with their partners and importantly, how they constructed their violence when they were in a situation where they could acknowledge and reflect upon it, was an important focus of our research.

From our perspective, trying to explain what factors contribute to domestic violence is in no way related to diminishing individual responsibility for that violence. We see that matter as something that is and ought to be defined by society, not the social sciences. Our view is that behaviour is never entirely determined and that there is always an element of free choice. For some men whose earlier lives may have been influenced by violence, the choice to eschew violence may be a more difficult choice than for men whose early lives were violence free. However, it is still a choice and it could be argued that there is an even greater moral obligation on men who experienced violence early in their lives to be vigilant about their own behaviour (Paul et. al. 1999).

In the light of these issues, we were cognisant of the possibility that men would use the opportunity to deny, rationalise, minimise or exploit their violence. We were particularly concerned that some of the

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areas we wished to explore, such as family background, would feed into their excuses for violence and detract from the impact of programs intended to help them to be more accountable for violence. In pursuing men's accounts, however, we wished to learn more about these very aspects of their response to their own violence. From a qualitative research perspective, we were equally interested in their denials as in their openness, while we remained impartial and curious as to all of their accounts. This is consistent with best practice in any clinical intervention – it is crucial to understand whatever meaning the client gives to his own behaviour.

Therefore, this qualitative study aims to contribute our understanding and analysis of some men's perspectives on men's violence, in the interests of refining and developing ways of assisting men to cease violence and in the longer term, of making families safer for all: women, children and men.

The study – method

The study involved lengthy interviews with 24 men, selected from a group of 130 men who were administered a range of quantitative measures. The men were mostly voluntary attendees at domestic violence men's programs conducted by Relationships Australia in Sydney and the ACT from 1997 to 1999. The men volunteered to participate in the taped interviews with researchers, and some were paid \$20 towards reimbursement of their costs. The interviews were held at Relationships Australia in most instances, after the men had commenced the program and before they had completed it. To be eligible for the perpetrator program, the men had to have acknowledged their violence and be requesting help.

The men ranged in age from 24 to 60. Of the 24 men, 21 were of white Anglo-Saxon backgrounds and 3 were first generation Australians from parents from southern Europe. About half the men were middle class, white-collar workers while the other half were working class men. This reflects the local population profiles of the areas from which the programs were run, i.e. north and west Sydney and the ACT.

The 24 qualitative interviews were transcribed and

analysed according to grounded theory principles and thematic analysis. This report is of the qualitative results, and where indicated, reference will be made to the quantitative outcomes. The qualitative interviews explored pre-determined areas. As we progressed, various changes were made to the areas we explored with the men, to follow up hypotheses that were indicated from early analysis of the data. We started with two clear questions in mind:

- > 'How do men who use violence, understand and account for their violence?' and;
- > 'How do men experience their own violence?'

From these discussions of their violence, we tracked the subjects' answers, exploring their family relationships as they were growing up, the impact of peer groups, their understanding of their current and previous relationships with partners and their relationships with their own children. Frequently, the interviews involved tracking the men's contacts with legal, health and welfare services, their use of drugs or alcohol, their responses to intervention including domestic violence orders, and their history of mental or physical illness.

From the transcripts of the interviews we searched for key themes, ideas and constructs, drawing connections and comparisons both within and between subjects (MacKinnon 1998; Glasser & Strauss 1967). Codes were assigned to the ideas, concepts and content of the men's answers to questions. This allowed for constant comparison between subjects, searching for explanations of similarities and differences where they occurred. For instance, early on we noted that some subjects, in describing their violence, referred to themselves as 'losing control'. Being 'in control' or 'out of control' became a critical dimension for comparison and explanation. Over forty concepts and themes were identified and analysed in this way. This paper addresses the findings in relation to the following themes identified in the research:

1. How men construct and experience their violence
2. How men experience their relationships with their partners.
3. How men saw their relationships between themselves and their parents when they were growing up, and
4. How men thought about masculinity and femininity and their attitudes towards women, including exploring peer group influences.

Part 1: Men's construction and experience of their own violence

We asked the men to describe their abuse and its impact, including the first, worst and most recent incident of abuse. We explored their experience of abuse and violence in its physical and emotional manifestations, including their own thoughts and ideas at the time and since. In our analysis we identified a number of themes both about violence and the relationship context in which it occurred. This section of the paper reports our analysis of how men described their experience of perpetrating violence and abuse.

In considering the language men used to describe their violence, we noted a difference between men who saw their violence in more instrumental terms, as something they employed to get their own way, versus men who experienced their violence in expressive terms, as outside of their control. This distinction between 'in control' and 'out of control' described a difference that, while not accounting for patterns of severity, certainly reflected a difference in the style of violence perpetrated, and a man's conscious intentions. We called these two styles of violence 'tyrannical' and 'exploder' violence respectively. At times we refer to these simply as *Tyrants* and *Exploders*, a shorthand device referring to *styles of violence*, not the men themselves. The following section details these different styles more fully.

Tyrannical violence

Men whose violence was 'tyrannical' used aggression, intimidation, verbal abuse and physical assault to assert domination and control over their partners. Members of this group were more likely to progress from verbal abuse to physical assault if their partner did not comply with their wishes. In describing their violence, there was a sense that these men knew what they were doing and they intended to frighten, intimidate and punish. They saw their violence as a justified or understandable response to experiencing frustration and anger, for example:

I know exactly what I am doing, but fuck you woman – I'll grab you and make you listen.

I use violence because I wasn't getting my own way.

My body language says to her 'I am going to get abusive' you can see it (fear) in her eyes.

I kicked her in both knees, kicked her up the arse while she was on the floor and I put my foot on her head... did it in a terrorising manner

I punched the wall... I guess it was a way of releasing, probably two things, releasing some sort of pent up violence in me. This is a physical situation, and when I say I haven't hit my four kids I most

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certainly have more than once punched out a wall. I slammed a door so hard until it is, you know, virtually broken. Yes, the release of a pent up type anger, and I think also a way that says, 'Hey, I am the one that's controlling the situation, you're not'.

Despite these descriptions of physical violence, other men who used Tyrannical-violence distinguished between physical and non-physical violence and were less likely to describe themselves as physically violent. Those that did this seemed to have learned this distinction from their counsellors or from the group program, embracing the idea that verbal abuse was violence, perhaps at the expense of admitting to us their own physical abuse. Perhaps this helped to keep them quarantined from the label 'wife beater', as their view of a 'wife beater' was different to how they saw themselves. This tendency to minimise the physical violence, while at the same time admitting to non-physical violence, also needs further examination in the light of Hearn's work. He suggests 'that in some contexts re-telling may involve the man taking on other's professional accounts and recounting them in his own words' (Hearn 1998 p. 203). In our interviews, it was clear that many of the men experienced considerable ambivalence about their violence and some felt ashamed and embarrassed (Brown 2001). Clearly one way of dealing with these feelings is to own up to what is perceived as a lesser misdeed. Service providers need to be alert to this possibility.

Had anyone asked me six months before we separated did I engage in domestic violence I would probably have categorically said no – because I would not have perceived it as such... the one time I was, I did grab (partner's) hand, the counsellor made me realise it was violence.

I think someone who is violent they imagine as being thumpers and beaters, yeah. But it still has that connotation for me – the fact that I was into abusive behaviour back then, set me back... But it pushed me into doing something and I needed that.

I knew I was being hard to get along with, but I did not consider that what I was doing was abusive.

'Tyrants' described their partners in terms that suggested that partners were submissive, careful and watchful lest they put a foot wrong. Walking on eggshells, however, would also be the experience of partners of 'Exploders', even though Exploder-violence is different and partners behave differently.

Exploder violence

Exploder-violence is different in that men experienced their violence as out of their control. The violence of 'Exploders' in the study was sudden and explosive, both verbal and physical and most often occurred in response to their partner's criticism, challenge or continued pursuit, such as being 'in his face', being intoxicated, or 'going on at him'. Exploder-violence functioned to allow the man to get distance from his partner, and to silence her. It occurred in the context of a partner whom the man experienced as out of control. Usually the 'Exploder' had controlled his feelings or reactions for a time, and then suddenly 'lost it'. Unlike 'Tyrants' who tended to deny physical violence, 'Exploders' were more likely to acknowledge that they had used violence, but would also blame their partners for provoking them to lose control after they had given partners ample warning to 'back off'.

She would go on and on, I would try to get away, I'd push her.

I try to walk away, she comes after me and keeps pushing.

She lashes out and hits me, and I hit her back – I do it in retaliation.

I respond to verbal barbs with verbal barbs.

I marched her out of my sight, shoving her, whacking her.

Constant goading and physical blocking – I would cross over to violence – it was not pre-meditated.

It (anger) would cross over and then it is too late – and you reach a point where you know that you are going to be out of control.

The above excerpts indicate that for these men, their violence functioned to bring an unpleasant situation or experience to an end. Although men using Exploder-type violence described their violence as something that was not pre-meditated, one would not assume that their partners agreed with this view. To partners, the violence of the 'Exploder' may appear a deliberate act of silencing. It is also possible, as others have suggested, that 'losing control' is a deliberate choice, and that men who appear to lose control are also simultaneously, in control. As Goldner so cogently expressed:

From a both /and position, the double sidedness of a morally informed psychological perspective captures something 'true' about the violent act and experience: that it is both volitional and impulse ridden, and, thus, it is both instrumental and dissociative. (Goldner 1999, p. 330)

Situating the Exploder-Tyrant distinction

It is unclear whether other popular typologies of violence mirror the above distinctions between Exploder- and Tyrannical-violence we found in our study. For instance, Jacobson's and Gottman's (1998) two main categories of 'Cobra' and 'Pit Bull' were derived from observations of men's behaviour during interactions with their wives, and from analyses of the violence they had perpetrated. While their 'Cobras' appeared to observers to be explosive and unpredictable in their violence, in other ways their behaviour is similar to that of our 'Tyrants'. Similarly, their 'Pit Bulls' at first glance are more like our men who use Tyrannical-violence, having a high level of control over their partners, but also like our men who use Exploder-violence, their violence was sudden and fierce.

We postulate that the lack of correspondence between these two typologies arises from the difference between a man's account of his own violence, and how his violence appears to observers, either his partner to whom it is directed, or to researchers. Therefore we caution readers to remember that Tyrant- or Exploder-violence represent categories derived from the men's own view of their violence.

Dutton (1998) distinguished between men who were more instrumental in using violence to attain specific ends, and those who were more impulsive in their violence. To Dutton, the explosions of the impulsive batterer signified 'over-control' as a result of being unassertive. While our similar group described themselves as 'undercontrolled' this referred to their actual violence, not the build up stage. However, Dutton's instrumental category, the 'dominator' seems akin to our Tyrannical-violence group:

These men are extreme in either of two directions, being unassertive, leading to occasional explosions (the 'over controlled' batterer), or being the dominator, who uses every form of control (financial, emotional and physical) rather than negotiation. (Dutton 1998)

Fonagy draws similar distinctions between 'predatory' violence that is planned and purposeful, and 'affective' violence that is a reaction to a perceived threat and accompanied by heightened arousal (Fonagy 1997). There is a remarkable similarity to our own groupings in these descriptions, despite the fact that we relied upon the men's self-descriptions.

We also considered the extent to which these styles of violence fit the 'instrumental' versus 'expressive' distinction so commonly used to differentiate between men and women's violence (Campbell, 1993). It would appear at first glance that Exploder-violence is more expressive whereas Tyrant-violence is more instrumental. Campbell describes 'expres-

The men's experience of their violence is inseparable from how they experienced their relationships with partners. Indeed, men in violence programs, when asked about their violence, often use the opportunity to blame their partner for their distress, and/or their violence.

sive' violence as sudden, resulting from frustration at being unable to get a message across. Women's violence towards men is expressive in that women rarely think that their violence will achieve specific ends, but they experience it as an expression of emotions of frustration and anger, having felt driven by a constant series of frustrations. The resultant explosion is an outcome of having held in anger for a period of time. Women usually experience shame, and see their violence as socially unacceptable (Campbell 1993). Men on the other hand, are socialised to use violence to assert their authority, to gain respect or to achieve a particular outcome. Men's violence is therefore instrumental, in that the aim of the violence is to achieve a certain end (Campbell 1993).

Tyrant-violence is clearly instrumental: these men recognised that they used violence with a deliberate intent, and experienced themselves as more in control when actually exercising violence. They were deliberately punishing their partner, and they remembered the details very well. They saw their violence as planned and deliberate responses to their partner's transgressions. Exploder-violence, on the other hand, is similar to the expressive violence more commonly experienced by women. 'Exploders' would describe their violence as 'losing control' of themselves, when they experienced their partner as out of control.

However, we need to be careful in comparing female and male expressive violence. In our sample, the women partners of our exploder-violence users were both fearful and felt controlled by their partners. This was the end effect of male violence towards their female partners, whether it was explosive or instrumental. These men 'exploded' from a position of male dominance and in sure certainty that they would win, with minimal damage to themselves. It would be useful to explore further how much these users of exploder-type violence did genuinely lose it, in the sense of really losing control or dissociating. It is possible that over time they learned that they got what they wanted from their explosions and this allowed them to explode more frequently. In this sense, it is possible that they are choosing to snap because they know from past experience that this will achieve the desired result. Understood in this

way, Explosive- and Tyrant-type violence are not mutually exclusive but instead can be understood as on a continuum with men experiencing or reporting varying degrees of control and intentionality. From the woman's perspective, however, the outcome is the same. From the men's perspective it seemed important that they describe and presumably experienced their behaviour as reflecting different degrees of intentionality and control.

Implications of style of violence

Acknowledging and working with the man's own experience of his violence is important for therapists and program providers. For instance, an intervention proposed by Goldner asks men who describe themselves as 'losing it', i.e. our 'Exploder' group, to focus on their choices, prior to the moment of losing it (Goldner, et. al. 1990; 1998). This is based on the belief that a man's sense of being out of control is something that can be explored, understood and predicted. In this way, he can begin to take responsibility for being out of control by becoming more aware of his feelings and his perceived tendency to be over-controlled to his own detriment until the moment of exploding. This provides the entry point to helping the man take responsibility. While this is an important intervention for Exploder-violence, it may not resonate as well with men who do not see themselves as 'losing it', but who see themselves as in control of their actions.

As men who use Tyrant-style violence use a range of abusive tactics, framing all of these as abusive challenges his claim that he is not violent because he doesn't hit. This would assist 'Tyrants' take responsibility for the full range of their violent tactics. Presumably, the exploration of the man's experience would target his controlling stance in the relationship, including his use of violence.

Both groups of men felt driven to use violence because of what they experienced as intolerable emotions of anxiety or anger from feeling humiliated or shamed. Assisting men to relinquish abuse and violence as their only method of dealing with emotions aroused in relationships may involve helping them identify these underlying affects. This would be as important as the more frequent focus of intervention on men's attitudes and beliefs about women.

The men's experience of their violence is inseparable from how they experienced their relationships with partners. Indeed, men in violence programs, when asked about their violence, often use the opportunity to blame their partner for their distress, and/or their violence. In this context, we followed the man's story, exploring both his experience of the relationship and his violence interchangeably. Here we found that each style of violence (i.e. Exploder or Tyrant) had its own particular style of relationship.

Part 2: Style of violence and relationship with partner

We entertained the possibility that the differences between the styles of violence described above, emerged in the context of the man's ongoing interaction with his partner. If a partner submitted and tried to avoid violence by 'walking on eggshells', the man, perceiving that his dominance was assured through his partner's submission, was reinforced for using violence in an instrumental manner ('Tyrants'). These couples appeared to have less overt conflict and the men were more dominant and the women more submissive in their interactions. If however, the partner 'stood up' to the man, and generally refused to be silenced, the man's ability to get his own way was diminished in the first instance, and he was more likely to use explosive violence to achieve his end ('Exploder'). Indeed, the relationships of men who used Exploder-type violence, but not those of those who used Tyrant-violence, were characterised by high levels of conflict, partner violence, alcohol abuse of either or both partners and symmetrical¹ escalations. Thus it is possible that a woman's personality and especially her general response to a man's controlling behaviour and his violence, may complement or reinforce a man's pre-existing preference for a particular style of violence. This does not mean she is responsible for slowing an escalation by submitting or challenging an abusive partner, as overall she will have little impact on whether or not her partner will use violence and she is always vulnerable unless the fundamental power dynamics change.

Other than these differences in relationships, no other factors distinguished users of Tyrannical-violence from those who used Exploder-violence. The men's histories of violence outside of relationships, in previous relationships or their experience of abuse as children did not distinguish Tyrant- or Exploder-violence with the small numbers in our study. This is why we considered the possibility that the explanation for the type of violence used may lie in the men's relationship with their partners, and the structure and style of interaction. We found that this did clearly distinguish the groups. It also needs to be stressed here that the type of violence perpetrated did not predict the severity of abuse. Both types of violence produced severe injuries to women.

The relationships of exploders and tyrants

The men we interviewed did not and could not, talk about their violence without references to their female partners. However, this was more in relation to how they experienced their partners in the relationship rather than what they thought the impact of the violence had been on them. This

accords with Hearn's (1998) experiences of interviewing men in relation to their violence. He states 'that it is rare for a man to refer to the violence in terms of the experience of the woman' (Hearn 1998, p. 83). He explains this in terms of the men's inability to take the position of the other and that 'to do violence is not to take the position of the other, not to be interested in the experience of the other' (Hearn 1998 p. 83). Very few of our men were able to relate to, or articulate the experience of their partner, though they did show somewhat more empathy to their children's experience of their violence.

In analysing the transcripts, we noted similarities between groups of men in relation to how they talked about their partners and their view of the relationships. Exploder-violence occurred in relationships where the female partners took a 'symmetrical' stance towards their husbands, in that they would argue and participate in escalating fights. These relationships were also 'complementary'² in relation to intimacy, most often with the woman as the pursuer and the man as the distancer. She would pursue him for intimacy, communication or involvement and he would distance himself from what he experienced as criticism or attack. If she prevented him from distancing, or continued to pursue beyond his level of tolerance, he would use violence to end the interaction. The partners of our Exploder-type violence users were described as more likely to have emotional problems or drug/alcohol addictions than partners of Tyrant-type violent users. Nevertheless these problems did not stop them from asserting themselves, a situation the men with Exploder-violence could not tolerate.

Tyrant-type violent relationships were also 'complementary' but reflected more of a dominant-submission pattern. While some Tyrant-type violence users were able to reflect upon their need for control and underlying fears of abandonment, others were less open, and more focused on their partners' unacceptable characteristics.

Men, in describing their experiences in relationships with partners, referred frequently to themselves as being treated unfairly by their partner. From the subtle differences in their accounts, some categories of relationship type emerged. We plotted the men from both groups in relation to whether each one saw himself as a 'victim' (yes or no) and/or a 'rescuer' (yes or no). Four groupings emerged:

1. Group number one consisted of men who saw themselves as both rescuers and victims in their relationships. We called this group the 'Martyrs'. In relation to their style of violence, this group consisted entirely of Exploder-violence users.
2. Group number two consisted of men who saw themselves as rescuers but did not appear to feel victimised by their partners. This group consisted

entirely of Tyrant-type violent users and we called them 'Rescuers'.

3. The third group were men who did not see themselves as rescuers but did see themselves as victims of their partners, a group we simply termed 'Victims'. They consisted of 'Tyrants' and 'Exploders' equally.
4. Members of the fourth group did not describe themselves in any way as having rescued a needy partner, nor did they describe their partners as lacking gratitude. So they were neither victims nor rescuers and they consisted entirely of men with Tyrant-violence. This group we called 'Patriarchs'.

should have been grateful. This is when the 'Martyrs' started to see themselves as victims of partners who made excessive demands or had unfair expectations.

Violence would occur when partners stood up to 'Martyrs', that is, they argued with them, or hit or attacked them or they may have sworn at them. As the 'Martyrs' used Exploder-style violence, their violence erupted when they felt criticised or abused or when they were prevented from leaving an argument. They believed that they were violent because that was the only way they could get their partners to stop doing what they were doing. In our view, this was an attempt to assert dominance over a

partner who had ceased showing gratitude, something she could show if she would only let him have his way. In other words, the partner's attack, signifying a lack of gratitude, was used by a 'Martyr' to justify greater violence towards her and to end her attack.

Gerry is a good example of how a 'Martyr' begins the relationship as a 'rescuer':

She is 5 years younger – she was under a very violent, domineering father as

		<i>Rescuing yes</i>			
		<i>MARTYRS</i>	<i>RESCUERS</i>		
		<i>Exploder violence (7)</i>	<i>Tyrant violence (3)</i>		
<i>Victim yes</i>				<i>Victim no</i>	
		<i>VICTIMS</i>	<i>PATRIARCHS</i>		
		<i>Tyrant(3)/Exploder violence(3)</i>	<i>Tyrant violence (8)</i>		
		<i>Rescuing no</i>			

well – she had probably gone from one asshole to another – I've lost track. No I did not feel that I owned her, I wanted to set her up as an independent person – because their husbands had dominated all her sisters. They were at their husbands' beck and call. I did not want that. I hoped it would be a fifty/fifty relationship.

As the relationship progressed, his wife wanted more and more freedom and he felt that her expectation that he do all of the housework (as he perceived it) was unfair. He felt abandoned by her emotionally, while she came to believe that he was having an affair. He experienced her behaviour as taunting him and he would become violent to silence her, ending the symmetrical conflict.

Another example of a Martyr is **Michael**:

I got involved with someone that had a history of problems, had suffered physical violence previously, had suffered a lot of problems.

Exploders as Martyrs in relationships

'Martyrs' saw themselves as being both rescuers and victims of their partners. In telling the story of their relationships, 'Martyrs' described themselves as having saved their partners from situations that were dangerous or relationships where their partner had been unhappy. Sometimes partners had been in abusive relationships, or they may have been struggling to survive, e.g. they may have had significant drug and alcohol problems, been involved in prostitution or homeless. 'Martyrs' therefore began relationships feeling they were offering women a better alternative than what they currently had. As they saw their partners as needing what they had to offer, an intense bond was established around this mutual need. However, over time, partners started to make demands that the men felt they were not able to meet. For some, there was a turning point in the relationship, a time when the man started to feel that he was being treated badly by a partner who

As this relationship developed, he saw his partner as having severe mood swings, during which he felt verbally harangued. This would occur often after they had both been drinking. He felt he was a victim of these irrational attacks.

...and then she followed me into the study and started ripping into me and tearing the place apart and I pushed her and dragged her out of the room, and I took off... I've never lived with anyone, or been in a relationship that had such change of moods and didn't know what was going to trigger a change in personality... you're always in the wrong, no matter what you did, right through I was always in the wrong.

The pursue/withdraw dynamic was evident in Martyr-type relationships with Exploder-violence. **Michael** would try to withdraw from his partner, who experienced him as distancing in the relationship. He always tried to avoid hearing her expressions of anger and would attack her physically if he could not escape.

Michael: *One of my mechanisms was to try and leave. She would physically grab me and prevent me from going anywhere.*

Interviewer: *What would you do?*

Michael: *Well, that is probably when the violence would start. So physical restraint. I can't stand this, I've got to get out, there was no release. I could feel my anger building. She would just follow me all around the house.*

In some respects, the profile of our Martyr/Exploder fits the description of men with borderline personality disorder described by Dutton:

The problem was, for reasons he couldn't understand; he kept feeling bad in intimate relationships. He would intermittently feel tense, anxious, irritable, 'off center'. He would start to get angry easily, over little things. He knew his partner was to blame for this. He tunnelled in on her faults. They grew until they filled the screen of his consciousness. She was to blame for his feeling this way...he wanted to push her away. But sometimes he wanted her to come and get him, make him feel better, soothe him. That feeling passed so quickly he hardly noticed it. He went back to feeling that he wanted to push her away...she was such a bitch.. If only he could be free.. He started to drink more... he got less restrained and more aggressive...Friends found him occasionally a bit withdrawn... (Dutton 1998, p.93)

While men with Exploder-violence were mostly 'Martyrs' in their relationships, 'Tyrants' were spread between 'Patriarchs' and 'Rescuers'. 'Patriarchs', who were neither rescuers nor victims, exercised dominance over mostly submissive partners, while equally dominant 'Rescuers' saw themselves as saving their partners.

'Patriarchs' saw themselves as dominant, and their violence as punishment of their partners who were either insufficiently submissive or who stepped outside of the 'Patriarchs' expectations...

Tyrants as Patriarchs in relationships

We used the term 'Patriarch' to refer to the type of relationship characteristic of most of the men who were 'Tyrants' in their style of violence. These men did not convey that they had rescued their partner, nor did they convey feeling victimised. They did however, blame their partners who they saw as 'deserving' the violence they perpetrated.

These men, describing themselves as in control of their violence, or as using violence to assert or maintain dominance, seemed to have partners who were frightened and submissive. Although partners were submissive when compared to the resistance of partners of 'Exploders', 'Patriarchs' still used partners' non-compliance with their expectations or standards for behaviour as justifications for their violence. 'Patriarchs' saw themselves as dominant, and their violence as punishment of their partners who were either insufficiently submissive or who stepped outside of the 'Patriarchs' expectations:

Andrew:

*When I start getting angry, it's all her fault – she is not thinking about what she is doing; she is not paying attention to what she is doing. She is not taking anyone else into consideration – and that makes me angry. **I can almost feel the heat rising in me, now thinking about it!***

It was as if these men experienced their partners as deliberately breaking rules they had set.

The dominant-submissive complementary relationship between these men and their partners meant that actual physical violence needed only to be possible not actual. The threat of physical violence was often sufficient for the Patriarch to maintain his dominance in the relationship. Consequently, some of these men only saw their controlling behaviour as abusive after they had had contact with the men's program. This is a finding consistent with Hearn's findings that physical violence is not necessary once dominance can be assured through creating in the other a fear of physical violence. Other 'Patriarchs' were both physically abusive as well as emotionally abusive.

Jack saw his behaviour of punching holes in walls as abusive but not violent:

Interviewer: *How does your wife see your violence?*

Jack: *Terrifying.*

Interviewer: *She is terrified of it?*

Jack: *Yes – she sees me as a violent person, that would have the ability to hurt her. And hurt her physically. I was very able to hurt my wife emotionally, and as it turns out, very able to frighten her physically, even though that was never intended. The violence was not to frighten her in any way, it was to stop me from hurting her.*

To **Jack**, punching out a wall was to stop himself from punching his wife, a way of managing his impulse. The fact that he terrified her so much that she left him was a mystery to him.

Rick relied on the threat of physical assault to maintain dominance:

There was no physical violence in our relationship. My wife is intimidated by my displays of emotion and I would get angry and those sort of things. There are lots of incidents in the course of my separating where the level of tension and emotion was so high that I probably let my emotions get out of control. I hate displays of emotion and I get frustrated and gesticulate a lot. The fact that I do this (hits hands on lap) to myself is interpreted as being potentially dangerous.

Some ‘Patriarchs’ would insist on taking control of a situation, acting in an intimidating and abusive manner and becoming violent when partners or children would try to leave.

Barry described his need to assert dominance in his relationship and dealt with this by preventing his partner from leaving when she was afraid:

My physical aggression is just trying to make the person do what I want them to do. To grab someone and make them stand still. I’ve pushed (partner) into chairs. Tried to, you know, when she just wanted to get away from me because I have been so over-bearing and unpleasant, but I haven’t wanted her to leave, and I have tried to make her stay... smashed things to try and demonstrate how tough and powerful I am.

‘Patriarchs’ were more likely to be the pursuers in the relationship, jealous of partners’ other attachments, such as children, relatives, friends or interests such as careers. This could lead to stalking behaviour, or other kinds of punishing abuse. Most ‘Patriarchs’ were unable to articulate their feelings of anxiety and insecurity that fuel their abuse and violence. **Barry** did describe how he used violence to prevent his partner from leaving:

That for someone else to leave, you know, is like putting their controlling influence on it. I can’t get in there and control the whole thing and resolve it to get the result I want. There is probably no negotiation involved, it’s just like, losing your temper to get what you want I suppose. That leads me to try to get her to come back physically.

Others saw a partner’s distancing as insulting to their self-esteem and were less able to articulate underlying feelings.

Tom had met his partner when he was her boss. She believed that he changed when they had children:

(Partner) said that’s when I changed. I’ve tried to show like I am in control. I’m the head of the house. I’m the man, so to speak.

Although, he described his need to be in control and get his own way, it is possible that he felt more anxious about being abandoned by his wife, after they had children and that this led to more controlling behaviour. This anxiety emerged during the interview:

Tom: *In actual fact what is happening, is I am chasing, she is running away. And what I have to teach myself, is to stop. Not to make her stop, me to stop.*

Interviewer: *How do you chase her?*

Tom: *I pursue, what are you doing? How are you doing it? Why are you doing it? Um.. who is that? Why are you talking to them? Why are you being so secretive about this? Why are you being so... in actual fact I am reading more into it than what there actually is.*

Interviewer: *And what sort of feeling drives that questioning?*

Tom: *Anxiousness, anxiety, um anxiety of wanting to know the real, real deep truth and...*

Interviewer: *About her feelings for you?*

Tom: *About her feelings towards me more than anything else, and she keeps saying, yes, I love you. Yes I will never leave you. And, I am feeling like there has got to be something more, something more, something deeper. And I had to stop pursuing like that.*

Tom does not see himself as either a rescuer or a victim, just as dominant, like the other ‘Patriarchs’, openly expressing how his need for closeness and his anxiety about loss, leads to his insistent pursuing. Some men with this Tyrant-style of violence seemed to feel more like they have to be responsible for their partner. This stance we called ‘rescuing’.

The partners of the 'Tyrant/Victims', although careful in adopting what seemed in some instances like a strategic, submissive position, seemed emotionally resilient and were asymptomatic.

Tyrants as Rescuers in relationships

Some men with Tyrant-violence styles saw themselves as *rescuers* of their wives but did not see themselves as *victims*. More akin to the Pygmalion style of relationship, these men saw themselves as offering guidance and help and took the lead in making decisions. In other respects, they had Patriarch-type relationships.

George:

I had her like a part of my life that I had worked out rather like one puts an investment in some blue chip stock and suddenly the accountant rings you one day and says, 'you have lost the lot'. She did some good work with 'inner child' stuff with me.

Peter:

She used to say, 'you can't make me love you' or something like that and I'd say 'I don't want to make you love me; I want you to want to love me'; She just wouldn't come with a positive attitude to things.

A group of men equally divided between Tyrant- and Exploder-type violence, were distinguished from the others in that they were more pre-occupied with having been unfairly and unjustly treated by their partners. These men were seen as taking a stance of 'Victim.'

Tyrants and Exploders as Victims in relationships

Three 'Tyrants' and three 'Exploders' we classed as 'Victims' in their relationships when they reported their partners as having either abused them, taken advantage of them or if they saw themselves as suffering more than their partner. The partners of the 'Tyrant/Victims', although careful in adopting what seemed in some instances like a strategic, submissive position, seemed emotionally resilient and were asymptomatic. Partners of 'Exploder/Victims' were portrayed as being mentally unstable. They either had problems with alcohol or 'mood swings' but, even so, unlike 'Exploder/Rescuers' there was not a sense that these men tried to rescue their partners.

The other difference that distinguished the 'Tyrants' as 'Victims' from other 'Tyrants' was their level of depression. All three of them described feelings of

depression and worthlessness, and this seemed linked to their controlling, critical and irritable manner expressed towards partners, which led frequently to violence. This link between depression and violence was also a finding in the quantitative study (Brown, et. al. 2001).

Tony, a 'Victim' with Tyrant-violence says he used violence when he didn't get his own way with his partner and he felt continuously disappointed and let down in the relationship:

(Partner) always looked after her needs and I'll always accommodate her needs, but she will never ever recognise my needs sort of thing. She could never walk in your moccasins.

Another 'Victim' with Tyrant-violence, **Martin:**

I felt very sort of unloved and you know, insignificant, and um I felt that, you know the biggest contribution I was making in the family was just bringing home a wage each fortnight.

The 'Exploder/Victims' seemed perplexed about their partners' treatment of them.

Tim saw himself as a victim of his wife's attacks:

Tim: *My wife doesn't take long to lash out and hit me. She lashes out very quickly and she's hit me a number of times and I've struck her back a couple of times.*

Interviewer: *When she hits her, do you feel frightened of her?*

Tim: *No.*

Interviewer: *When you hit her, is she frightened of you?*

Tim: *Yeah probably. She says, 'you're bigger than me and when you hit back it hurts a lot more than when I hit you'.*

Another Victim- with Exploder-violence, **Andrew**, felt that in his relationship he was 'seriously put upon and unfairly treated'.

It is interesting to note that if we combine the two victim categories ('Victim' and 'Martyr') the majority used Exploder-type violence. As 'innocent' victims of their partner's attacks or criticisms, they 'exploded' to end interactions they could not tolerate, at the same time maintaining a view of themselves as suffering more than their partners, despite their violence. It could be worthwhile to explore further with these men what appears to be a sense of entitlement vis-a-vis their current partners. The concept of 'destructive entitlement' has been used to make sense of behaviours of people who have experienced past abuse themselves, and now become perpetrators of abuse (Boszormenyi-Nagy and Spark, 1984³). This abuse appears to be mediated by a

massive sense of self-entitlement, requiring current life partners to 'make up' for past hurts. This impossible task inevitably positions any partner as doomed to fail, with such failure seen by the man as justifying further abuse.

In order to understand further men's understanding of their own violence, we explored their relationship in their families as they were growing up, and their experience of violence in their families of origin.

Part 3: Family of origin experiences

In exploring the men's experiences growing up, we were interested in whether they made connections between their violence and their family of origin experiences and whether we could connect the two. Drawing upon a significant amount of evidence that many men who are violent towards their wives have experienced violence themselves, or have witnessed parental violence, we asked questions that explored:

- > The quality of the man's relationships with both his parents;
- > His experience of separation and loss;
- > How he experienced his parents' relationship;
- > Whether he was abused as a child;
- > Whether either of his parents was violent or abusive towards each other or the children.

In summary we found that:

- Three quarters of the men were victims of punishment severe enough to be considered abusive, or witnessed their parent's domestic violence, although many did not relate this experience to their own violence. Only a small number of men saw their parents' relationship as non-conflictual. Many of the men were triangulated into their parents' marital conflicts.
- There was no clear pattern in family of origin experiences that distinguished between Tyrant- or Exploder-violence, although a greater percentage of men who were 'Patriarchal' in relationships were victims or witnesses of parental abuse.
- There was a pattern that suggested that the most severely violent men were both witnesses and victims of abuse and violence as children.
- Some of the men minimised the abuse they had experienced and played down the importance of being severely punished. They saw themselves as having deserved to be hit, or saw it as not having harmed them.
- Others were consciously angry and aggrieved at

the abuse they had experienced from their fathers, and less often, mothers, and saw it as unjustified. The men varied in the degree to which they could acknowledge and feel their own hurt and pain from these childhood experiences

- Men who were violent towards peers were abused by their fathers and tended to have older brothers who were also abusive.
- There was often a similarity between how the men saw their parents' behaviour towards each other and their own behaviour towards partners. For instance, men who were not physically abused as children were also not physically abusive in their current relationship with their partners.

We identified four separate parent behaviours that the men emphasised in describing their families:

1. father abusive
2. mother abusive
3. witness of father's violence towards mother
4. distant from mothers

Father abusive

Fifteen of the subjects described themselves as having been fearful of their fathers as children. They experienced their fathers as distant, and as having been both verbally and physically abusive towards them and their mothers as children. Some of the fathers relied more on intimidation and shaming, rather than actual violence. Significantly, seven of the eight men whom we had classified as severely violent towards their partners, had had fathers who had physically abused them as children.

Tony described his father as a 'loner' from whom he was very distant and minimised the violence he experienced:

He was very violent... oh just moderate smackings and stickings quite regularly.

Interviewer: *Stickings?*

Tony: *Oh just being hit with a stick on the bum.*

Interviewer: *What sort of stick?*

Tony: *Oh, feather duster type material, little thin sticks.*

Interviewer: *And who would do that, your mum or your dad?*

Tony: *No Dad, Mum generally is a non, totally non-violent person.*

Interviewer: *And how often would that happen?*

Tony: *Oh, a few times a week, like nearly every day. I remember thinking that if I could get through a day without a smacking it was pretty good.*

It is interesting to see how **Tony** used 'oh' and 'just' in his discourse as a way of making light of his father's behaviour.

Terry, on the other hand, was enraged by his father's very severe violence. Terry's father smacked and punched him, belittled and humiliated him, especially in relation to Terry's closeness to his mother. It was this latter humiliation that wore him down.

He fucked me up and I don't think he should get away with it... He was always jealous; I didn't have a relationship with him. I didn't feel at all, because it hurt to feel. I managed to close off, and I still do now. I hurt to feel the feelings so I disregard them... He used to belittle me, put me down verbally that went on for years.

Sean's father was extremely abusive to both Sean and his mother. He says of his father:

He dealt with you by using violence. I often got punched, I have a broken cheek. Mum brought us up – but if ever I was a bad boy, I would get to go into the bedroom and 'wait until your father gets home' and there would be a flogging – a belt around the bum, a punch in the head. First time it happened I was 7 – he broke my face, not through punching, but I flew through the air, and hit the corner of the window. Broke my arm trying to get away from my dad.

Sean saw his mother as his protector, and is very close to her.

Mark's father was extremely violent during Mark's childhood. Although his mother was unable to protect him, he felt her support. The violence ended when Mark was old enough to stand up to his father.

Mark: *I have always been very angry...*

Interviewer: *What sort of experiences did you have with your parents? You intimated that your father was very...*

Mark: *He was very violent.*

Interviewer: *How was he violent?*

Mark: *Oh, in many ways. If you didn't do what you were told, when he told you, you know, back handing, slaps kicks, belts, anything and everything... I remember going to school with wet pants... I was terrified when I was a kid, I was really scared of him, until I was about 18, when I was physically strong enough... when I took him on.*

Mark reflected on whether his anger was also

towards his mother who did not protect him from his father's abuse. Perhaps his closeness to her, his worry about her and his fear of losing her stops him from risking being angry with her.

I thought about it often, about do I have any anger towards her? Is that why I am angry? Or is that why I have been angry? Because she didn't stop what he was doing, but I think my hate for my father sort of overrides all that.

John:

Certainly verbal and physical violence. I was starting to have flashbacks... the pushing and the shoving and the moving out of the way. The door slamming and the same sort of intimidation behaviour that I do now, by my father. But also from my mother's point of view as well, so it was equal on both sides. Huge rows that would last for three, four, five days sometimes even weeks... another dinner in silence from an issue days ago. So I am very good at carrying things on.

While some of these men had been close to their mothers, none of the *most severely* violent men who had violent fathers, had been close to their mothers. It is obvious that mothers whose partners are abusive would be affected by the abuse. How much a mother is able to provide a secure base to children while she herself is either being abused or is under threat is questionable.

Ed said of his mother:

I know that she loved us and looked after us all, but it was a fairly distant sort of love.

Richard's father had been severely violent towards him throughout his childhood. He felt abandoned by his mother who left when he was a young child. He lived with his father and older brothers who were also violent towards him. He understood that his mother had escaped from her husband's violence that he himself had been subject to for most of his growing up.

Mother abusive

Three of the men described their mothers as having been abusive towards them when they were children, while remembering their fathers as distant but benign. It seems that, if the father was distant and unavailable, there was a greater chance that the mother and son would be conflictual, the mother resorting to violence in order to exercise control. It could also be that sons of 'controlling' mothers, having felt criticised by their mothers, were more sensitive to their partner's criticism of them, and were therefore angry and defensive in their relationships. If, in addition, the mother was abusive in her use of punishment, the man seemed to bring this rage into his relationship with his partner.

Geoff describes his mother as ‘the first level she controls, second level was emotional control, third level is threatening and then she goes back to emotional control.’ He saw his father as passive, and tended to side with his father against his mother. His mother was also physically violent, hitting him with the wooden spoon. He sees himself as being controlling like his mother. Geoff was severely violent towards his wife.

John was hit by both parents, but focused more on his mother whom he saw as more abusive. He saw her as ‘flying off the handle’ for numerous reasons, calling both John and his father ‘stupid’ and hitting him with the wooden spoon. John was caught between his parents, with both of them involving him in their arguments.

Martin, like Geoff, described his mother as controlling and as ‘physically disciplining him’ and his father as distant. However, Martin also says he loved his mother and describes considerable warmth from her towards him. Also, unlike Geoff’s mother who was extremely angry with her husband, Martin described his parents as loving each other. Interestingly, his violence towards his wife seemed an outcome of his anxiety about not living up to his own or his wife’s expectations of him as a father himself. He attempted to control his wife as his mother had controlled him.

Witness of father’s violence towards mother

Three of the men witnessed their fathers being violent towards their mothers, but the fathers were not abusive towards them (the sons). Within this group, two of the men took their mother’s side and one took their father’s side.

Joe describes his father as ‘the boss’ and as repeatedly using violence towards his mother. He was close to his mother, but sees himself as being like his father in his current relationship, trying to be the ‘boss’. He described himself as a ‘go-between between her and my father’ and as also being the ‘go-between for his father to his mother.’ As an adult he suffers from depression.

David saw his mother’s behaviour towards his father as abusive in that she blamed his father for things that were not his fault. Although his father would assault his mother, to David, his mother deserved this treatment. The alliance between father and son could have been fostered by the fact that the father threatened suicide, and David was worried his father would carry out his threat.

Distant from mothers

Of the men who claimed that they were not afraid of abusive fathers, but who nevertheless experienced

The family of origin experiences of these men confirm other findings that most abusive men have experienced abuse within their families of origin, though not all boys who are abused grow up to be abusive.

corporal punishment administered by either parent, four of them described their mothers as depressed or incapacitated by illness, and their relationships with their fathers as distant. None of these men were currently classed as severely violent.

Barry describes his mother as emotionally distant and too focused on appearances. His mother used to hit him with a wooden spoon but he was not bruised. One gets a sense of a boy being closely monitored by an emotionally cool mother and longing for a closer relationship with his distant father. He sees his violence as more linked to the masculine culture he experienced at school and at work. He hungered for acknowledgment from, and more contact with, his father.

Andrew as the youngest of five children described how he spent a lot of time with his mother who was angry and frustrated with his father. Andrew’s father was hardly ever at home and his closest relationships were with his siblings and his mother. He describes being hit by both parents with objects as punishment but he did not see this as an issue for him. In considering his own violence towards his wife, Andrew saw himself as extremely verbally abusive, something, like with Barry, he attributed more to his experience in the culture of masculinity at work and at school.

Tim’s mother had a ‘nervous breakdown’ when he was eight. Tim remembers her as hitting him, but as also being depressed. Although she was abusive, Tim’s situation is different to the other men who experienced abuse from their mothers, in that he had a close relationship with his father. As an adult he experienced his partner as abusive, needy and demanding, perhaps similar to his experience of his mother. Perhaps, in addition to his violence, he keeps an emotional distance from his partner, as he did from his mother, and she feels shut out.

Despite being hit, both Andrew and Barry saw their parents as having little effective control over their children’s behaviour. They were allowed to ‘do as they wanted’ particularly as adolescents. It is interesting to speculate that boys who are distant from both parents, and whose parents have little effective control over them, may be more vulnerable to influences from their peer environment in relation to the development of their violent behaviour.

The family of origin experiences of these men confirm other findings that most abusive men have experienced abuse within their families of origin, though not all boys who are abused grow up to be abusive.

Current research on children's development is also clear about the impact of on-going conflict between parents and the loyalty conflicts experienced by children. On-going conflict between parents, (which frequently involves enlisting children to take sides) is consistently linked to difficulties in childhood and is a better predictor of children's adjustment than separation or divorce or the type of family structure (Amato and Keith 1991). Children from consistently high conflict families are more vulnerable to delinquency, display more aggressive behaviour, have poor social skills and social relationships, and see themselves in a negative manner.

Our subjects, besides being exposed to on-going conflict and divided loyalties, were also subject to on-going abuse. Being criticised and abused by fathers, and having mothers who are abusive, depressed and anxious, does not foster secure attachment. Clearly, a number of the men lived with fathers who treated their mothers appallingly. There are two consequences of the father's violence for sons which may explain the son's subsequent violence: there is direct learning from his father that women deserve to be abused, and there is the impact on the son of his mother's depression as a consequence of the father's violence towards her. This latter factor is the most cogent predictor of insecure attachment in children, which in turn is a strong risk factor for boys' externalising behaviours (Fonagy 2001). Other studies have shown that witnessing a father's violence towards the mother is a severe trauma for children and is linked to dissociative experiences and perpetrating violence as an adult in which dissociation occurs. It is not clear how many men in this study with Exploder-violence, actually were dissociative (Simoneti et. al. 2000).

In addition to experiences of abuse however, other more subtle forms of attachment disruption occurred when these men, as boys, were not allowed to show vulnerability and were not sufficiently comforted or supported when they were frightened or stressed. Many of the men described being humiliated when they were upset and were encouraged, particularly by fathers, to act 'tough'. A strong link between shame and violence has been proposed (Brown 2001). It is perhaps the combination of all of these factors that result in the intergeneration transmission of violence for some men.

In this study, many of the men felt entitled to use violence or abuse to deal with their anger and frustration when they did 'not get (their) own way'. This often translated into 'not getting the respect (they) deserve' from their partners. This led us to

consider how the men in our study, as boys, came to position themselves in relation to traditionally masculine attitudes and values, and how this position may have interacted with attachment anxieties contributing towards perpetrating violence in intimate relationships with women.

The boy who observes his father's violence is three times more likely to beat his own wife when he marries. The boy learns that aggression pays. It puts an immediate end to arguments and restores order over the emotional clamour that has preceded it. His father gets what he wants... (Campbell 1993)

In the next section, we consider how inculcation of traditional masculinity, combined with having experienced abuse and being anxiously attached, was a recipe for violence for many of the men.

Part 4: Inculcation into traditional masculinity: family and peer influences

Andrew:

Its such a deep-seated thing with men, I honestly believe that it is. We don't have the capability to process quickly enough before we hit them. Button is pushed and you have to strike out. It goes back to the hairy mammoth days, when that was our role. No matter how much learning we do, how much education you receive, you will react in that instinctive way.

This view of men and their violence is part of the discourse of traditional masculinity. In exploring the men's understanding of their own violence, we were interested in their experiences of themselves as men, and how much they construed the issues or conflicts in their relationships in gendered terms.

In order to elucidate their views, we enquired about how they saw

- > Their *parents' relationship* in relation to traditional sex roles,
- > Their *own relationships* in this regard,
- > Their *parents treating them or expecting them to behave as boys or young men*
- > Their *relationships with peers*.

We explored whether they had experienced violence outside of the home, in their peer groups, and if so, were they themselves victims of peer abuse or perpetrators of such abuse.

Parents' traditional relationships

Many men described their parents as having traditional relationships, with the father as the breadwinner, and the mother as having the main responsibility for childcare and housework, whether or not she worked outside of the home. They saw their fathers as 'the boss', as more dominant, even when their mothers were abusive and angry.

Andrew:

My mother looked after the home and worked. My dad enjoyed his job and was well respected, and my mother enjoyed being in the traditional role of mother, a hostess when Dad had guests over, or they were entertaining.

Graham: *I never made a bed, had never made a bed until I was 40, you know, because my mother had always made my bed.*

Interviewer: *So she did a lot of things for you at home?*

Graham: *Cooked, washed, cleaned. You know I had to be looked after because I studied, I mean I didn't, but that was the story.*

Interviewer: *So you grew up being used to a woman kind of really devoting herself to you in a way?*

Graham: *Yeah, sure.*

Angus :

Interviewer: *What do you think you learned about being a man from your family when you were growing up?*

Angus: *...dad was never there, so I just took off. I never really got much discipline at home. You know, and after work, he used to work hard and he used to drink pretty hard, so he was never there.*

Interviewer: *That's what you keep saying to me, he was never there.*

Angus: *Yeah, that could stem back to why I turn up late at home of a night. No, I can't really blame my dad...yeah, my wife says 'you're getting more like your father every day!' so, in a way I suppose you are right, thinking about him not being there, and the verbal abuse.*

Rick (on his fathers' view of the roles of men and women):

We never had any discussions about it, but I would suspect that his view was more of what I'd consider a 1940's, 1950's type of thing where the man was the bread winner and that was his role in life and he

brought home the pay check every fortnight or every month or whatever. His job was done type of thing. I know that he was almost proud recently to say that he'd never changed his role in the house.

Traditionally gendered roles are not surprising, but in the context of men's domestic violence they become the structural bedrock from which boys develop a sense of their own entitlement in relation to women as partners and mothers.

Learning from fathers

Many of the men we interviewed described being criticised and humiliated by their fathers, especially when they showed vulnerability or were seen as close to their mothers. Some mothers were described as also having frequently endorsed the injunction that 'boys don't cry' and participated in ensuring that their boy did not act like a 'sissy'. As many of these men as children were being traumatised, they were unable to express their distress, even to the non-violent parent. Although a majority of the men disliked or even hated their father's treatment of them, they frequently saw themselves as having become similar to their fathers.

Tom longed to have his father's approval and saw his older brother as gaining this through using violence. The brother had been violent towards Tom and his sister, and continually got into fights with others, including his wife. Tom, however, would not fight, even though it cost him his father's high valuation:

I used to watch my eldest brother, he has always been able to handle himself, you know. If he got into trouble he could always be able to fight himself out of it, whereas me and the kid across the road would have a fight, and I would prefer to run away than fight... later this really hurt Dad... dad was a man, and his son didn't stand up. (tearful).

Interviewer: *He would rather you fight?*

Tom: *Yeah*

Interviewer: *So your dad more or less aspired to you being kind of like a 'macho' man? Not to show your softer side?*

Tom: *Yeah, and that is why I get so upset when I don't know what is happening... I turned to alcohol to cover it up... to block all that out and say 'I'm a Man!'*

Later, Tom said that the group was helping him to handle his feelings of humiliation arising from showing his 'softer side' and therefore, not measuring up to being a man. To Tom, having his father's respect, was his most important desire. At the father's 75th birthday, his father hugged him for the first time.

Traditionally gendered roles are not surprising, but in the context of men's domestic violence they become the structural bedrock from which boys develop a sense of their own entitlement in relation to women as partners and mothers.

Andrew was able to talk to both of his parents when he was upset, but they did not approve of him crying.

Interviewer: *What were your parent's attitudes to you when you cried, showed them you needed some help?*

Andrew: *Be a man. Dry your eyes. Um, from my dad, that was a favourite expression of his actually, 'dry your eyes' whether you were crying or not. When you were feeling sorry for yourself, he would say 'dry your eyes'. Um, 'grow up' they would tell me. But I also feel that when it was real, I was comforted.*

Terry who felt torn between his parents, with older brothers grew up in a traditionally masculine culture.

Interviewer: *You said you were closest to your mother, how would you describe your relationship with her?*

Terry: *I always felt as though I was torn between the both of them like dad would say, 'go on, leave him alone, you'll make a sook out of him.'*

Learning from peers

Two thirds of the men interviewed reported significant experiences of violence in relation to their involvement in peer groups. Half of these men described themselves as primarily *perpetrators* of peer violence and the others described themselves as primarily *victims* of peer violence. All of the men who were perpetrators had fathers who were physically abusive, aggressive, and critical of them and almost all experienced physical punishment. Of the five men who were victims of peer abuse, three reported that their mothers were abusive towards them. Further research would need to establish whether being a victim of mothers' violence would more likely result in the boy being victimised by peers. There was a strong tendency for men who had older brothers to be involved as perpetrators in peer violence. As victims of their brothers' abuse, they learnt the rules of survival in a masculine culture from an early age.

Tony whose parents were highly conflictual, was involved in bullying at school as *both victim and perpetrator*:

Yeah, I used to be bullied and have a lot of fights with those guys and I was shunned by all of my old academic type friends and dropped a couple of classes at school just dropped out basically.

Rick: was a *perpetrator* in his all-boys school, and said:

You've got to test your limits and work out where you fit in to the pecking order at school, so that's all it was.

Barry was a *perpetrator* who would smash something if he didn't win an argument:

I was one of the bigger guys around, but wasn't one of the big sporting types...I was still big and strong...I would pick something big up and throw it away, was part of losing my temper. I didn't get into fights, I used to avoid fights but the way I spoke to people used to invite fights. There would be tension in the group...a discussion about the fastest motor bike or something and it could end up with people shirt-fronting each other...It was a blokey thing to do, you argued, you were loud. He with the loudest voice was the rightist. I had firmly held opinions but was not tolerant enough of anyone else who thought differently.

Jack had three older brothers who used to fight with each other and with Jack, so it is not surprising that he learned from a young age to fight.

Interviewer: *What about at school, was there any bullying there?*

Jack: *Yes, I did a bit of it myself, but very little. And I usually picked on someone smaller. As a real young fella I had a fight with a big bloke and they had to pull me off, as I would have strangled him. But that was, you know, he just pushed, he pushed me so far that I just let go. I didn't have control over myself, I was just going to get him and that was it.'*

Andrew also had older brothers:

There was little bullying at our school, I did it sometimes. I wouldn't say it was always, I wasn't a bully, but when I was a child, it was important to know how to fight. And physically fight, and you resolved disputes that way with those boys.'

Adoption of traditional masculinity

Many of these men saw themselves in traditionally masculine terms, and were beginning to question the value of these practices as result of their involvement in the group programs. Of particular concern

to the men was how difficult they found revealing vulnerability or emotions such as sadness or fear, unlike anger, which they found easy to express. Unfortunately, they had experienced some very painful situations in their families and in their relationships, so it wasn't surprising that many of the men were depressed and had significant problems with alcohol or drugs. This we saw as a possible outcome of their adherence to traditional masculine values prescribing that they be strong, in-control and independent.

Some of the men viewed themselves as 'loners', 'invulnerable' and 'isolated'.

John describes this attitude:

I had an independent streak, you know, 'I'm alright – I don't want anyone around me type of thing. And I am bullet proof and nine foot tall' type of thing.

Coming to terms with what he saw as 'unmasculine' aspects of himself, was a challenge for Richard who had recently decided to stay at home and was doing housework:

Richard:

It's not a man of a thing, going to some bloody woman counsellor and saying I've got problems. Its like, fuck man, you've turned into a softy! But other times I know I have to do it or I will end up in goal for killing someone, or killing myself. Guys I used to hang around with would say 'you fucking wanker, what are you doing all that for? What are you, a house help?'

Barry:

...we just try to avoid that vulnerability, you feel anxious, you feel vulnerable and these are not the feelings that I want. These are not the controlling, manly feelings that I am supposed to have, so I had just better get angry. Just to fill it up, cover it up. Like we talked about just having to feel vulnerable sometimes, just let it go, yeah, like sometimes you are going to be sad, sometimes happy and sometimes vulnerable.

Many of the men with Tyrant-violence described how they came to see themselves as dominant in relation to others outside of their families, and used violence to win in a competitive interaction. Such instrumental use of violence fits Campbell's description of how men view others as potentially challenging or competitive, using violence to win, thus shoring up their masculine self image (Campbell 1993).

Ed idolised his older brother, and followed him into the various arenas where men congregated, such as football, bike riding. His older brothers had friends, and Ed was always on the outside of the group. He was often violent, like putting his fists through walls, but his parents never tried to stop him, as this was how boys were. He takes a dominant stand

Other codes operated such as 'its not ok to hit older people' or 'its not ok to hit children'. These codes seem to function to protect the man's own self esteem; if there was something worse he would not do, then he could feel better about himself.

with Tyrant-style violence in relation to his partner, seeing himself as more rational than she is.

Interviewer: *So you actually believed that you could make someone see something your way?*

Ed: *My way? Yeah. I am a fairly rational sort of person and I think I have got a rational mind that I see, I can't see why somebody else can't see things just as rationally.*

Tony saw violence as just a way of operating in the world:

I grew up in a boy culture, Male Australia, life for men is very physical, whether it gets physical or not, its still getting into men's spaces and the way men walk and how they approach you. Just playing football or going to school, boys fight a lot.

Part of the masculine sub-culture for some of these men was the belief that violence towards women is wrong. Almost universally they claimed that their own fathers did not agree with violence towards women, and although many of them admitted their own violence, their shame about violating this code, led them to focus more on non-physical violence such as shoving, rather than hitting or punching. Other codes operated such as 'its not ok to hit older people' or 'its not ok to hit children'. These codes seem to function to protect the man's own self esteem; if there was something worse he would not do, then he could feel better about himself.

Andrew:

My father told me never to hit a girl, never hit a woman. Which is sort of a backhanded way of saying: 'it's okay to hit a bloke'.

Angus had been violent for most of his adolescence and adulthood and was used to responding instantly with violence if he was verbally challenged or slighted, but he claimed not ever to women, only to men. 'Not hitting a woman' was something he strongly believed in, although he admitted to other forms of intimidation and aggression.

Before I was never wrong. I would just never be wrong and I couldn't take her telling me I was wrong. I couldn't handle that, I would just get aggressive, abusive, you know... she would be fright-

ened I would get violent, like in the past I had a pretty violent background... assault charges, and once I start it's hard to stop. My fuse is a lot shorter towards other men than it is towards women, I'd never hit a woman ever... Men can protect themselves better. I would never use my aggression on my wife or another woman... I'd walk away.'

Richard:

Even when I was a kid and I was beating up people, I always had moral standards for my kids, you don't pick on old people, pick on people your own size or grown men, I don't know why. I never thought I would come out to be hitting a woman, you know... you molest children, you hit women, that's the most despicable thing you can do as far as I am concerned... I never thought I would end up doing something like that. I have always had these warped male instincts, thinking that it is not a man thing to hit a woman.

It appears to be paradoxical that men who perpetrate abuse and violence against women, at the same time claim to strongly disapprove of violence towards women. Campbell, in describing men's accounts of their own violence towards others, reported three different contexts or scenarios: where the opponents are equal, where the opponents are unequal and the odds of winning are high and where opponents are unequal and the odds of winning are low. If the odds of winning are high, then the man who wins is at risk of being labelled a 'bully'. Most men abhor 'bullies' which accounts for why the men in this and other studies claim to disapprove of men's violence towards women. To Campbell (1993), men who are violent towards women, have by their own account, broken specific rules of conduct operative in the peer group culture.

Some of the men talked about being aggressive and abusive in their work situations.

Andrew:

You feel that the only way to get somebody to do something that you want them to do, is to yell at them or threaten them with either their job or their wage or getting paid... I didn't like to do it but there are times when it is okay to scream at certain people and everyone did it.

Barry:

My anger has affected my career as well, I didn't realise I could get real shitty. Used to work long hours with a certain group of people, it was a bit like an extended family sort of thing. And arguments would break out and things some of my behaviour was pretty, you know, when I look at it now, I was very controlling, trying to dominate and control conversations, or discussions. I mean, that ended up affecting my career to a point where I thought I was being shafted, so I left.

It is evident from the above accounts, that many of these men as boys were thrust into a hierarchical, competitive and physical culture which significantly impacted upon their views of women, their own roles as husbands and fathers and which nurtured their propensity to resort to violence in certain circumstances. However, men who are not abusive towards women also live within the confines of this culture. It is our conclusion from this study, that there is a particular cocktail of aversive experiences that lead some men to perpetrate domestic violence.

Conclusion

Domestic violence is a complex area. Despite the relatively small numbers in this study, it does support the view that there are many factors connected to the aetiology of violence. As we come to understand more about what meanings men give to their violence towards women, it is clear that although domination and control are always inevitable outcomes of violence, the path to achieving these outcomes varies from relationship to relationship, and man to man. Our study points to the need to engage men around their perceived control and/or their perceived lack of control; to challenge denials of violence and deflections of responsibility within the context of the style of violence and the man's positioning of himself in relation to his partner. The fact that so many of the men described their violence in the context of a pursuer/distancer pattern also supports interventions that assist men to address attachment issues in intimate relationships. It is interesting to note that in the companion quantitative study of 120 men (from where this sample for the qualitative study was drawn), anxiety about attachment was the main predictor of violence (Brown, J. et. al. 2001)

On a social level our study supports social measures to reduce domestic violence. It is not clear to us that the general population relates to the fact that involving children in their disputes and children witnessing domestic violence has the potential for a deleterious impact on their child. Our study suggests that very serious consideration should be given to an awareness campaigns on this issue, as a large percentage of our men in this study had been involved in their parents' conflictual relationship, had witnessed domestic violence, or been on the receiving end of abuse and punishment themselves. This family environment, combined with exposure to the worst excesses of masculine culture seems to have contributed to their use of violence now. Addressing the issue of bullying and other oppressive aspects of male cultures should be seen as a matter of priority.

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Endnotes

- 1 'Symmetrical' describes competitive processes and 'complementary' describes polarising communication patterns or roles in systemic family therapy.
- 2 See previous footnote
- 3 This idea was communicated to us by our colleague David Jones who is researching Boszormenyi-Nagy's concept of destructive entitlement and its relevance to violent men.

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