

Part III

Issues and challenges of working in the abuse field

Working in the field of family violence is at the hard end of human service practice. Effective intervention is ultimately about forming working partnerships: between men and women, worker and client, worker and support staff, intervention practice and policy. The focus of Part III is on the partnerships that support and encourage effective interventions. Through exploring how we can maintain our passion over time, effective training, dynamic supervision, and evaluation of programmes we deliver, we are challenged to consider a number of issues related to safe practice.

CHAPTER 10

MAINTAINING OUR PASSION AND INTEGRITY IN THE WORK

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Passion and integrity are about energy, hope and an eagerness for change. They are about having a commitment, which drives a vision with dedication. When I worked for the women's refuge movement our collective passion for women's and children's rights sustained us as we listened to endless stories of male abuse and walked alongside courageous women, both those who left and those who chose to stay with their violent partners. As a women's collective¹ we cared deeply about what was happening in women's lives and we nourished each other as we found our voices in shared stories and endless debates. We laughed, cried, spent hours on the ends of phones and stood on street corners to raise awareness and money for our cause and our wages. We produced policies, which maintained our integrity to 'protect women's right to live free from violence' both at a personal and political level. We saw individual empowerment as a misnomer if not used for the betterment of others. Many of us believed in what hooks (1997) calls collective empowerment, which means being aware of both the social-cultural context that affects one's life and the potential one has to transform oneself in relationship with others and society. Despite the size of our vision we were never in doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed women could make a difference — and we did.

Advocates within the battered women's movement do not claim a monopoly on either passion for women's rights or the right to speak about domestic violence. Over the past 30 years, with increasing information, domestic violence has gone from being a private family issue to a major public concern and become a specialist area for practice. This professionalisation has been assisted not only from within the broader

aspects of the women's movement, but also through various government and community agencies, writings, debates, conferences, research papers and discussions over the kitchen table. The pivotal role that the battered women's movement in New Zealand has played in recent years is seen in the implementation of the Power and Control Model.² This is an integrated approach between and within services to address domestic violence and the model has its strength in the co-ordination of the criminal justice systems and in the advocacy programmes for domestic violence.

The integrated systems approach heavily influenced those of us working in the field. Many domestic violence organisations refocused their thinking on systems accountability and began using the 'Power and Control' curriculum (Pence and Paymar 1993) as part of their intervention strategy. The curriculum is based on social learning and feminist theory and uses critical theory methodology, which has its roots in Paulo Friere's (1972) transformation education. The curriculum's premise is that the purpose for using physical abuse is to control the thoughts, feelings or actions of another person. A man's violence against his partner is inextricably linked to his perception of the world and her place in it. The rationale for focusing on men's present behaviours and challenging contradictions such as 'She didn't need to get hurt, I just wanted her to listen', can lead participants to question their own values and belief systems.

Many facilitators I worked with and trained reported an increased awareness of themselves within relationships as they challenged and engaged clients in their change process. This increased awareness came through engaging clients with their stories, challenging the distortions in their thinking and identifying with their struggle to understand relationships in a different way. Through continuous exposure to the work they recognised their dual teacher-learner dyad where the very thinking that is challenged in group is also present in every aspect of daily life, and this in turn can result in facilitators challenging themselves within their own relationships. Pence and Paymar (1993) suggest that this challenge comes from the recognition that we've all been socialised in a culture that values power, and facilitators are in the business of challenging basic beliefs in relationships, the 'social norms' of our society.

Learning to be a facilitator

It is common knowledge that people who work in human service agencies are often primarily motivated by idealism, have a resilience to cope with the task and are flexible in how they achieve outcomes. Through two

exploratory research papers into facilitators' experiences³ I learnt that many initially came to this work for a variety of personal and professional reasons. Many are women who were already involved in social service work and bring a wealth of experience and knowledge to the role. Others have more personal or philosophical reasons for working in this field, expressing a desire to move beyond just giving voice to their concerns to joining with others who have a passion for the work. They want to make a difference and 'to be part of the solution.'

The training of facilitators is an important role. The concepts taught are at the heart of developing a trainee's practice. Having passion for the work is not enough in itself. Facilitators play a significant role in keeping women and children safe. This work appears endless. We know that attendance at programmes alone does not guarantee that women will be any safer and we know that women are more likely to stay with a man who attends therapy or a batterers' group programme. Hart (1988)⁴, who played a major role in monitoring the men's programmes, suggests that it is incumbent on the facilitator to assess the man's behaviour while he is attending the programme. The facilitator must accept responsibility to assess this behaviour, to carefully evaluate the risks of possible serious assaults and, if necessary, to follow through with protective strategies.

This requires competence in a variety of skills. As well as group process skills they need a wide range of clinical and social knowledge to understand fully the complexities of their work. Yet, as Bograd (1992) points out, academic training, group counselling experiences, and a pro-feminist philosophy in themselves do not prepare practitioners to intervene in domestic violence. Those of us who have worked and trained in this field for many years know that there is limited training available in truly facing, naming and addressing coercive, terrifying, and sometimes fatal, male violence. Most clients are men, most do not come to the programme voluntarily and many pose a potential threat to others. Facilitators are put into the role of changing and challenging clients' behaviours and attitudes, of representing authority on behalf of the justice system, and of being a social change agent.

Learning in this area is an evolving process. Understanding domestic violence and the many dynamic and complex issues that interweave and intertwine is like creating a picture made up of many layers of paint. The painting changes shape and colour as each layer is applied. Ideally, on a professional level we increase our knowledge and maintain our passion and integrity with the aims and values of the organisation through regular

training and support. This requires shared goals and visions about tasks, effective relationships among staff and accountability systems in place to support the practice. On a personal and a practice level we need to know, and have others feed back to us, that what we are doing is worthwhile and that our contributions are valued. Not always an easy task, as many community organisations operate on a limited budget, with part-time staff and are training facilitators who work in the evening after completing a day's work elsewhere.

Beginning the work

Over the past eight years co-gender facilitation has moved beyond being pioneering work in this country. Many facilitators have developed strong friendships within their organisations, friendships that have nurtured them through the 'hard stuff' of doing this work. Like the women at refuge they have given and received energy from each other.

As with most social service agencies, more women than men are interested in working in this field. The difference in exposure to interpersonal violence, previous experience in the work and in numbers of men and women attending training sessions, result in facilitators taking different pathways in gaining the required skills and knowledge.

Many men find the training uncomfortable as its very essence is in challenging patriarchal roles in society. While there is no one way of responding to training on issues of social oppression and abuse, I have witnessed many times how hard it is for men to listen and hear women's stories of male violence. While some men felt 'got at' when discussions were focused on men's abuse of women, others did recognise that they were starting on the back foot in terms of understanding the issues involved. Later when 'doing the work', men perceived the need to 'get it right' and at times felt that they were 'being watched' and that there was a need to prove themselves. It was only through time and much discussion that they felt they were able to work as equal partners and eventually move through their doubts about their ability to do this work.

Effects of 'doing the work'

Working as a facilitator had personal consequences for both men and women. Some men were forced to face their own issues of power and control after seeing their own behaviour reflected in the men they worked with. For some this meant the end of their personal relationships, while others found a deeper awareness and an openness to changing their attitude

from being authoritarian to acknowledging that all people have rights and that a team situation ‘gets the job done better’.

Women facilitators were initially overwhelmed by, and angry at, repeated stories of violence towards women. They felt isolated in their perceived role of being there to ‘tell women’s stories of violence’. This left many feeling more cynical about men’s ability to change and far less tolerant of systems and people who support violence.

Facilitators rarely have the opportunity to talk about the impact this work has on them, often tending to regard it as one of the givens of the job. Rhonda Murrey (1998) in her review article, ‘Burnout: An expected side effect of sex offender work?’⁵ suggests that: “there are many ways that professionals mimic the dysfunctional characteristics of their client group, particularly when it comes to assessing the relative risks of the work and in failing to protect themselves from its impact” (p11). While Murrey was reporting on child sex offender work, these concerns are equally relevant to this work. I have adapted her list of external and internal issues that impact on workers because they are relevant to facilitators working with men who assault their partners and therefore worth reiterating:

External effects: the things we lose sleep over

- The severity of incidents that facilitators hear about
- The widespread prevalence of abuse
- The system’s inability to protect potential victims
- The question of whether a client is reoffending during treatment
- The system’s inability to remove dangerous offenders from the community
- Internal effects on emotions and cognitions
- Ambivalent emotions
- Victim/aggressor identification
- Facilitator always on the alert for client behaviour that exploits and manipulates the situation to enhance his sense of adequacy and self-esteem. These behaviours can result in the ‘subtle victimisation of the therapist.’
- Re-examination of beliefs
- Increased awareness of issues of abuse:
 - (1) Female workers can be covertly victimised during the treatment process and may generalise these feelings to all males.
 - (2) Male therapists may suffer from gender guilt because of the

pervasive and negative attitudes, values and behaviours of the client group, largely with respect to women and children.

Building resilience

The key to any effective treatment programme is not just about having the necessary professional skills, it is also about the quality of the personnel who deliver the service. To survive in this work, experience tells us facilitators need to be as amenable to change as their clients are if they are to avoid dysfunctional practices when dealing with the nature of the work. The problems we are tackling seem insurmountable and therefore don't get resolved quickly. Facilitators are at risk of quitting the work with no coping strategies and limited sense of their overall effectiveness and trust in their own personal and professional lives. For facilitators to recognise the external and internal effects, they may need to develop self-awareness about the way they work, with respect to the details of the material and how they defend themselves against painful information of the disclosures. This means remaining flexible, increasing and broadening our skills, and remembering our personal qualities that foster team-building among workers. There is also a need to spend more time whilst training in focusing on perceptions relating to the right to live a life free from violence. Any system that gives one group power over another group dehumanises both those with too much power and those without enough power.

From their collective experiences, facilitators from the research identified personal and professional values and attitudes that have helped them build knowledge and resilience for working in this area. The professional values identified were:

- Acceptance of differences as people and how we organise our world
- The right of women and children to live safely in their homes
- Cultural sensitivity
- Clear boundaries
- The ability to name and recognise power and control behaviours
- Trust and respect for co-facilitators
- Working respectfully with clients
- Having a pro-feminist analysis.

Personal values identified as supportive of work practice were:

- Having clear boundaries around the treatment of others
- Being clear about the ways in which men are abusive and use male privilege

- Focusing on being respectful to others
- Reinforcing non-violence as an option
- Focusing on the importance of families
- Acknowledging women's reality
- Having a compassionate attitude towards men's stories
- Being aware of their own abilities.

Using intuition to support their work was a particular area that women talked about. I strongly support this use of intuition. It has been my experience in this work that your intuition comes from a 'knowing', from a past experience, or a past feeling. Many women have spent years picking up non-verbal clues, watching, listening and learning in a variety of relationships. I encourage them to trust themselves and to use it as a message or a powerful trigger to check things out and to ask for more information.

Organisational structures that support coping strategies

There are many benefits to working co-operatively on social issues. It is not easy going against the mainstream, nor is it easy to attend yet another meeting after a busy work day. Facilitators come with different energy levels and different interests. Some just want to 'do the work' and not be involved in the politics or the processes of the organisations. For some their sense of identity and okayness are excessively bound up in their work. There are also many other 'social' issues that impinge on this work and there is always a risk when discussions among colleagues in the workplace centre on issues such as culture and gender, where feelings can run high. In my experience facilitators, who are usually very concerned to achieve resolution in the conflicts of others, tend to be very slow to address these issues among themselves. Instead people on both sides of the conflict often retire hurt and are left with their feelings of fear, outrage and distrust.

Finding a process, which enables the exploration and critique of work practices, yet does not invite a defensive reaction, is something these agencies have to achieve if they are going to do their work effectively. This will require having a structure and atmosphere that prohibits secrecy and scapegoating and deals as fully with the internal process as it does with achieving the external goals. The structure should be one that promotes:

- Learning, sharing and conflict resolution
- A peer culture based on accountability and empathy

- A structure that supports teamwork, co-operation and debriefing
- Supervision that addresses all aspects of the work.

Co-gender facilitation

Co-gender teams are often affected by the same power dynamics that happen in organisations. I believe that organisations can work towards strengthening co-facilitation teams, monitoring the effects on workers and encouraging workers to take responsibility for their stress levels by establishing co-facilitation contracts. In our quest for a better world one thing we can really do something about is take care of our own behaviours and ourselves. Co-gender facilitation can provide:

- A model of respectful and equal sharing in group
- A differing and equally valuable perspective to the group
- A balance to help prevent burnout
- Motivation for one another
- Opportunities to critique one another's work
- An opportunity to alternate group responsibilities.

Skills and values that assist co-gender facilitation are:

- Having a working relationship built on trust and willingness to talk
- Respect for other views
- Self-care
- Understanding personal and professional boundaries
- Having and building empathy
- A healthy sense of humour
- An ability to listen and network.

Co-facilitators' contracts could include a commitment to:

- Being on time for appointments
- Attending training and programme meetings
- Continuing to read and hear women's stories
- Making time for planning and debriefing
- Attending supervision regularly, and
- Establishing a process for solving ongoing problems.

More effort needs to go into creating partnership between co-gender facilitators, based on:

- Trust
- Accountability to the programme goals
- Maintaining a level of awareness of all aspects of the work
- Empathy for self and others

- Commitment between facilitators to address the gender issues in their work.

This requires an acknowledgement of:

- Power differences
- A willingness to listen
- Willingness to share information
- Willingness to receive feedback
- Willingness to make changes.

The agency could take on the responsibility to:

- Review and adapt where necessary the Power and Control philosophy
- Formalise structures for men and women to caucus
- Ensure victims' stories are heard and understood in the context of this work
- Create space where different opinions and options can be expressed safely
- Establish a process where concerns are addressed appropriately.

In conclusion

The Power and Control model has its strengths in the co-ordination of criminal justice systems, in the advocacy programmes for domestic violence and in creating a place for a greater number of women to go about their lives feeling more satisfied with the system's response (Pence & Shepard 1988). However the model itself will not stop violence against women and children. The model has a philosophy to protect women and children and presents some guiding principles for teaching and learning. Each agency needs to adapt these ideas and principles in the light of its own experience, through its own learning process within its own community. This process creates the spirit of **praxis** — an alternating and continuous engagement of theory, personal transformation and political action.

One of the most positive aspects of belonging to a group with aspirations such as our own is the feeling of security and the mutual acceptance of deeply shared beliefs that arise through our wanting to make a difference. We have learned how vitally important the quality of inter-member relationships is. This is based on feelings being allowed to be expressed, a high level of disclosure on issues of concern and full participation by all. A strong teamwork environment fosters integrity and hope. Hope is what keeps dreams alive. Hope feeds our faith in humankind in the face of a blatantly less-than-ideal world.

Notes

- 1 The women's collective at Wellington Women's Refuge in the early 1990s played an important role in creating an environment that nurtured and educated women on the issues of domestic violence — to them I owe a big thank you, especially Clare Aspell, Lysie Pomeroy and Julie Craig.
- 2 This model was introduced into New Zealand through the Hamilton Abuse Intervention Pilot Project in 1991 and various forms of the model were later adopted throughout the country. Intervention programmes owe the original workers in Hamilton a huge debt for all the work they did in establishing and implementing the model. It was originally developed by battered women and their advocates in Duluth, USA and is outlined in 'Education Groups for Men who Batter' (1993) by Pence and Paymar.
- 3 PK Kirk (1996). Facilitators' experience of working in domestic violence education programmes for male abusers in New Zealand, and in 'Working Beyond the Duty to Warn' (1998) Wellington, unpublished research paper
- 4 Hart (1988) played a major role in monitoring men's programmes in North America.
- 5 Rhonda Murrey was referring to a 'Review of juvenile sex offending: Causes, consequences and correction' article by Ryan and Lane 1991