A Constructivist Approach to Challenging Men’s Violence Against Women

Submitted by

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Overview of the PhD by project

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Anticipating constructive alternatives to confront men’s violence against women

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Chapter Three: Exploring constructions of men’s violence against women
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Abstract

This PhD by project consists of a Manual for workers engaged in men’s behaviour change programs and a dissertation that theorises the principles underpinning the approach. The Manual and the dissertation examine a constructivist approach to challenging men’s violence against women.

The project, which is situated in rural Australia, is called the Men’s SHED (Self Help Ending Domestics) Project. The SHED Manual is based on a constructivist approach to men’s violence against women that reflects best practice principles within a pro-feminist framework. The Manual is comprised of eight sections that articulate various aspects of challenging men’s violence against women, with individuals, groups and communities. The dissertation details the journey of the project from its inception in 1994 to the beginning of 2002.

Personal construct theory provides a philosophical basis for the approach being enunciated in this study and it enables an exploration of constructive alternatives in engaging and challenging men towards behaviour change. As such, it is utilised both in engaging men to become non-violent and at the same time, reflexively enabling workers and facilitators to examine ways in which they can construct more effective ways for this to happen. The project is thus one of hopeful anticipation leading to new constructive alternatives in the endeavour to stop men’s violence against women.
Declaration

This is to certify that:

1. The dissertation and manual comprise only my original work towards the PhD except where indicated in the Preface.

2. Due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used.

3. The dissertation is less than 100,000 words in length, exclusive of tables, maps, bibliographies and appendices.

Signed:

Date:
Preface

This study builds on a framework for engaging men in behaviour change that was developed as part of a Master of Social Work degree as noted in the text. Regarding the SHED Manual, whilst it is an original work, by its very nature it draws on the practice wisdom and theorising of many other researchers and practitioners. These include the authors of works that make up the body of knowledge in this area, as well as the many workers and practitioners whose conversations have enabled me to refine and develop the manual and apply a constructive revision.
Acknowledgements

I would like to formally acknowledge that without my family and friends, I would neither have embarked on this project, persisted with it, nor completed it. My thanks to you all for the many and various ways in which you supported and challenged me to undertake and complete this journey, only to find that it opens up many other similar ones.

In particular I acknowledge and express my gratitude to the following:

The School of Social Work at Melbourne University for their support of a long distance student; Prue Brown, who introduced me to Personal Construct Theory and the late Jacqui Costigan, my clinical supervisor and mentor regarding PCT and clinical work; My late wife, Christina Ryl Currey, who inspired me to begin this research and to lay the foundations of the SHED Project and who continued to support the project despite significant personal cost.

To my daughter Giselle, for her patience at the many times that I was not available as a Dad because I was engaged in this project, and for challenging me with love; James, for reminding me of the important things, with music and harmony; The late Wendy Weeks who set me on the course of working with abusive men and challenged me to look at more effective intervention strategies as a social worker; Geoff Williamson who believed in the project from the beginning and helped me believe in myself despite adversity and Prasuna Reddy for good counsel and friendship during difficult times.

To Daryl Nation who gave me the confidence to think I could do it at times when I thought I could not; Michael Fontana, good friend and colleague, for many shared insights of practice wisdom; Lloyd Davies, friend, colleague and co-facilitator, for the hundreds of hours he generously volunteered for co-facilitation of the groups, and for much more; Anne Mackenzie, friend, colleague and co-facilitator who helped draft early versions of the manual; My colleagues at Latrobe Community Health Service in Moe, for believing in the SHED Project and to the men and women who took part in the data collection in the hope that the study will make a difference, my gratitude.
To my Colleagues at Monash, in particular Marg Lynn, Debra Manning, Karen Crinall, Olga Bursian and Phillip Dearman for the times they have supported my endeavours to research and write; My Head of School, Harry Ballis, for providing teaching relief that enabled me to write at a crucial stage, and for his personal support and encouragement; Dianne Whitehead, for desktop publishing of the manual and Anne Lorraine for the SHED Manual cover. To Debra Manning further acknowledgement and gratitude for the many ways in which she has supported and enabled me to complete this project and for bringing balance and laughter back into our home.

And finally, to Dr Fiona McDermott and Professor Bob Pease, my patient and inspiring supervisors who have always managed to challenge, affirm and encourage me to explore profoundly important and emotionally charged issues with respect and integrity, and who have enabled me to retain my commitment through difficult periods.
Glossary of terms

Personal Construct Theory Terms

Constellatory constructs: A construct which fixes the other realm memberships of its elements is called a constellatory construct. This is stereotyped thinking. (Fransella 2003:456).

Cognitive Complexity: The capacity to construe social behaviour in a multidimensional way. (Winter 1992:40)

Constructive alternativism: ‘There are as many ways to make sense of the world as there are people to make sense of it’ (Viney 1996:238).

Construct elicitation: Construct elicitation refers to the process of obtaining constructs for example, from a self-characterisation. This process is described in the SHED Manual on page 24.

Construing: ‘Placing an interpretation upon’ (Dalton and Dunnett, 1990: 3)

Corollary: Something that logically follows.

Fundamental Postulate: This is the ‘basic assumption upon which all else hinges’ (Kelly 1955/1991:561).

Impermeability: ‘Construing has impermeability if it cannot be applied to new events and people’ (Viney 1996:240).

Incredulous Approach: An open-minded readiness to hear anything and to put aside one’s judgements.

Invitational Approach: This means taking the stance of inviting the person to tell their story as a means to enable them to take responsibility (Jenkins, 1990).

Loose construing: Construing that is loose leads to predictions about events that can change but are recognizably related to one another. (Viney 1996:240)
Personal Constructs: ‘These are the meanings by which people make sense of their lives’ (Viney, 1996: 238).

Personal Construct Theory (PCT): This the constructivist theory developed by George Kelly (1955/1991).

Pre-emptive construct: This type of construct does not permit its elements to belong to other constructions and insists rigidly that they belong to nothing but it.

Repertory Grid Techniques: Repertory Grid Techniques are used for assessing the content of people’s personal meanings and how to use them. They were developed from personal construct theory. (Viney 1996:242)

Response-ability: being able to choose or respond in a given way.

Subordinate constructs: ‘Subordinate constructs are lower order constructs in the hierarchical system of constructs that are influenced by and understood through other constructs’ (Viney, 1996:242).


Superordinate constructs: ‘These are constructs that include others as one or more of the elements in their context’ (Fransella 2003:457).

Tight construing: Construing that is tight leads to unvarying predictions about events. (Viney 1996:243)

**Acronyms**


CORE: Community Corrections.

GRAPPLE: A men’s behaviour change program in East Gippsland, based on SHED.
LEAP: Law Enforcement Assistance Program (The Victoria Police database).

MOG: The Men’s Ongoing Group that is both a weekly support/challenge group, and the intake group for men. (outlined in the SHED Manual, Section Three).

MRP: The Men’s Responsibility Program is a structured twelve week program (outlined in the SHED Manual, Section Four).

NTV: No To Violence, the umbrella organisation for men’s behaviour change groups in Victoria.

SHED: Self Help Ending Domestics.


YIMS: Young Indigenous Men’s SHED – a culturally specific program based on the SHED philosophy.
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO EXEGESIS

Introduction

This study is situated in the body of knowledge about men who have acted violently or abusively. Specifically, it refers to work carried out with men who attend a behaviour change program to address their violence and abuse, called the Men’s SHED\(^1\) (Self Help Ending Domestics) Project, situated in rural Victoria. I will discuss the Men’s SHED Project in detail in Chapter Five. The study examines how Personal Construct Theory (PCT)\(^2\) (Kelly, 1955/1991)\(^3\), has been used to inform the behaviour change process of the men attending the program.

The aim of this chapter is to give an introduction to the exegesis and to situate it historically, geographically and theoretically. Its function is to give the reader some introductory sense of the focus of this enquiry and what it sets out to investigate. This chapter also indicates the boundaries and limitations of the enquiry and is structured as follows: (i) a statement of the questions addressed; (ii) a description of the background to the study, including reflexive information; (iii) a description of the ‘Experience Cycle’ (Kelly, 2003); (iv) a brief treatment of the socio/cultural/historical factors in the region; (v) working definitions for this area of enquiry; (vi) an indication of the direction of the investigation; (vii) parameters, issues and limitations of the dissertation; (viii) the ethical issues, specific and broader, are treated; and (ix) the centrality of PCT in the exploration, both as the methodology of the enquiry and

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\(^1\) SHED is used both as an acronym for Self Help Ending Domestics, and as a symbol for somewhere men feel at home, a safe space where they can think about life. In this research it is also used at times, as a verb, in the sense of shedding, or putting off, abusive behaviour.

\(^2\) Personal Construct Theory will be referred to as PCT. In this research it is used inter-changeably with Personal Construct Psychology (PCP), as the preferred term because it is not only about psychology. This inter-changeability is also reflected in the literature.

\(^3\) George Kelly published *The Psychology of Personal Constructs* in 1955 and it was republished in 1991.
as the philosophical basis for many of the behaviour change intervention strategies used with the participants in the men’s behaviour change groups.

**The focus of this study**

Not surprisingly, the focus of the study and the questions of interest have changed during the years that the project has existed. Initially the area of enquiry focused on the difference between men attending a men’s responsibility program and men generally in the community. However, as time passed, the focus of interest became more one of how the SHED project enables men to change their violent or abusive behaviour towards women.

The focus of the enquiry, for me, has thus changed from an investigation into whether men who attend are different in terms of their values, attitudes, perceptions, beliefs and their personal constructs about life, and has moved to the question of how does the attendance in the SHED Project impact on their violence and abusive behaviour. What is of most interest is if the use of Personal Construct Theory (PCT), in working with abusive or violent men as encapsulated in the SHED Manual, does enable some effective change to take place. The corollary is if the use of these PCT tools in working with men who attend the SHED Project enables those men to change and, hence, if their partners and children are safer. Therefore the continuing and prevailing areas of interest in this enquiry are focused in the following questions:

- How does an abusive man’s heightened awareness of his constructs lead him to be less abusive?

- How does the elicitation of personal constructs enable workers to challenge the abusive beliefs of violent men?

- How does the use of PCT tools enable men to make different meaning out of their behaviour in relationships and to what extent does that lead to non-violence?

- How does the use of PCT tools enable men to see how their abuse relates to other areas of their lives and how they are able to cease being victims of their biography?
Reflexive information

The majority of this enquiry was carried out part-time whilst I worked full-time as a social worker in a community health centre, as an alcohol and drug counsellor and as a men’s behaviour change program coordinator. That I was both researching for a PhD and working full-time was significant for this enquiry because of the way in which each complemented the other. Working as a social work practitioner and establishing a men’s behaviour change program enabled the grounding of theory about such work, in practice. The SHED project also provided a context for the ongoing and evolving enquiry.

The investigation, in turn, contributed to the SHED project’s ongoing development in line with current research and literature. By basing the original philosophy and structure of the SHED Project on research carried out as part of a Master of Social Work degree, in which I developed a framework for working with abusive men (Laming, 1993), I had some reason for confidence in starting groupwork with men identified as abusive. My PhD study has also enabled me to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the range of men’s violence against women, and its effects.

Whilst working as both a practitioner and a researcher has had its tensions, it has principally been a fruitful partnership in the establishment of a best practice program addressing men’s violence against women. Hence, this exegesis is about a men’s behaviour change program called the SHED Project, how it developed in rural Victoria, research that was part of that project, how it led to the development of the SHED Manual for workers, and why the manual is designed and structured the way it has been.

A few years earlier, as a social worker engaged in work with children of dysfunctional families in an agency called Big Brothers/Big Sisters Inc., I had a growing sense of doing ‘reactive’ practice, rather than ‘preventative’ practice; for example, working with the abusive men who were responsible for most of the violence. The theoretical antecedents for the framework I developed for an effective practice model were pro-feminist writings (Dobash and Dobash, 1979; Scutt, 1983; Edelson, 1984; Hamberger and Hastings, 1986; Adams, 1988; Dutton, 1988; Yllo and Bograd, 1988; Caesar and
Hamberger (eds), 1989; Sonkin and Durphy, 1989; Hamberger and Hastings, 1991; Ramazanoglu, 1989; Family Violence Professional Education Taskforce, 1991; Horsfall, 1991; Pease, 1991; Weeks, 1992), the Duluth Abuse Intervention Project (Pence and Paymar, 1986) and Narrative Therapy (Jenkins, 1990). This theoretical framework for a practice model became the foundation of the SHED Project and developed into this focussed enquiry.

From the beginning of the SHED Project, there were tensions between academic requirements and work demands. Initially, as it was the only men’s behaviour change program from Melbourne to the NSW border, the SHED Project was expected to meet a multiplicity of needs. For example, as a ‘men’s program’ it was also seen as the place to refer men with a variety of needs other than to change their abusive behaviour: ‘men’s health issues’, men who were depressed, men who had been sexually abused in childhood, men who had separated, men who were angry and so on. In addition, being a male social worker and a scarce resource, I was perceived as someone to whom men could better relate and, hence, as someone to refer them to. This growing demand created another tension because it was in contrast to the severely limited funding of the SHED Project.

At the start of the SHED Project in 1994, there were only five hours of funding per week and the project was only able to continue as a result of the other jobs being done by myself, as the project officer, to fund SHED. For example, I worked as an alcohol and drug worker concurrently with coordinating the SHED Project, and whilst this enabled some important clarifications to be made (for example, that alcohol is not the cause of violence) and building lasting working relationships with those in that related sector, the arrangement also had the capacity to give mixed messages to those majority of men who both misused alcohol and/or drugs, and were abusive or violent at home. Those men required ongoing reinforcement of the message that although the man was the same person, alcohol and drugs were not the cause of their violence, and that they were responsible for their actions.

In various ways, there was a close relationship between my coordinating the SHED Project and my role as a researcher. Many of the tasks for these roles overlapped. For example, in the assessment of the SHED participants, I was able to draw on a
repertoire (Bartlett, 1970) of techniques, skills, questions, intuitions and insights which were informed by my growing reading in the area of men’s violence (SHED Manual, Section Two). In the development of a group program and curriculum, I was reliant on a number of sources, both for the content and the process (Edelson, 1984; Pence and Paymar, 1986; Stordeur and Stille, 1989; Ammerman and Hersen, 1992; Edelson and Tolman, 1992; Jenkins, 1990; Russell, 1995; Andronico, 1996; Cavanagh and Cree, 1996).

The SHED Network Forum was formed to meet the growing need for a more collaborative approach, based on an inter-agency understanding of, and agreed response to, men’s violence. This meant that there was increasing demand for input by the SHED coordinator into the occasional training of child-protection workers, police, alcohol and drug workers, and those workers in the area engaged in working with family violence (see Appendix H). Running workshops on working with men, managing difficult behaviours and managing aggression became a regular commitment, especially because they provided some revenue by which the SHED Project remained financially viable. This is another indication of the continuing tension between funding shortfall and program demand.

This exegesis is the story of the project and the resultant ‘SHED Manual’ for workers engaging in men’s behaviour change, and the journey travelled in its development. As such, this PhD by project has two main parts, the first being an exegesis focusing on, and integrated with, the second part, which is the SHED Manual.

The SHED Project came about when female workers at the local community health centre asked if I would be interested in starting a program for men to address their abusive behaviour towards their families. It was from the combination of this request and my previous research into men’s behaviour change programs (Laming, 1993) that the SHED Project was started. In the introduction to the manual, I give a brief account of the history and development of the SHED Project.

The SHED Manual is structured functionally to reflect the key elements of working for behaviour change with men. It includes chapters on assessment of men, the facilitation of groups, using a collaborative inter-agency approach with other workers, community education and evaluation. I would now like to briefly look at one way of
conceptualising this exegesis, by using the ‘Experience Cycle’ (Kelly, 2003), in the hope that it gives the reader another way to perceive what I am articulating in this writing.

**Experience Cycle**

I have decided to conceptualise this exegesis by using the ‘Experience Cycle’ (Figure 1.) because it provides a useful way for me to demonstrate the linked and cyclical stages of this ongoing exploratory enquiry. The five stages of the ‘Experience Cycle’: Anticipation, Investment, Encounter, Confirmation or dis-conformation and Constructive Revision (Kelly, 1970:18; 2003:12), can be used as a way to frame the structure of this exegesis. The ‘Experience Cycle’ is important because it contains ‘the essence of all construing’ (Winter, 1992:13), and it is also a tool that can frequently be used with individual men, as well as in groups (Epting, 1984; Epting and Landfield, 1985), and is one of the SHED ‘tools’ of intervention (SHED Manual, Section Four).

![Experience Cycle Diagram](Adapted from Oades and Viney 2000:66)

**Figure 1.**
Therefore, Chapter One of this exegesis, the introduction, is the first ‘Anticipation’ stage of the Experience Cycle. It is about anticipating the ‘journey’ of this investigation, as well as a retrospective explanation of how and why the SHED Manual was developed in this way. The background of the enquiry, the focus of the study, the questions of interest, and the impending investigative endeavours are outlined. This anticipation stage also notes the parameters of the enquiry, literature to be researched and why the questions are important. Part of the anticipation identifies past dilemmas of not meeting the needs of women and children for safety and well-being, juxtaposed with the hope that the costs of men’s violence against women is now being taken more seriously and responded to more effectively by services such as the men’s SHED Project.

Chapter Two contains the data from the applied methodology. This is the ‘Encounter’ stage of the ‘Experience Cycle’. This chapter examines both how the intervention strategies have affected the men, and the feedback from their partners. A key finding from this chapter is that the very techniques used to carry out research with this cohort of men, themselves act as instruments in a behaviour change process that enables a man to gain a better insight into his behaviour and its effects on others.

Chapter Three represents the ‘Investment’ stage of the Experience Cycle, in which the research is prepared for by reviews of the literature related to this area of interest and work, and which provides an insight into the knowledge and practice wisdom that informed the establishment of the SHED Project in 1994. The formative influence of a pro-feminist approach to working with men as well as the issues of choice and responsibility, beliefs and values, and personal construct theory, all play an important role in developing an integrated theory of practice embedded in sound policy.

In Chapter Four, the ‘Investment’ stage of the ‘Experience Cycle’ is continued and the Personal Construct Theory (PCT) literature, particularly as it applies to men’s violence against women, is reviewed. The utilisation of PCT as the research methodology to elicit individual constructions of reality from a cohort of men attending the SHED Project is outlined in chapter four, as well as its interface with the intake process.
Chapter Five describes the ‘Confirmation/Disconfirmation’ stage’. There is a developing understanding of how to work effectively with abusive men to bring about change and this leads to a growing number of requests from other agencies for information, training and consultancy. In this chapter, I review the various components of the SHED Project that have developed over time as the result of a multi-dimensional process of responding to requests for input and information, critically reflecting on the service provision with other workers engaged in the field, applying intervention strategies developed elsewhere and targeting funding sources.

Chapter Six is the Constructive Revision stage of the ‘Experience Cycle’ in which I examine some of the issues that have arisen as a result of a continuous praxis (Freire, 1972). This process of action – reflection – action, on the applied theory of the project, includes feedback from group participants and their partners, from workers, co-facilitators and from reflexive learning on my own practice. The research is such that it connects with a range of issues. For example, the question of whether men’s behaviour change programs are effective, the ability of men to change, the correlation between alcohol and drugs and abusive behaviour, the seemingly growing incidence of abuse and violence by females, the connection between anger and abuse, the need to survive in such work, rather than succumb to vicarious traumatisation, the male suicide rate and the need for a response that complements the appropriate legal process.

The SHED Manual can also be framed as part of the ‘Constructive Revision’ stage of the ‘Experience Cycle’, in which I draw conclusions and raise questions on the basis of the research experience and the stages of the cycle: Anticipation, Investment, Encounter, Confirmation/Disconfirmation and Constructive Revision. This stage of Constructive Revision itself becomes the basis for the ‘anticipation’ of the next Experience Cycle and so on. In light of this, the research is not another contribution to a knowledge bank, or what Kelly refers to as ‘accumulated fragmentalism’, but rather a stage in a process of ‘constructive alternativism’ (1955/1991:3–45).

This enquiry is important because it adds to the body of knowledge that seeks to address a major community problem; men’s violence against women (Webster, 2004; Laing and Bobic, 2002). And whilst this exegesis concerns one attempt in rural
Australia to address this problem, it is situated alongside many other programs in Australia and overseas. It also takes place in a global context of growing fear and awareness of violence, aggression, war and terrorism, in which men are usually the perpetrators and women, children, the old and infirm are most usually the victims (WHO 2002). Women ‘are overwhelmingly more likely than men to be victims’ (Vic Health 2004:10) of intimate partner violence (ABS 2003; Bagshaw and Chung, 2000). During the time of writing, Amnesty International have launched a global campaign targeting men’s violence against women, and there is a growing acknowledgement of the urgent need for a more serious effort to address gendered violence.

**Men’s violence**

The SHED Manual was developed in this particular way, as a response to the incidence of men’s violence against women. Initially, the available literature regarding programs addressing men’s violence against women was reviewed. In particular, the Duluth Abuse Intervention Pilot Project (1987, 1988) was significant at the outset in providing a framework for working with men. Crucial to this was the fact that the Duluth Project is grounded in a pro-feminist approach to working with men. However, not all aspects of the Duluth Project were found to be useful or appropriate in the context of rural Australia. For example, the criminal justice response based on inter-agency collaboration, in my view, is only part of what is needed. It is generally acknowledged that most incidences of family violence do not come to the attention of the criminal justice system and, hence, a broader response is required. In the context of the isolation in rural areas, this can be crucial.

In a television interview, the Victorian Law Reform Commissioner, Judy Pearce, stated that ‘we know that 80% of [family violence] cases never get to court’ because they go unreported (Pearce, 2004). This view of gross under-reporting is supported widely in the field and in the literature (Sherrard, Ozanne-Smith, Brumen, Routley and Williams, 1994). Hence, it is imperative to include in any program addressing men’s violence, not only a response to those in the criminal justice system, but also to those majority of men who have never been challenged by the law. For these men, the existence of the men’s behaviour change program offers them the opportunity to take responsibility for what they do and to change that abusive behaviour.
The strength of the Duluth Project lies in its feminist analysis of men’s abuse and violence. In addition, the assessment process that comes out of that analysis is adapted in SHED (SHED Manual, Section Two) as part of an intervention repertoire that addresses men’s violence and holds men responsible for what they do.

Similar intervention projects, that were modelled on the Duluth Project, to address men’s violence against women were established in Hamilton, New Zealand (Busch and Robertson, 1993) and in Armadale, Western Australia (Gardner, 1995), and in turn were influential in the design and framework of the SHED Project. The writings of Button (1985), Jenkins (1990), Dobash and Dobash (1992), Edelson and Tolman (1992), Frances (1994a), Archer (1994) and Russell (1995) were all influential in the early formation of the SHED Project. The literature represented by these authors will be examined in Chapter Three. First, I would like to give a brief description of the SHED Project as the context of the enquiry and the reason why it matters.

The SHED Project as the context of this enquiry
The aim of this section is to provide some insight into the context of the research, where it takes place in the SHED Project and how the two are related. Any study is carried out in a given time and place, and this is no exception. This section shows the connection between the literature and the context of the investigation, as well as the interrelation between the two. In this way, I hope to show the clear integration of the SHED Project and the study at a number of different levels, both in terms of the content and process, and in terms of how I work as a researcher and social worker coordinating the SHED Project.

The SHED Project is the product of different models of working with men, different philosophies and varied sources of practice wisdom. Here I describe its origin, location, background and funding, and how it is the context where this research is grounded and how the two have developed side by side.

Background
The aim of the Men’s SHED Project is to prevent the continuation of men’s family violence in Gippsland. The Gippsland Region encompasses farming, forestry, mining, electricity power stations and industry. Many of the men who attend the project are
sons of ex-State Electricity Commission (SEC) workers, dairy farmers or timber workers. This region supplies electricity, water and gas for the Melbourne metropolitan area, as well as much agricultural produce. There is a sense that ‘the city’ takes a lot from ‘the country’ and gives little in return. Indeed, among parts of the rural population there has been a growing disenchantment and resentment at reduced services, imposed shire amalgamations, and the closure of schools and hospitals in the name of greater efficiency and ‘economic rationalism’. The level of this rural resentment was clearly indicated in the elections of October 1999 when the then State Government, led by Jeff Kennett, lost through a massive backlash from country voters.

Privatisation, especially of the electricity industry, and massive ‘downsizing’ has meant approximately 20,000 local jobs have been lost to the Gippsland Region in the past 15 years (Commonwealth Department of Human Services and Health, 1995).

The resultant exodus to find work elsewhere, the effect on local businesses, the inability of families to sell their homes, the extraordinarily low house prices and other factors have generally depleted morale and perceived self-worth. There seemed to be a political culture of blame and counter-blame, whilst the style of governing the state had been one of power and control (almost exclusively by males). There was a sense that ordinary people were treated in a dehumanising way, as if it was normal (Rees and Rodley, 1995).

**Regional needs**

In 1995, the Commonwealth Government’s Regional Needs Analysis made the following statement about Gippsland:

> In the three year period to October 1993 ... 16,000 people were retrenched in Gippsland ... This statistic at 15.7% of people in the age group 18 to 65 is substantially higher than the statistic of 10.8% in the Melbourne region for the same period ... A sense of insecurity prevails in the local community in the face of high levels of poverty and a bleak economic future. High levels of social dysfunction and distress are indicated by a range of factors including family breakdown (10.1% of the
Latrobe Valley population live in sole parent families compared to the state level of 7.5%), suicide, crime, homelessness, domestic violence, substance abuse and psychiatric illness.

(Commonwealth Department of Human Services and Health, 1995:33)

This statement is particularly relevant because it was in March 1994 that the SHED Project commenced. By then, a situation had been created where many men in the region constructed themselves as victims of ‘the system’. Many of those caught in this situation had become depressed, frustrated, angry, resentful or apathetic and cynical, and this often contrasts sharply with their inherited ‘macho’ self-image. Alcohol and drug abuse, problem gambling, youth suicide and crime were all above the state average. In addition, both the towns of Moe and Morwell had long had very large Housing Commission areas, with a high proportion of single mothers and little supportive infrastructure.

Victoria Police records indicated that ‘Family Incident Reports’ in this region are far higher than for the rest of the state (Victoria Police, 1996). The August 1995 police statistics for Q District (Gippsland), showed that the number of domestic assaults (44) are more than double the number of non-domestic assaults (20). This police statistic reflects the generally high level of family violence in the region. The presence of three prisons in Gippsland and their effect on the general population further highlights the need for education programs to change men's violent attitudes and behaviour. Such program options can complement incarceration and provide a rehabilitative component of a man’s sentencing for violent behaviour.

Again, the Commonwealth’s Regional Needs Analysis highlighted another lack of resources that compounded the dilemma at the time and continues to be the case 8 years on.

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4 The word ‘construed’ is a technical term used in relation to PCT, meaning ‘perceived’ or ‘seen with attributed meaning’. In this way, ‘construed’ has a sense of making meaning of something or someone.
The Region has an under supply of domestic violence services 
(particularly in South Gippsland) including women's refuges and domestic 
violence outreach workers. This is of particular concern given the high 
levels of stress in the Latrobe Valley and the fact that the Region has the 
highest number of reports of domestic violence of any country region. 
(1995: 36)

Furthermore, there was then and still is an under supply of men’s services, with a 
men’s behaviour change program for the whole of South Gippsland only commencing 
in 2002, and this was modelled on the SHED Project. Until that began, men routinely 
travelled by car for over an hour from parts of South Gippsland in order to attend the 
SHED Project. For those who rely on public transport, it is a very difficult task. The 
Men’s program established in Bairnsdale for East Gippsland in 1997 using the SHED 
model of practice, has only received sporadic and minimal funding and had to close 
twice as the result of a lack of resources. In the next section, I will introduce Personal 
Construct Theory and indicate how it is important to both this enquiry and to the 
development of the SHED Project.

**Personal Construct Theory**

As the literature search progressed, there was a body of knowledge that became 
formative for the SHED Project and that was Personal Construct Theory (PCT). This 
theory of psychology was formulated by George Kelly and articulated as an integrated 
initially provided the basis for the methodology for this investigation (Bannister 1970; 
1977; 1985; Costigan and Reddy 1992), but as time progressed, it has also become the 
foundation of a number of techniques used to enable men to change their attitudes 
and, potentially, their behaviour (Kelly, 1969a; Dunnett, 1988; Dalton and Dunnett, 
1990; Fransella and Dalton, 1990; Dallos, 1991; Burr and Butt, 1992; Houston, 1998; 
Horley, 2003). This body of knowledge is examined at length in Chapter Four.

PCT is central to the methodology used in this enquiry and I will demonstrate in this 
chapter just how it is philosophically appropriate for this investigation. Therefore, 
although methodologically PCT is both the vehicle of the enquiry and a subject of the 
investigation, at the same time, the researcher is also the project worker, investigating
and reflecting on his own work. PCT is the subject of the enquiry, in so far as the methodology examines the way different applications of PCT affect men and their violent behaviour, and it is also the vehicle of this enquiry in so far as it is utilised as that methodology by which to gain an insight into whether the use of PCT tools with men has been effective or not.

Before presenting an outline of the methodology, I will make several further points. It was and still is, important to me to use a methodology that is not only consistent with the underlying philosophy of the SHED Project, but also appropriate and useful in this area of work. The methodology had to be one that enables the participants to express themselves, to take responsibility for that, and at the same time to get beyond their strong resistance. This latter factor cannot be underestimated and it is crucial for any research methodology used to address and overcome that almost universal initial resistance by the participants to engage in a men’s behaviour change process. This is especially so because the area of change needed is usually charged with shame and self-loathing, even whilst they are still in denial, blaming or excusing.

Such resistance by the men participating in the enquiry was not so much about this investigation, but about them addressing their behaviour which was violent and abusive. As a researcher–practitioner, I looked for a research methodology that could be a part of the assessment and intervention process, and indeed complement the behaviour change process. The ongoing awareness of the high personal stakes involved in working for men’s behaviour change means that it is necessary to employ a research methodology which not only enables the researching of data, but also gives the participants a better insight into themselves and their behaviour and, hence, further enables the possibility for change to occur. In this way, the participants were also co-researchers with myself. This is entirely consistent with Kelly who is fond of referring to people ‘as scientists’, (1955/1991:4) in the sense that we each have the capacity to investigate.

It is not a case of the participants being treated as the objects of an investigation by me, as much as being co-researchers (‘scientists’) who themselves use PCT methods. Those methods are explained and supervised by me. However, in a very real sense it is the participants who do the research. It is this quality of PCT to both treat the
person respectfully (not as an object to be researched) and at the same time to innately challenge them, that I believe makes it so applicable to this focussed enquiry and to the process of men’s behaviour change programs. In this way particularly, the methodology reflects the working philosophy of the SHED Project. The intervention process for someone referred to the SHED Project is described fully in Section Two of the SHED Manual. In practice, the assessment commences in the initial meeting and often continues whilst the man is also attending the men’s ongoing group (MOG). A flowchart of the parallel process of enquiry and intervention follows in the next chapter.

**Summary**

In this introductory chapter, I outlined the ‘Experience Cycle’ (Kelly, 1970) with its five stages: Anticipation, Investment, Encounter, Confirmation/Disconformation and Constructive Revision (Epting, 1984). In addition, I introduced the notion of utilizing PCT as part of a model for working with men to effect behaviour change. I presented a blueprint of this enquiry including its foundations, structure and boundaries. I stated the questions of interest that focus on how the use of PCT as encapsulated in the SHED Manual enables change in abusive men. I also identified the parameters of the enquiry. In Chapter Two, I present the methodology employed in the investigation and some of the data elicited.
CHAPTER TWO: EXPOSING THE PERSONAL CONSTRUCTS OF ABUSIVE MEN

Introduction

In this chapter I present and outline of the PCT methodology and the data from its application, as well as feedback from the partners of participants obtained at both the beginning and end of the process. I then examine various issues arising from the data such as family background, depression and suicide, work ethic, black or white construing, group experiences, choice and responsibility. I conclude the chapter with a section on the participants’ comments about their involvement with the SHED program.

During the SHED program, different personal construct theory (PCT) techniques are applied in the men’s assessments and in the group process, and these are described in the SHED Manual, Sections Two, Three and Four. In this chapter, I present data to illustrate the results of such an application of PCT techniques with a small cohort of six men. A brief profile of these men is given in Appendix A with their names and the names of their partners and children, changed to ensure anonymity. All six men were in the third research cohort and an outline and comparison of the three cohorts is given in Appendix B. This enquiry and its findings provides data that grounds the sense of utility of the PCT approach in this area of work and hence, informed my decision to develop a manual. A flowchart of the parallel process of enquiry and intervention follows in the next section as a means of clarifying the methodology.

5 SHED Program here refers to the assessment, intake group (MOG), and men’s responsibility program (MRP), as distinct from the SHED Project as a whole.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SHED intervention</th>
<th>Research methodology</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) Referral received</td>
<td>1) First self-characterisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Initial meeting</td>
<td>2) Elicitation of constructs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) Individual assessment</td>
<td>3) Choosing elements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) Partner feedback</td>
<td>4) Rating elements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5) Men’s Ongoing Group</td>
<td>5) Triadic elicitation and rating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6) Men’s Responsibility Program</td>
<td>6) Supplied constructs and rating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7) Men’s Ongoing Group</td>
<td>7) Computer data processing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8) Community education</td>
<td>8) Grid analysis, discussion and participant feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9) Second self-characterisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10) Fixed role therapy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11) Third self-characterisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12) Elicitation of constructs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13) Choosing elements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14) Rating elements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15) Triadic elicitation and rating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16) Supplied constructs and rating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>17) Computer data processing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>18) Grid analysis discussion participant feedback</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2.
The above table seeks to indicate simply the parallel stages of both the SHED intervention process and the research methodology that was embedded in it. However, the functions were not necessarily concurrent and a fuller explanation of the stages at which the research was carried out is presented below.

A summary of the intake process and the applied methodology follows. It is important to keep in mind that the emphasis in this enquiry is on how the use of the PCT tools better enables a participant to change from abusive behaviour, rather than on gathering empirical data from the applied methodology. For example, the repertory grids are used with the research participants as one of the tools to enable them to see themselves differently, rather than as a means to statistically analyse their constructs. The intervention process with the men forms part of the empirical data that is reflected on, and the SHED Manual is the product of that reflection.

**Intake and intervention process**

1) **Referral**

The first stage in the process is the referral and its purpose is to clarify why the man is being referred and to establish inter-agency collaboration in the case, including the sharing of information through the client’s authorisation for disclosure. This indicates to the man that his violence will be responded to consistently by a range of agencies.

2) **Initial meeting**

The purpose of the initial meeting between the SHED worker and the man is to establish rapport and a sense of mutual understanding. From the worker’s side this includes stressing the premises upon which the SHED Project is based:

- That each of us is responsible for our actions;
- That we can learn to choose non-abusive ways and attitudes;
- That none of us are born violent. Therefore we can unlearn the violence and choose differently in our behaviour.
It also includes conducting the initial session in an invitational manner, where the man is invited to tell his story. It is offering the man the chance of a new start, inviting him to put denial, blaming and minimising aside, and begin to take responsibility for what he has done and take practical steps to change by joining the SHED group programs.

3) Assessment
The purpose of the assessment (SHED Manual, Section Two) is to get a clear idea about the nature of the abuse, its duration, pattern, escalation, effects and ramifications, substance abuse associated with the abuse, weapons used, level of current risk to family members, as well as a range of other factors including family background of the man. The purpose of soliciting information from other sources, particularly from the victim, is to enable a check on the account of the man in his assessment. The invitational mood is used in the assessment to elicit information, to convey that alternative choices of behaving are available and to signal that the matter is serious.

4) Attendance at Men’s Ongoing Group (MOG)
The purpose of this group (SHED Manual, Section Three) is to provide an intake venue for those men opting to take responsibility and do some work on changing their abusive or violent behaviour. It also provides an opportunity for the men to gain some initial group experience and to hear from other men that they are not alone in their struggle to change. This group provides some basic understandings about what group membership entails and provides a platform for more structured group work.

5) Participation in the Men’s Responsibility Program (MRP)
This structured, 12 week program (SHED Manual, Section Four) aims to build on what has been learnt in the men’s ongoing group and give the participating men the tools to remain non-violent.
There were three groups of participants in the research, with each successive group, together with the researcher, becoming more adept at the construct elicitation procedure. Their feedback is reported in the next chapter and as can be seen in the summary of the cohorts in Appendix B. There were no non-participants for the research in this particular men’s responsibility group. The research methodology followed a parallel process to the usual SHED intake and intervention procedure outlined above.

**Process of enquiry**

The assessment stage of the SHED Project was when the investigation process commenced, with the first self-characterisation (SHED Manual, Section Two). Men who came for assessment were offered the possibility of being part of the research and were assured that whether they chose to take part or not, they would receive the same opportunities and options in treatment. That is, they were reassured that to opt not to participate in the enquiry would not disadvantage them.

PCT techniques have been used for the assessment of offenders in a number of studies (Landfield and Epting, 1987; Winter, 1992; Neimeyer, 1993; Houston, 1998; Winter, 2003b; Horley, 2003; Winter and Gould, 2000; Cummins, 2003). I will now briefly describe the research methodology based on PCT before examining some of the data it elicited. The fundamental postulate of personal construct theory, and its corollaries, can be found in Appendix E.

**1) First self-characterisation**

During the usual SHED assessment process (SHED Manual, Section Two), the participant is given the following instructions:

> I want you to write a character sketch of (for example, ‘Matt’), just as if he were the principal character in a play. Write it as if it might be written by a friend who knew him very intimately and very sympathetically,

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6 Construct elicitation refers to the process of enabling someone to articulate their personal constructs. For an example of this process see SHED Manual p.24.
perhaps better than anyone ever really could know him. Be sure to write it in the third person. For example, start out by saying, ['Matt'] is someone who... (Kelly, 1955/1991).

The purpose of getting the participant to create his own character sketch, or self-characterisation, is to help him loosen his construing; to see himself from another angle and to articulate it. For men who are often locked into a very negative view of themselves and of the rest of the world, this exercise allows a ‘freeing up’ of their construing. At the same time, the self-characterisation is an expression by the participant of himself and how he sees the world. It is written in the third person as a way of getting the writer to stand back and appraise what they see objectively.

2) Elicitation of constructs

The next step is to ask the participant to identify all the personal constructs from within his self-characterisation and to underline them. He is then asked: ‘Which six have the most meaning for you?’ about the personal constructs that he had identified in his self-characterisation. When the six are identified and written on the left hand side of the page, I then ask the next question: ‘What is someone like who is not...?’(for example). The answers he then gives, might produce, for example, the following bipolar constructs:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Elicited pole</th>
<th>Contrasting pole</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>honest</td>
<td>weak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>go the extra mile</td>
<td>selfish, irresponsible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>do best at whatever he does</td>
<td>missing opportunities, self injustice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mismatch of self-confidence</td>
<td>ideal (perfect)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hates making mistakes</td>
<td>honest, realistic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>someone he loves, believes in him</td>
<td>unfortunate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The purpose of this exercise of eliciting the six most meaningful constructs is to make the participant think about what is most important to him at the time. At the same time, he is also required to identify the contrasting poles of his constructs as a way of getting him to clarify what the constructs are.

3) Choosing elements
The next step in the research methodology is to get the man to personalise the following twelve elements listed on the repertory grid sheet. I do this by giving him twelve cards. On each card is written an element. He is then instructed to personalise each element by naming someone who fits that role for him at the moment and to write their first name only on the card. The elements or roles are:

me now, ideal me, me six months ago, best mate, someone in authority, someone I admire, partner, father, researcher, someone I like, mother and someone I dislike.

Once the man completes this 5 minute exercise, I ask him to read out the name he had ascribed to each of the twelve elements. I write these down on the three repertory grid data sheets. The purpose of personalising the elements is so that the participant, as far as possible, has someone in mind whilst thinking of the elements or roles, rather than thinking in abstract terms. (Fransella, Bell and Bannister, 2004)

4) Rating elements
The man is then requested to rate the elements on a scale of 1–6, where 1 signifies the ‘exactly like’ left hand pole of the construct (eg honest) and 6 signifies the ‘exactly like’ right hand pole of the construct (weak). Once he has completed this first grid data sheet, I hand him the second one.

5) Triadic elicitation and rating
This second grid data sheet introduces the concept of triadic elicitation. The man is instructed as follows:

7 The first one being for the constructs from the self-characterisation, the second for the constructs elicited from the triadic elicitation, and the third for the supplied constructs.
‘Take the three elements marked\(^8\) on the first line of this second grid data sheet and ask yourself the following question: ‘In what important way are two of these elements alike and so, different from the third?’ (Fransella and Dalton, 1990:58). Please write that down in the left hand column and mark the two elements with an ‘X’. The alikeness is noted by the man on the left side of the grid data sheet as the emergent pole of the construct.

Next, the man is asked: ‘In what way does the third person differ from the other two people?’ This gives the contrasting pole of the construct, which is recorded on the grid data sheet. This process is repeated six times, to elicit six constructs. All six bipolar constructs\(^9\) are elicited by this method and are recorded on the second grid data sheet, bringing the total number of constructs elicited thus far to twelve. The man is then requested once again to rate the elements on a scale of 1–6 for each construct elicited, in which ‘1’ signifies the ‘exactly like’ left hand pole of the construct and ‘6’ signifies the ‘exactly like’ right hand pole of the construct.

The purpose of using triadic elicitation is that it gives the participant an opportunity to articulate some of his personal constructs using a different technique to that of the self-characterisation. Thus, the participant is enabled to see another view of himself.

6) Supplied constructs and rating

Once the man has completed this second grid data sheet, I hand him the third grid data sheet with the six supplied constructs and he is asked to rate them on the elements in the same way as with the previous two sheets. These six supplied bipolar constructs have been taken directly from the ‘Power and Control Wheel’ and the ‘Equality Wheel’ (Pence and Paymar, 1993) in which abusive behaviours and the respectful behaviours that are their alternatives are identified. These ‘wheels’ are used as a

\(^8\)The triadic elicitation the data sheet is already marked with three randomly selected elements for each of the six constructs to be elicited.

\(^9\) A personal construct is regarded as having two poles, the elicited pole and the constrasting pole, and is thus referred to as ‘bi-polar’, a term employed by Kelly fifty years ago (1955/1991:106).
component of the men’s responsibility program curriculum. The supplied bipolar constructs are as follows:

**Supplied constructs**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>non-threatening</th>
<th>intimidating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>respects</td>
<td>emotionally abusive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>supportive</td>
<td>uses isolation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>honest</td>
<td>minimizes, denies, blames</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fair</td>
<td>uses coercion and threats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shares responsibility</td>
<td>uses male privilege</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There are multiple purposes in supplying these six constructs: (i) to make the connection for the participant between the research process used and how he can apply it laterally to his abusive behaviour; (ii) to enable the participant to conceptualise how key people in his life, and himself, rate in terms of these abusive behaviours; and (iii) so that there would be some common constructs, within the participant’s range of convenience, that can be compared.

**7) Computer data processing**

When the man has completed the third grid data sheet, I ask him if he has any questions or wants to change anything. We then move on to the next phase of entering the data into the computer. We do this in the same room by moving to another table where a laptop computer is set up. I then ask him to read out the elements and his constructs whilst I enter them on the computer, and also the ratings he had given. I use this process both to facilitate the data entry operation and to make it as transparent and non-threatening as possible. This data entry process takes approximately 20 minutes. Once the data is entered in the computer, the G-Pack software (Bell, 1987) processes it in terms of a factor analysis and produces a grid plot of both the elements and the constructs.
The purpose of this process is to give the participant as much of a role in the investigation as possible. This methodology allows the participant to see the different connections between what he has given in his self-characterisation, in the triadic elicitation and in his rating on the supplied constructs, and to be in control of the process. In this way, the participant can more clearly see the links and relationships between his personal constructs and his responsibility for them. Also, this ‘immediacy’ (Egan, 1998) is important for the participant as it puts before his eyes in graphic form the way he construes these people (the elements) in terms of their relationship to him. The reason G-pack is chosen is precisely for its simplicity and relative unsophistication, because most of the research participants are not computer literate and tend to feel anxious and intimidated by technology.10

8) Grid analysis, discussion and participant feedback

I ask the man to share his reactions and reflections first on what he sees in the raw data that he has supplied and also in what he sees on the resultant repertory grid11 generated by the computer. I do this to enable him to internalise the connection between the construct elicitation process of the previous hour, in which he has identified his personal constructs and rates them on the twelve elements, and the printed data sheets now before him.

In addition to the articulated personal constructs, there are also many potential non-verbal cues to a person’s construing. Body language, tone of voice and gestures can all communicate something about a person’s construing, and, hence, they provide ways of gaining insight into the man’s constructs (Butten, 1993: 68). The person

10 This has changed markedly over the past few years as more and more people have at least one personal computer at home, as well as at work.

11 The repertory grid (rep. grid) is derived from the Role Construct Repertory Test of Kelly (1955/1991). It has been widely used in many types of research. (Landfield and Epting 1987; Winter 1992; Neimeyer 1993; Houston 1998; Winter and Gould 2000; Winter 2003b; Horley 2003; Cummins 2003). It is basically ‘a structured interview procedure which allows the investigator to obtain a glimpse of the world through the ‘goggles’ of their subject’s construct system.’ (Winter 1992:21)
carrying out the assessment has to be alert to any incongruence between what the man is saying and his non-verbal cues. The repertory grid can enable further elucidation of the meaning of the abusive man’s construing regarding his abuse, beyond what comes to light in the self-characterisation (Neimeyer, 1993).

9) Second self-characterisation
The second self-characterisation was requested from the research participants halfway through their participation in the men’s responsibility program, using the same instructions. This was carried out in order to give them a chance to look at themselves again using the self-characterisation as a tool, but now halfway into the program. It is used as a way for the participants to be able to stand back and perceive their progress (or lack of it) from another angle and, hopefully, use that information in their effort to become non-violent. This second self-characterisation, or character sketch, is also used as the basis for the next step in the process.

10) Fixed role therapy
The second self-characterisation is then utilised in the session of the men’s responsibility program of the following week (SHED Manual, Section Four, Session Three). The participants are introduced to fixed role therapy (Kelly, 1955/1991: 361–392) as a possible strategy for them to use in identifying and adopting non-abusive forms of behaviour.

The process used in this technique of fixed role therapy is as follows. The participant brings to the group session his ‘self-characterisation’ given as ‘homework’ the previous week. The worker uses this ‘self-characterisation’ to prepare an enactment sketch with the participant, (this is like a second self-characterisation based on, but different to, the first one). The criteria for this enactment sketch are that the sketch must be believable, not idealistic; and it must be possible to enact; it must be related to how the participant sees himself and not the complete opposite and, therefore, acceptable to him. As Kelly states ‘The object is not to make a model human being … but to accomplish realistic therapeutic ends with as little disturbance to this client’s personality as possible’. (Kelly, 1955/1991:369). Other participants in the group offer their suggestions about the man’s new ‘role’, whilst it is being written up on a white board.
The worker and the participant discuss, debate and experiment with a role enactment sketch until he agrees on the role he will play, where he becomes a new person with an assumed name. Questions are put to him. For example: Does this role fit? Is this someone you would like to know? Is it feasible (for you) to play this part? Is there anything else central that we have missed?

It is worth noting that the enactment sketch is aimed at developing a new theme rather than bringing about changes in specific behaviour. ‘The general aim is to set processes in motion – get the client on the move – rather than to create a new person.’ (Fransella, 1995:98) One aim is to get the man to focus on how other people are construing his new (non-abusive) behaviour.

Next, the participant enacts his new role in the group, gets feedback from the other participants, and modifies and alters anything that doesn’t fit. He then chooses a name for his new role (for example, ‘Stan’) and is sent for a two week ‘holiday’ while ‘Stan’ takes over. The participant is given a copy of his new role sketch. The participant is asked to read the sketch at least three times a day, to relate to others as ‘Stan’ without telling them about it and to observe the way they then respond or react to him. It is hoped that the participant will then begin to realise that he has, in a real sense, re-invented himself. That he is not unalterable and that he is able to change.

Arrangements are made for the participant to have easy access to the worker during the time of role enactment. In the following week’s session, feedback is given by the participant about the experience of playing the role during that period. In that session, he is asked to elicit comparisons between the new role and his ‘old’ self, and encouraged to see new possibilities for lasting change to non-violence. The group members each relate their experiences in playing their roles and what lessons they learnt about both their past and new (role) behaviour. This process is conducted over a 2 week period.

The purpose of introducing fixed role therapy to the participants is to give them yet another personal strategy to use to gain self-awareness and a sense that they can change if they so choose. This technique is designed to enable a man to see that he does have the capacity to ‘re-invent’ himself and is ‘response-able’; ‘to enable the
client to see how it is possible to create a new person; not totally new, of course, but to see that it is indeed possible to change and to do it oneself” (Fransella, 1995:97).

11) Third self-characterisation

The third self-characterisation takes place in the last week of the men’s responsibility program (MRP). The purpose of getting the participants to do a third self-characterisation, is so that they can see that they are changing and they are able to see and measure their change, or lack of it.

12) Elicitation of constructs from third self-characterisation

From this third self-characterisation described above, the man uses the same process as with the first one, with the same purpose, to identify six bipolar constructs. The purpose of this exercise is as before, only this time the participant is able to measure his different construing against the previous occasion before he undertook the 12-week men’s responsibility program.

13) Choosing Elements

The same elements are used as previously described (see Step Three on page 22).

14) Rating Elements

The man then rates the elements on the constructs as before. Similarly, once again he uses triadic elicitation in the same manner as earlier, with the same purpose; to elicit six constructs. Steps 5-8 in the methodology described above are repeated as previously.

In this section, I have outlined the intake process and how the method enquiry interfaces with it in such a way that the intervention is not impeded, but rather, complemented. It is the combination of respect, challenge and hope that addresses the resistance by participants mentioned above. I believe that the men understood that the research complemented the SHED Project’s aim to enable them to change their behaviour and attitudes. They knew that change would only occur with them getting greater insight into the effects of their abusive beliefs and taking responsibility for learning new respectful attitudes and behaviours towards women.
This approach is consistent with a pro-feminist approach in which mutual respect, rather than power and control, and challenge rather than threat or paternalism is valued. In the next chapter, I will present the findings from this applied methodology with the individual men.

This method of enquiry was piloted in 1996 following an initial review of the literature and gaining ethics approval. Following the piloting of the method of enquiry, three cohorts of men were involved in the investigation (see Appendix B). Only data from the third cohort, consisting of six participants (see Appendix A), is discussed in this chapter. The reasons for this are that first, after the initial and second cohorts, the methodology was refined to include the second self characterisation and the fixed role technique as in the outline above. Second, all the participants in the third group opted to be part of the third research cohort. Third, with the switch in emphasis from researching a thesis, to writing a dissertation on the SHED Manual, I decided to present enough of the data to present a picture of what the SHED Project does, rather than focus only on individual men.

**The data**

The research data is elicited through a combination of the men writing or dictating their self-characterisations, being guided in a process of eliciting their personal constructs from those self-characterisations, as well as through a process of triadic elicitation, and finally through the participant’s own comments and commentary on the data sheets and repertory grids generated from their rating of their constructs. The methodology that generated this data is described above. Feedback from the men’s partners at the commencement of the process and at the end of the 12 week program is also part of the presented data. At times, I have attempted to present the data in themes, keeping in mind that it represents the personal constructs of the individual men.

In this section, I will examine what the enquiry reveals and whether it was anticipated or unexpected. For example, the exercise of asking individuals to relate their story and to respond to it in such a way that their meaning is listened to, is usually not anticipated by violent men referred to the SHED Project. They often anticipate that their assessment will be carried out by a prejudiced worker who has already judged,
labelled and condemned them. It is my belief that this perception by abusive men is prevalent and is in stark contrast to the belief in women’s domestic violence services that abusive men are generally colluded with by workers in men’s behaviour change programs, rather than being confronted.

That abusive men’s stories are listened to is clearly of great importance to the participants, many of whom have never had such an opportunity before, and as a result, feel misunderstood. One participant put it this way: ‘… listening to others in the group really helps the self-awareness’ (Matt). In this statement, Matt hints at another powerful influence on men attending a behaviour change program; that hearing others’ stories which are similar to their own, gives them a sense that they are not alone in their struggle to be non-violent. The context of the program precludes participants from normalising the abusive behaviour, by challenging them about it, demonstrating its destructive ramifications for their families whilst offering alternatives, and, therefore, does not unintentionally support it.

I believe that ‘listening to someone’s account of their abusive behaviour non-judgmentally is not the same as condoning it or colluding with the abusive man. Rather, it is about trying to understand the meaning he puts on his actions, in order to better enable him to change. This is an important point, not without controversy, and yet it is described as one of the steps in the men’s behaviour change process (Dobash et al., 1996:ix). It is an attempt to see the world, and relationships in particular, through a man’s eyes so as to better enable him to become non-abusive (Houston 1998). That point is reinforced repeatedly for the participants.

Many individuals find that the PCT exercises open them to being willing to accept that there is a better way of relating with their family. Matt puts it this way ‘The hard part is to change the attitudes, not just stay at an intellectual understanding [of our behaviour] and doing these exercises helps to identify my feelings which are my attitudes … doing these PCT exercises has helped me to identify attitudes’ (Matt). This open approach to the participants affects them in a number of ways.

The first way is that the men feel listened to and understood, both individually and in the group (Dobash et al., 1996), and as a result are more open to engaging with the process of change. Second, the men gain a sense of where they are in regard to
different aspects of their behaviour, particularly when they rate themselves on the various self-assessment continuums. This means that the men have a chance to assess themselves and to compare that with how they think their partner might rate them on the same scale. It also means that they have a chance to assess how they might have changed, or not changed, on the various scales and, also, how change in one area of abusive behaviour affects change in another.

For many of the men, this is very sobering, especially when reinforced by other participants and their stories, and how they too, have caused all types of destruction in their own family. Third, the sense of being listened to and understood leads to men passing the word on to their mates that even though attendance at the SHED group is often painful and difficult, it is worth trying. The ‘word on the street’ is that SHED is OK and that, in their words, it is not a ‘male bashing exercise’. Many of the men feel under threat because of their behaviour and some feel that the whole world is against them. They are very sensitive to criticism, even though they might not be ready or willing to change. In regard to getting men to attend a group, it is important that they know that, although they will be challenged about their abusive beliefs and behaviour, it will be done honestly and directly.

Regarding the notion of ‘male bashing’, some men might use it as an excuse not to attend a group. It seems natural for someone to feel sensitive about attending a program for men who are identified as abusive. This could be seen as a reflection of the perceived social situation that men feel ‘under siege’ and a bit lost, whereas many recognise that their behaviour is unacceptable, even though it is convenient for them.

Maintaining the balance between supporting genuine endeavour by men to change and at the same time challenging abusive attitudes and behaviour is the key to an effective intervention. I will now examine feedback from partners of the men attending the men’s responsibility program, before presenting findings from the men themselves.

**Feedback from partners**

The feedback from the partners of participants about the degree and type of abuse varies considerably. It is not uncommon for a partner to be less critical than the
participant about his abusive behaviour. For example, when talking about Matt, Sam reported in the initial assessment that ‘The worst thing he does is grab Jim [2-year-old], so I can't hold him, and I'm terrified he will hurt him.’ Of his studies, she said that ‘it's fair that Matt does the course, everyone has their problems and, anyway, it is the first relationship he has been in.’ However, she went on to say in the initial assessment session that ‘he treats me like dog-shit and he tells me things like “go and get some dog food”’ (for herself) and then ‘he goes off and ignores me, he's scary and irrational’ Sam continued ‘Matt seems angry about things from his childhood’ and ‘has a bad temper.’

The excusing of Matt’s abusive behaviour by Sam is despite identifying herself as a feminist. Sam is also a graduate with a social science degree and, arguably, above average skills and knowledge to survive and deal effectively with men’s abuse. Yet, Sam remains vulnerable to this type of psychological and emotional attack by her husband. This raises the question of what might be the effect of such abuse on women less prepared to deal with it.

**Intimidation and threats**

The findings indicate that all of the partners experience intimidation, leading to varying degrees of fear. Sam described how Matt ‘is often nasty, volatile, and unpredictable. He intimidates me into his point of view.’ Matt described one of his ways of intimating Sam as ‘I slap her or hold a fist to her chin to instil fear.’ The unpredictability that Sam mentioned is also a common theme among abused women. These women state that it is precisely the not knowing when their partner is going to next erupt violently that keeps them ‘walking on eggshells’, afraid to do or say something that might upset him but at the same time not knowing what or when that might be. Russell (1995) talks about how men’s abusive beliefs are often centred on their ‘centrality’ and that anything that they perceive to be a threat to their centrality is reacted to abusively. This reaction can be both unpredictable and sudden, and creates much anxiety for the victim.

This level of anxiety itself can have far reaching consequences. In the face of Brad’s sporadic abuse and violence, Danielle’s alcoholism is not surprising as a possible coping mechanism against all types of abuse, including sexual abuse. In her interview
for the assessment, Danielle gave the following information regarding Brad. In terms of physical abuse, he punched her on three occasions, bashed her against a door, as well as pulling her hair, pushing her (through a window), throwing things at her (the phone) and restraining her (‘he ripped the phone out when I went to call the police’). When asked about sexual abuse, Danielle replied ‘he gets the shits if he doesn’t get it’ (sex). Because Brad has been married twice before, the possible level of his violence in the previous marriages is concerning.

Cathy reports how she is afraid of Henry. ‘When he is angry he intimidates, throws and breaks things, yells and screams, pounds his fists, slams doors…once he threw all my folded washing on the floor.’ She stated that the most damage is caused by ‘…the emotional abuse, the name calling, put-downs and humiliating me in front of other people.’ This behaviour of Henry’s, as described by his wife, is consistent with the actions of someone who has had their control (pre-emptive construing), and worldview (construct system), challenged in a way that they neither anticipated nor welcome.

As seen above, the use of threats is a very common form of behaviour by the participants. When asked whether Lou ever threatened her, Noreen recounted an incident where she bought a ride-on mower while Lou was away on the drill-rig. When he returned, he was furious and said ‘It had better not be there when I get back, I'll burn it, and burn you on it.’ Noreen also recounted how Lou intimidates and scares his family when he drives recklessly at times. She went on to say that ‘Lou spends most of his time yelling at one of us.’ Noreen said she was afraid of him because he is a lot stronger than her and he ‘kicks and breaks the kids' toys and I just put them in the rubbish.’

Teena reported that Bart had slapped and punched her before their marriage 16 years previously, but not since then. He had tried to choke her 3 years previously and had pulled her hair, pushed her and restrained her 'a few times'. Teena stated there is no sexual abuse, however, in terms of controlling behaviour he says things like ‘Where have you been? What have you done?’ Teena said that she just ignores him but ‘Then he starts on the kids.’ Teena reported that Bart makes threats to take the kids away
and says things like ‘If you leave me I'll take everything, I'll end up killing myself ..I'll have you declared an unfit mother.’

Teena also said that she is afraid of what Bart might do if they separate. ‘Bart gets 'the look' when he is angry, and can be very intimidating. He throws things like plates, punches the walls, yells and screams. He also uses verbal abuse to put me down about my looks, clothes, sex, and cooking, and to humiliate me by calling me “bitch” and “slut”’. 

Hank admitted to a wide range of physical abuse to Donna in the 6 months prior to the assessment, as well as threats ‘I'll belt you, I'll cave your head in, I'll blow the bastard up [their car]’, intimidation and emotional abuse, ‘Dumb Doris, this place is like a shithouse’, and humiliating her in the middle of the street. Hank reports that the police were called ‘last time’ by a worker at a local community agency, after Donna went there for help ‘The police have attended [our home] three times since the new year [a month before], and twice before’.

Jealousy

Danielle described very controlling behaviour (pre-emptive construing) by Brad ‘He didn't believe I was paying bills. He would follow me around, question me about where I had been ... and get very jealous. He would get very aggro and talk himself into a state ... the look in his face, eyes, the way he speaks ... really scary ... So I would worry about how he is going to turn ... He'd treat me like a piece of shit ... and call me 'slut'. Recently he tipped beer on the carpet and tipped beer on the phone, broke it [the bottle] on my head, ... then bought me a bottle of Southern Comfort to buy sex. He uses “mind control.” ’

Cathy described Henry as ‘a very jealous person. I see him as obsessive and paranoid. He checks up on me and tries to catch me out ... In every argument he makes threats like ‘I’ll kill you, I’ll smash your head in, I’ll go and hang myself because there is no meaning without you.’ ’ Cathy also described how Henry had ‘pressured me into sex...mostly after arguments...It’s his way of dealing with it.’ This raises the question of whether Henry looks for an argument in order to gain sex.
Teena described how, at a recent work party, Bart became furious with her (out of jealousy), ‘veins in his neck [stood out] eyes bulging, kicked the car door and car seat.’ She expressed that she’d ‘… had enough. He has to change. He does things to get my attention, so he feels needed. He’s 35 years old, and still he hasn’t grown up … I feel like I have to pat him on the head and say what a good job he's done.’ Despite this, she said that they all go out together as a family.

**Sex and double standards**

The picture that Danielle paints here is not atypical of other partners of men attending SHED. Brad seems to be full of contradictions and hypocrisy, demanding (and buying) sex from Danielle, putting her down and drinking with her, and at the same time condemning her for not staying committed to the detoxification program. On the one hand, Brad sees himself as ‘a Christian’, and his pastor made contact with me several times, concerned about Brad’s abuse of Danielle, and on the other hand, he clearly uses a wide range of violence to get what he wants.

Brad is a truck driver and has used amphetamines in the past, as well as other drugs. However, according to Danielle, ‘He got very angry and said he would knuckle the bloke who planted dope in the back yard.’ Again, this reaction points up Brad’s double standards and can be explained by his feeling that his ‘centrality’ is being threatened. With the above relationship scenario it is not surprising that both Brad and Danielle reported that they had seriously contemplated suicide. In terms of Brad’s drug use, there is a discrepancy in the feedback. Danielle stated that Brad had not used amphetamines for 3 years, and at the same time his teenage son reported that his violence had also been at times when he has been taking ‘speed’ to enable him to drive longer.

In relation to having sex with Lou, Noreen said, ‘I don't mind participating, but in the morning [after] he ignores me. He has no warmth or affection.’ Noreen expressed concern at being more and more isolated. ‘Not many people call around any more.’ This feeling of isolation is very real for partners.
Effects of violence on children

Feedback from Danielle towards the end of the men's responsibility program was that Brad is still very controlling “… tried to talk with Brad and he got sarcastic … He came and stayed the night and kept waking me up, and then I got grumpy in the morning, and he told me I have to deal with my anger, and I told him not to put his stuff onto me. The kids are starting to regress, and be nasty to each other. I tried talking to Brad but he started to get an attitude … so I felt really churned-up … I arranged for Sandy [the domestic violence worker] to come around, and in front of her I told Brad it was over and we exchanged keys [of each other's places] … He says he doesn't take the Bible seriously … I keep getting phone calls that ring a couple of times and then stops … earlier … he left and asked if I was getting a divorce.‘ Brad has since moved to Queensland. Danielle’s description here is of a man who, despite attending the program, is still blaming her for his abuse, is negatively affecting their children, and harassing her with ‘prank’ phone calls. In addition, Brad is already moving on, literally and metaphorically, and preparing the way for another relationship by asking about the divorce. His focus is not on his abusive and violent behaviour that he needs to change.

Noreen reported Lou slapping the children on the head, and bruising to their legs, punching Molly in the incident he reported to police, restraining her by locking the door and standing in front of it when she attempted to leave, and throwing things such as the boys’ toys. Teena stated that Bart often verbally abuses their teenage daughters but that he very rarely abuses alcohol, and he does not possess any weapons.

Minimising

The minimising description of Matt’s abusive behaviour, by Sam, contrasts with his own version of his abuse of her, in his initial assessment. He described his physical violence such as slaps, kicks, pushes and ‘throwing her around.’ He described how he slaps to ‘instil fear’, and how he presses his fist against Sam’s chin to intimidate her. He also breaks things that mean a lot to her. When questioned about sexual abuse, he said that Sam tells him that he ‘equates sex with emotional happiness‘ and that he uses controlling behaviour like ‘the silent treatment’ and intimidation that terrifies. For example, he says things like, ‘You're lucky I didn't bash your head in’ (which he
whispers under his breath), or ‘Leave me alone or I'll kill you.’ Matt uses put-downs of Sam such as, ‘You fuckin’ [sic] mental bitch’ (Sam's mother is mentally ill), or put-downs of himself such as ‘you stupid, stupid idiot.’

In the case of Lou and Noreen, their separate accounts of his abuse are generally similar. The main difference is, once again, that Noreen sometimes makes an excuse for his abuse, especially earlier on. As time goes on, Noreen loses patience and seems to despair at Lou’s ability to ever change enough for their relationship to recover. In this regard, she wisely puts her own and her children’s safety before her pity for her intimidating, suffering, and depressed husband. Although, many abused wives stay with their husbands out of compassion in such circumstances.

**Feeling trapped**

Matt reported how ‘I never ever wanted to get married . . . then Sam fell pregnant.’ He then goes on to say that he feels ‘trapped, resentful and angry, and guilty after being abusive.’ Matt reported that the most recent arguments had been about money and his wanting to control it, and make the decisions himself. He stated that he had contemplated suicide.

**Controlling behaviour**

Again Sam described how Matt ‘… is often irrational, scary, nasty, volatile and unpredictable’ and how he intimidates her into his point of view. She said he has double standards and when he gets annoyed with something, he then sets it up so he can blame her. She stated that when driving, he is very controlling, giving orders and then demanding her to repeat it by saying things like ‘Now tell me why I told you to do it that way?’ She said that this for her was ‘fear invoking and confusing.’ In this context Sam mentioned that Matt's brother is a heroin addict, who also has the effect on her of evoking fear and confusion by his controlling behaviour.

**Family background**

Teena, in her interview for Bart's assessment, also told of how their eldest daughter had recently revealed to a school counsellor that she had been sexually abused several
years earlier by Bart's brother. This revelation has created enormous tension between Bart and his brother, and his parents who refuse to believe their granddaughter's story. Teena told of how there was a great deal of physical violence in Bart's family when he was growing up. She intimated that violence is something that Bart learnt as he was growing up.

During the group session about family background, Henry maintained strong loyalty to his family of origin, defending their use of beatings to discipline him as a boy as justified because of his misbehaviour. He defended his own harsh treatment of his children by saying that it didn’t do him any harm when he was growing up and so he cannot see a problem. Hank also reported that there was alcohol related violence when he was growing up. For example, ‘Dad was pretty brutal banging our heads together ... (I remember) ... he whacked me across the back with a ladder from the bunk when I wet my bed.’

Lou recounts how he was made to work as a child. He was driven by his father to an isolated field and left there all day to work. He was often hungry, thirsty, lonely and scared, and later, angry. This began when he was ‘seven or eight’ (years old) and continued. Whatever the reason, it arguably contributed to Lou’s lack of social skills, especially his immense struggle to communicate. He attributes this treatment of himself by his parents to their German cultural heritage and work ethic. Whilst struggling to be loyal to them and their ways, he has a growing realisation that it is not right, especially as his insight into his own behaviour with his sons grows, and how he scares them in much the same way as his own father did with him. At the same time, he also begins to make the connection between what he felt then and what his own sons must feel as a result of his treatment of them.

The influence of family background on learnt behaviour in relationships is clear. 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. (James et al., 2002:17) However, there is a general sense from the men in this research, and indeed from the several hundred men overall who have been assessed by the SHED Project staff, that they do not usually make the connection between their upbringing and the strength of
its influence on how they relate to their partners and children almost as functional entities that serve their (perceived) entitlement. The men usually have no idea of how their own feelings of pain and hurt in childhood, as a result of themselves being victims of someone’s demands of entitlement, are replicated in their own children when they are abused. When they do make the connection, it is often a powerful ‘ahha’ experience that can motivate their behaviour change even more.

**Participants’ perceptions of themselves and life**

At the end of the 12 week men’s responsibility, program Lou dictated the following self-characterisation:

> Lou recognises he has a violence problem. He doesn't feel good about what has happened. He would like to get on top of it, get rid of the problem. He's having a go. He's getting on top of it. He's frustrated it isn't happening faster. The setbacks upset him. He'll keep persevering. Lou wants to get on top of the problem. He wants to treat [his] partner as an equal. He wants to have a loving relationship.

From this self-characterisation, we can see that Lou both takes responsibility for his violence and is motivated to do something about it. Lou is able to articulate changes for himself that he has not been able to do before. This is a step towards constructive alternativism for him and a prerequisite towards becoming non-abusive. For his partner Noreen, however, it is, as she put it, ‘too little, too late.’ Like many partners of violent men, Noreen is worn out with the various roles she plays (parent to their children, homemaker, wage earner, wife) in the face of Lou’s continuous yelling, intimidation and abuse, and later, threats of suicide.

Eventually, Noreen took her children and moved out of their home, in spite of Lou being regularly absent, working 2 week shifts on the off-shore oil rigs. This is perhaps an indication that she is no longer able or prepared to cope with the anxiety and fear that Lou’s imminent return from offshore work usually engenders in her and in their boys. Many men who work hard at changing their abusive behaviours, only to find that it is ‘too little, too late’, feel deep sadness and hurt that their efforts have been unsuccessful in redeeming their faltering relationships. Bart is another such man.
At the end of his participation in the men’s responsibility program, Bart gave the following very brief third self-characterisation. ‘Bart is emotional, confused, has plans, looking to the future, great guy, doesn't give up.’ Bart then identified the following six bipolar constructs from his third self-characterisation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Elicited Construct</th>
<th>Contrasting Pole</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emotional</td>
<td>tougher, resilient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confused</td>
<td>relaxed with all aspects of life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>has plans</td>
<td>stuck in one place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>looking to the future</td>
<td>live from day to day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>great guy</td>
<td>don't care about others - live for themselves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>doesn't give up</td>
<td>blocks everything out</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Bart presented the above information painfully. The brevity of his self-characterisation was one indication of how hard he was finding his life at the time. He certainly presents as emotional and confused and yet there is also the sense of his ‘moving on’. The tensions in his life are apparent, as can be seen from his comments about his second repertory grid given below.

When Bart was asked to regard the computer readout of his data and the resultant grid, and to comment on what he saw he said, ‘I think this is how things are, however I would like to be where ideal me is. The group on the left of the grid (someone in authority, ideal me, someone I like, researcher, and best mate) are all family-oriented and have a vision, they are set in a certain mould. They are going places. Those on the right hand side are, like me are in a Catch 22 situation ... can't go forward and can't go back.’ There is a sense from this account that Bart feels stuck and frustrated at not being able to live his own vision.

Bart went on to say, ‘About me now, I see that I have come a certain way since my first interview but it has not been in leaps and bounds ... and that is why I am critical
of myself ... and have put me now close to me six months ago. In terms of those over there on the left, they are all family oriented and that is something we haven't had for a long time. The people who are at the top of the grid are in contrast to that, doing family things, hard working, shit doesn't come out of their mouths, just crap, doing things together as a family, when you sit down together for a cup of tea you talk about normal things, not dirty jokes ... that's what differs from them other two ... just crap comes out of their mouth.’ Here Bart is referring with feeling to his wife and her newly established lesbian relationship.

Bart continued, ‘I feel that this grid is 80% spot-on in terms of how things are ... I feel I am distanced from me partner as far as I can get there, about. The person I dislike is three quarters of the way away from me, and the people I like and admire are all clustered around the page, within the corner. Not so much me mother and father at the moment because of the conflict with me brother but …’ Bart leaves this hanging, with the sense that he hopes that things will change and revert to the way they were between he and his parents before the recent discovery by a school counsellor, that his brother had sexually abused his (Bart’s) daughter and his parents will not believe that he did.

During his assessment, Hank showed a mixture of remorse, bewilderment and frustration that he is abusive and violent to Donna. However, it also becomes evident as time goes on that Hank enjoys 'performing' to the group, whether by his eccentricities or by using language, or expressing opinions to shock. On the occasion of his assessment, I believe he was attempting to be genuine about how he feels. For example, Hank said ‘I should be able to use my skills to manage my anger. The most violent episode was in August September 1996, when I punched her in the head and hit her with the torch. When I get angry it is like I'm someone else. I was Donna's knight in shining armour and now what I do is abhorrent.’ The notions that Hank expressed here, that it is as if he is someone else when he is violent and that he has let his wife down, are commonly expressed by participants in the SHED Project.

Half way through the 12 week men’s responsibility program, in his second self-characterisation, Hank gave the following view of himself, ‘Hank is still a lot of unresolved things, dealing with them better, aware that they have to be resolved and
settled, uncertain about how much the SHED has helped, went to a SHED group 18 months ago with head up his arse, he has changed and reacts differently, realises anger management applies to everyone, has trouble with his relatives, has to think about resolving conflicts in another non-violent way, gave the elephant sandwich speech, hasn't gone to jail, can feel and see the difference, more confident and less uncertain about the future.’ At the same time as Hank giving this feedback, I feel an unease due to feedback from psychiatric services that indicate his wife is still feeling unsafe and anxious at home.

In contrast, protective services are giving feedback that their workers observe that Hank’s home situation seems to have improved somewhat. Clearly, Hank is a very complex man with sophisticated strategies for avoiding taking responsibility and engaging in behaviour change. Hank expresses a deep love for his wife and children whilst being, at times, extremely erratic and volatile. He is highly intelligent, articulate and controlling, and his sarcasm and other verbal abuse is clearly a formidable and cutting weapon when he chooses to use it on his family.

Henry, commenting on his second repertory grid, makes the following comment, ‘I'm nothin [sic] like the way I was 6 months ago.’ When I reply that if he looks down the raw data it is almost identical (me now and me six months ago) Henry replies ‘Maybe I was my ideal me 6 months ago.’ This reply from Henry gives a hint of his entrenched resistance to seeing his behaviour as less than ideal, despite getting clear and strong messages to the contrary through the men’s responsibility program. I will return to the notion of resistance and tight, black and white construing in Chapter Three.

**Work ethic**

There is an issue of how much work pressures can impact on individual men’s health and well-being, and on their capacity to relate respectfully. On the one hand, there is a very strong work ethic. There is a sense that a real man has to work ‘until he drops’ and not feel a thing, because that is what they learnt from their fathers. On the other hand, there is a sense of quiet desperation from men who are worn out, feel like they are losing their families and yet do not know how to change their behaviour so that their wife and children are no longer scared.
For Lou, the struggle to learn to read and write was very humbling and in stark contrast to his abusive behaviour. Unfortunately, Lou’s efforts in this regard, and in changing his abusive behaviour, were fragmented by his working lifestyle. For Lou especially, his work pattern of 2 weeks away on an oil rig and 2 weeks at home was problematic in terms of attending the men's responsibility program. Even so, Lou was still very driven by his inherited work ethic.

The size and strength of Lou, who works 12 hour shifts as a welder on an oil rig, is something that frightens his young sons. This and his loud voice, which seems at times to try and compensate for his inability to communicate, ‘If I say it loud they will understand.’ Lou was encouraged to start practising his reading and writing as a way of improving his literacy but also as a means of connecting with his own primary school aged sons, who are themselves learning to read. He would read bedtime stories to his youngest son and, after some months, felt enough confidence to begin writing brief letters to his sons while he was away on the oil rig.

‘Black or white’ construing

Another participant who had similar work ethic issues to Lou was Henry. He described in the group how he had given his 15-year-old son a paid job to split 4 tonnes of firewood by a certain date 3 months hence. For this work, Henry agreed to pay his teenage son $200. The load of wood was duly dumped at their house and the boy began splitting it. The boy began enthusiastically, however, he was not constant in the work, so that with 2 weeks remaining he had still not split half the wood. He began splitting the wood in every spare minute he had. However, at the end of the 3 months there still remained a small quantity of wood unsplit. As a result, Henry refused to pay him anything because ‘he didn’t fulfil the contract.’ According to Henry, this would ‘teach him a lesson he will never forget … just like my father taught me.’ When Henry expressed this in the group, he was strongly challenged by the other participants, which seemed to surprise him and at the same time have the effect of making him more adamant that he was right.

Henry, a tough plumber, ‘a man’s man’, heavy drinker, a self professed ‘football star’ in his youth, a deer hunter (until his firearms were confiscated as the result of having an intervention order), is not used to having his way of seeing and doing things
challenged, especially by his much younger second wife. In this, he is not unlike many other men. Yet, because he sees things in black and white and his construing is rigid, his way of viewing the world is vulnerable when it is challenged and invalidated because most of his constructs are closely interrelated (Lawlor and Cochran, 1981).

*Invalidation of predictions derived from any construct is thus likely to reverberate to core constructs and to lead to threat, defined by Kelly (1955: 489) as ‘awareness of imminent comprehensive change in one’s core structures’ (Winter 2003b:17).*

For Henry, any questioning of his opinions represents a threat in the above sense, especially at home where he has tight constructs around bringing up children and his right to control his wife, in every regard. Any situation which requires a reconstruction of his self–other boundary is a threat, and one he reacts to strongly (Hallschmid, Black and Checkley, 1985). For example, Cathy describes Henry’s physical abuse of her in terms of ‘*choking, pulling hair, pushing, restraining, (he had me on the ground, sitting on me), throwing things, (cup of hot coffee, stubby and a jar of nuts).*’

The construct system that Henry disclosed appears cognitively simple, ‘black and white’\(^{12}\), and tight. Winter found in a study of police officers that those ‘… with tighter, more logically consistent construct systems also tended to be more extrapunitive’ (Winter, 2003b:17). Similarly, in a study of prisoners it was found that those with ‘cognitively simple’ construing were more likely to commit violent crime (Chetwynd, 1977).

**Depression and suicide**

In Lou’s second self-characterisation, he described himself this way: ‘*He has made some headway, learning about how to deal with things and cope with things and not go down the violent avenue. Lou is positive about going the right way. He won't throw*’

\(^{12}\) The notion of ‘black and white’ construing refers to a person who sees things in absolute terms without any possible shades of meaning and complexity, or ‘grey’ areas.
the towel in.’ A few months after first attending the men’s responsibility program, Lou had needed to take time off work for stress and depression. He continued to attend SHED at least weekly and participated in a second men’s responsibility program to make up for the sessions he had missed previously.

By this time, his wife Noreen had moved out of the family home with the boys for fear of their safety as well as not coping with having ‘another child in the house’, as she referred to Lou. By this time, Lou was presenting as very pathetic and feeling sorry for himself. For Noreen, this contrasts strongly with her struggle to bring up the boys as a single parent and her anxiety was heightened whenever Lou threatened to commit suicide, which occurred regularly until his doctor prescribed antidepressants.

Suicide is also something that Matt had seriously contemplated at times of despair, when not knowing what to do or how to change his behaviour. ‘I slapped her or held a fist to her chin to instil fear ... I never ever wanted to get married ... then ‘Sam’ fell pregnant …’ He went on to say that he felt ‘trapped, resentful and angry, and guilty after being abusive.’ Matt reported that the most recent arguments had been about money and his wanting to control it, and make the decisions himself. It is in this context that he stated that he had contemplated suicide seriously. Brad too, reported that he and Danielle had both seriously contemplated suicide. However, Brad instead moved to the Gold Coast.

**Choice and responsibility**

Choice is both an issue for the participants in a men’s behaviour change program and a key principle of the SHED Project in that it aims to present the men who attend with the choice of an alternative attitude and behaviour. However, many men feel like they do not have a choice about their behaviour. For example, the impact of family background, that ‘this’ is what they learnt when they were growing up, therefore ‘this’ (abusive behaviour) is what they have to do. As a result, there often seems to be a subtext in which the men are claiming that because of their upbringing they are not responsible for how they now act. And yet:

...once chosen, we must accept the consequences of an act which clearly limits freedom. An individual does appear free, for whatever conscious or
less than conscious reasons, to enact and to re-enact a wide variety of behaviours, offensive ones included. Why would an individual choose the actions of a ‘pervert’ or ‘killer’, or why would a person act in a manner that appeared to be both self-injurious and injurious to others? The answer may be ultimately an individual one – it depends on his/her own experience and past efforts to construe personal experience – but it can also be a simple, shared one – it depends on perceived construct extension and definition. (Horley, 2003:5)

This means that for the abusive man, the courses of action will probably be violent (Winter, 2003b: 28) because that is what he anticipates will extend and define his construct system, which is based on abusive beliefs and attitudes which support his controlling behaviour. (Russell, 1995)

The notion of ‘experimenting’ with behaviour has been mentioned earlier in Chapter One and is relevant here as an explanation of why some men choose behaviour which is abusive, whereas others do not. For some, extending their construct system is a key factor in choosing to act one way rather than another. Kelly’s view was that all behaviour is experimental (1970), and it is used to test tentatively whether the result of the ‘experiment’ is acceptable or not (Horley, 2003:4).

For some men (eg. Matt, Hank and Lou), their abuse provides a relief from the chaos of their lives in which they have a sense that things are out of their control, and they do not know what is happening. Hence, their abusive behaviour gives them a feeling that they are in control and that everything is alright.

A corollary of this is that as long as a man is not challenged about his abuse and is tacitly supported by being left unchallenged, the more it ‘works for him’ in the sense that it verifies his anticipation. It confirms what he had anticipated, namely, that this type of behaviour gets him some sort of reward; for example, a feeling of being in control. He has most often seen this when growing up and he now experiences that it works for him. The more that he construes his abusive behaviour as working for him, the more it is reinforced, and the harder it is to change. Related to this is that most often the partners report that the abusive and violent incidents have escalated over some time. In Kelly’s terms, the man is ‘extending his construct system’ to include
ever more abusive acts that he has ‘experimented with’ and found the outcome to his liking (1970:19).

The significance of the group for participants

At times, the group represents a place where participants can learn to freely express themselves and their emotions, tell their stories without being put-down, condemned, or laughed at, a place where they are listened to and feel understood. At other times, the group is a place of challenge where the participants learn to recognise and take responsibility for their abusive behaviour. Often it is a struggle, and one participant put it this way in his second ‘Self-Characterisation’, ‘Lou seems calmer. He understands things a bit better. He finds it an effort to put into practice what he has learnt in the group. Looking back … things can turn to shit … He didn't have any control.’ Here, Lou articulated one of the tensions of the group for him.

On the one hand it has helped to make Lou more relaxed, and on the other he is struggling to put into practice the various strategies for non-violence learnt in the group. For Lou and others there is, at times, the danger of the group being akin to a football coach’s talk at half-time, in which the group members encourage, support and challenge each other to learn new strategies to put into practice in the coming week in order to learn and reinforce behaviour change from abusive to respectful relating. It may be problematic for a man to feel inspired in the group, only to find that in the reality of day-to-day life he is unable to sustain his non-abusive aspirations.

Within the group, the participants are able to build rapport with each other and support each other in their change. It is incumbent on the co-facilitators to ensure that the mutual support to enable change does not become collusion that reinforces abusive attitudes and behaviour. For some participants, that behaviour change process was difficult and for others it came more naturally. Whether this was as a result of motivation, intelligence, insight, a readiness to accept that they were wrong, or other factors, is not clear.

In Henry’s case, his lack of response to the group process and the assessment is consistent with research elsewhere.
The research findings suggest that people who are cognitively simple (and are therefore likely to be tight construers) may be deficient in their ability to anticipate the construing and behaviour of others; in their capacity to integrated conflicting information about others; and in their communicational ability. (Winter, 2003b:17)

In other words Henry would, and did, find it very difficult to be in a group or be identified as a group member, especially because of the discrepancy between his self image and personal constructs, and the challenges he received in the group about his attitudes and behaviour.

The PCT Corollaries of ‘Sociality’ and ‘Commonality’ are applicable here in so far as it is very evident that group members have the potential to have a very influential impact on each other. This impact can be negative, as in the case of collusion, or feigning an indifferent attitude to the behaviour change process, or it can be positive in the case of participants supporting and challenging one another to change. As Matt puts it: ‘By listening to others in the group really helps the self awareness. The hard part is to change the attitudes, not just stay at an intellectual understanding [of our behaviour] and doing these exercises helps to identify my feelings which are my attitudes. Doing these PCT exercises has helped me to identify attitudes’.

This need to change attitudes and resultant actions, and not stay at the level of intellectual understanding, is discussed more in the following chapters because it is central to the work of a men’s behaviour change program. It is common for group participants to remark when they begin that they never realized that there were other men in a similar position, that they were not the only ones. Although the participants in the men’s responsibility program (SHED Manual, Section Four) were coming with their own personal idiosyncratic histories, they often began the program with some common experiences.

13 For a definition of the sociality and commonality corollaries, see Appendix E.
Regarding his reflections on the men's responsibility group sessions, Bart gave the following written feedback: ‘The group pointed out the types of violence that I am doing in my family situation. Listening to the other members and relating what they said back to the group leaders was very helpful. Again, later Bart wrote: I learnt in the group that my behaviour is threatening to my wife and children and that I have been manipulative, I use mind-games, putdowns, minimising, criticism, and sexual pressing. I just see myself as controlling, untrusting and jealous.’ Bart also related how the group showed him how his actions affect his family and how to control his behaviour.

In session eight of the men’s responsibility program, the participants are guided through a fixed role therapy exercise (SHED Manual Chapter Four), based on the second self-characterisation, which they have done at home since the previous week’s group meeting. Regarding the exercise, Bart had this to say: ‘It showed me how I can change into another person and act out that role. It seems very exciting to me, and I am going to do my best at achieving my changes, for me, my family and friends. I feel I have learnt that I have the confidence to do the three things on my sheet, and do them well, and being 'Josh' allows me to put aside Bart and his doubts that he has’.

From these few sentences it is apparent that the group has a significant impact on Bart and is central in his efforts at behaviour change.

**Participants’ concluding remarks**

The participants each have a reflection of the impact of the SHED program on them. When ‘pushed’, Henry commented regarding the placement of the constructs in the grid, ‘These must be bad pricks out there on their own’. When I ask Henry whether he thinks this (grid) is the way things are and whether it is a picture of his life he replied ‘I'm nothing like the way I was 6 months ago.’ He stated this, despite construing his **me now, ideal me, and me six months ago** very similarly on his final repertory grid.

Henry, however, is firmly focussed on how his grid represents the distance between himself and Cathy, ‘**Me now is here and Cathy is here. 6 months ago, Cathy would have been seven thousand feet away (on the grid) ... 6 months ago, Cathy would have been further away but all the rest would have been the same. ... In terms of the grid,**
the people I dislike and the authority figures are in the bottom half, whilst those in the top half I like better.’ The latter category includes researcher and partner, whom Henry regards in similar ways and, hence, are proximately grouped together in the upper part of his grid.

When I asked Bart what he would like to change in the picture of his relationships as presented on the grid he answered, ‘I would like to be where ideal me is … but that is not very reasonable … I would be happy sitting half way there. I would like someone I dislike to be further away. Every day that passes I dislike that person more, and I am beginning to dislike my partner, in fact last night I told Teena that I am beginning to hate her … not respect her anymore. But in the next couple of months partner won't be on that page and neither will someone I dislike. I won't have to put up with them.’

I went on to ask Bart to compare the grids, the one from two-and-a-half months earlier and the one on that day, and what he observed, ‘Back then someone I dislike is much closer to me, and I am boxed up in the corner … I am not much further over now, but I know I have made headway, I have just been too critical of myself. In the earlier grid my partner was much closer to me now, but has since slipped right away. When I came to the program I had a chance of making things right but not now … On comparing the sheets the cluster on the left are still the same though earlier they were further away from me now, mum and dad were closer than they are now. There is a sense that Bart is both sad and reconciled to the situation that he and his wife are parting permanently, even though he had come to the SHED Project in the hope that he could rescue their marriage. Nevertheless, he is philosophical about the future.

During the final feedback session on the elicited data, Bart made the following request: ‘After the 12 week course, can I do a follow up in 18 months time? I'd like to have another assessment. I want to make sure I am going ahead. This is important to me, I don't want to let it go. I am only 35-years-old, I'm young.’ This is an extraordinary request from a man who has undertaken a painful behaviour change process, whose wife of many years has opted to establish a new relationship with a woman and who is regarded by a local feminist therapist as the primary victim in the relationship.
Bart is also the man in the group whose fingers the other participants checked first thing each week, to see whether they were all still there, because many of Bart’s stories included images of him becoming very emotional as he worked the benchsaw at the local timber mill. The implications and issues for occupational health and safety are clear, and yet it is often a man’s work mates who encourage him to stay in the relationship, and who collude with his excuses for abusive behaviour.

At the end of the men’s responsibility program when I asked Matt to regard the computer readout of his data, the resultant grid and to comment, he replied, ‘If we look at the grid, mother is on the far left … father is down the bottom.’ And when I asked him what the people at the bottom of the grid had in common, he replied immediately ‘They are confident and outgoing and also realistic and confronting … mother is the opposite and unable to communicate. Those at the bottom are emotionally abusive and those at the top are respectful.’ Matt went on to say that, ‘In terms of the distance between me six months ago and me now, there is a big gap and not far to go to the ideal me. Mother is towards the respectful [top] end of the grid but she is also manipulative. Me now and best mate are not so close anymore, and me now is closer to being respectful … changes that have taken place are that I have lifted the expectations … another change is that the person I dislike is now a distance from me six months ago, whereas before I saw them as very close. Also now my mother is further away from me on the grid.’ Matt’s mother had been on an extended visit from South Africa, but had since returned.

Matt noted that in terms of mother in one corner and father in the other, ‘The distance does represent the reality, and (in addition) ideal me is now far away from both mother and father.’ He says: ‘I recognise that for my father, he has stuff to work on … what has made a difference for me is recognising the behaviour and recognising that it is the behaviour which needs to change. I came to that recognition through self-awareness.’

I pointed out to Matt that his previous commitment to the men’s responsibility program was mixed with stubbornness, denial and ambivalence at week four or five when he seemed to have given up. I asked him what he thought turned it around for him and made the difference. Matt replied: ‘There was a lot of conflict … a lot of self-
talk, and listening to others inside and outside the group, and the power and control video, I saw myself in every one of the scenes, and I spoke more to Sam and owned and expressed my feelings ... so I don't get so angry. By listening to others in the group really helps the self-awareness. The hard part is to change the attitudes, not just stay at an intellectual understanding (of our behaviour) and doing these exercises helps to identify my feelings which are my attitudes ... by doing this PCT exercises has helped me to identify attitudes.

When asked to compare his first repertory grid and his second grid that was done at the end of the program, Lou said that he saw his father isolated and ‘I see myself on the map as more focused now than 3 months ago, I am much closer to my ideal self now than before ... My partner and myself now are still close. Three months ago I was all over the place. I see myself more honestly now. I wasn't seeing myself as honestly 3 months ago.’ From these comments, it is clear that Lou’s grid reflects how he sees himself and his relationships. This is communicated powerfully, perhaps in a way that a semi-literate man would not otherwise have been able to do. It is as if the exercise in eliciting constructs and constructing the repertory grid enables Lou to articulate clearly what he already construes, or feels, even though he is not able to form it in words until he does the exercise.

Lou went on to say, ‘I like this bit [on the grid] where we are (right cluster-ideal self, researcher, partner, and me now), but I feel this cluster at the bottom-mother, father, person I like, and person I admire is disturbing ... it is sad. There is sadness there, distance between me and them ... in terms of the group on the left ... it doesn't bother me one bit ... they (authority, dislike, me six months ago and best mate) could drop right off the picture for all I care. I can see me now and me six months ago ... and now my ideal self and me now are very close ... I think I know where I am going.’ Lou’s comment when asked to look at the raw data was ‘I don't seem to like people very much’ (because he rated them mostly at ‘six’, what he construed as the negative pole on the constructs he rated).

During this feedback process with Lou I had a strong sense of him being in transition, having come some way in a change process but still feeling he has some way to go. Lou went on to distinguish between those he identifies with and others: ‘ideal me,
researcher and partner ... are how I would like to be, on the left is the group authority, dislike, me six months ago and best mate, and they are not so good - I'd rather not be like them.’ That Lou’s best mate is located by him in this group of those he would rather not be like, may be an indication of the changes in his life. Similarly, when he says that ‘mother, father, person I admire, and person I like are a group... but they are going about things the wrong way ... as distinct from going about things the right way’, it is apparent that Lou maintains a clear picture for himself of what he thinks is right.

When I asked Lou in the final interview at the end of the research process ‘Is there anything you would like to change?’ (referring to his second elicited repertory grid), he replied, ‘I would like my mother, my father and the person I like to be closer to me. I don’t care about those on the left [authority, dislike, me six months ago and best mate], they are deadshits. In terms of the group at the bottom (mother, father, person I admire, and person I like). I don’t want to be down there, I want to stay where I am (on the grid), and I would like them to change and come closer to me.’ This longing for others to also change is commonly expressed by participants and is sometimes used as an excuse for not changing themselves until the other party also changes.

In the feedback session with Hank At the completion of the program, he thoughtfully identified the following clusters on his repertory grid as similar: best mate, researcher, authority as one, then person you like, partner, person you dislike, mother and me six months ago are all isolated on the left side of the grid which Hank construed as polarised, whereas he described the right side as closer together. The element construed furthest to the right is ideal me. Hank also drew a continuum between me six months ago, me now, father and ideal me regarding which he noted that he is getting closer to his ideal.

When Brad was asked in his final feedback session to look at his second repertory grid data sheets and comment on what he saw, he gave the following information: ‘I have a little bit of work to do between the ideal me and me now, but I have come a long way from me six months ago. Partner is a confused sort of a person by the looks
of these figures. **Best mate** is how I was once, pretty aggro . . . **me now** is altogether different to **me six months ago.**

Brad was then asked to regard the computer readout of his data, and the resultant grid and to comment: ‘**father, researcher** and **mother** are construed identically … figures of authority … and they are all close to **ideal me** … they are all authority figures. **Partner, someone I dislike** and **best mate** are all in a group and what they have in common is that they are angry people. **Someone I like** and **someone in authority** are in a group, they counsel people.’ Brad went on, commenting on his repertory grid: ‘People on the left of the grid are not people in authority. Those at the top of the grid (**someone I like** and **someone in authority**), earned their authority through respect. Those at the bottom of the grid (**best mate** and **me six months ago**) have not earned authority through respect. What I would like to change is … that I would like to see **partner** and **me now** over there on the right with this group (**father, researcher**, **mother** and **ideal me**). Comparing 3 months ago with now, it looks like we have drifted apart. **Mother** and **ideal me** are close … **me now** is closer to the **ideal me** … I have a clear goal now … I’m seeing things clearer now for the long term.’ Given the level and breadth of Brad’s violence towards Danielle, it is concerning that Brad has not taken more responsibility for his abuse and for changing his abusive behaviour, and instead focuses on earning authority through respect.

When Henry was asked at the end of the third ‘Self-Characterisation’ what struck him about his data on his second repertory grid he said, ‘… **what a waste of bloody time it is**…’ and when asked what he saw in his grid he said, ‘**Nothin!’**. The construct system that Henry disclosed appears cognitively simple, ‘black and white’, and tight. This ‘black or white’ construing (lacking in ‘cognitive complexity’, Winter, 2003b:17), mixed with an adamant inflexibility, was evident in Henry’s elicited constructs. No other participant in this study displayed a similar high level of rigid ‘black and white’ construing and, indeed, it was such in Henry’s first construct elicitation exercise that the computer program was unable to proceed with a factor analysis because of the lack of discrimination in his construing.

Not only were the constructs which Henry chose ‘black and white’; for example, female–male, big–small, teach–listen, but his rating was also. For example, he rated
everyone at either extreme, as a ‘1’ or a ‘6’, never ‘2’, ‘3’ ‘4’ or ‘5’. Throughout the research process, there is a strong sense of resistance from Henry who does not treat attendance at the men’s responsibility program seriously, despite travelling 100 km each way to attend.

Indeed, Henry’s ‘black and white’ (tight) construing blocked him from being open to the possibility of there being another way of seeing things. This was apparent in the group sessions when he was challenged by other men. For example, when he related with apparent pride, how he had taught his son ‘a lesson he will never forget’, the other group participants had challenged him about the unfairness of what he had done, but Henry remained adamant that he was right. He was unable to incorporate any of their feedback about his position into his tight and rigid construct system. Things appear to him either black or white, and hence the term ‘cognitively simple’ (Winter, 2003b: 17) was applied to this way of regarding life and relationships. This inability to see the other person’s point of view was also evident in Henry’s relationship with his second wife, Cathy, in which he demonstrated a high degree of disregard for her well-being whilst describing himself in his first ‘self-characterisation’ as someone who ‘want(s) to make her happy’.

Conclusion

What I have presented in this chapter is representative of the data collected rather than a comprehensive account. Nevertheless, issues emerge as well as the success or otherwise of the individual men’s attempts at behaviour change, an insight into their partners’ perspectives and a linkage with various connected factors, such as participation in the men’s responsibility program group. In Chapter Three, I will look at what the existing research presents in terms of this area of work and its key concerns and issues.
CHAPTER THREE: EXPLORING CONSTRUCTIONS OF MEN’S VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Introduction

In Chapter Two, I presented data elicited from a cohort of participants and their partners utilizing the Personal Construct Theory (PCT) methodology described in Chapter One. In this chapter, I review the literature and explore concepts that have informed this research, and locate it in the existing body of knowledge. In this exploration of the literature, I investigate possible foundations for a men’s behaviour change program.

There are a number of areas of research literature related to challenging men’s violence against women. They include definitions and types of violence, feminist theories, men’s behaviour change programs, integrated approaches to violence and groupwork theory. Because of its central position in this research, the PCT literature will be critically reviewed separately in Chapter Four.

Definitions and the language of men’s violence

There are a number of definitions of men’s violence and abuse of women and children, and one that I found most useful when beginning this research in 1993, was that adopted by the National Committee on Violence Against Women,

*Male Violence against women is behaviour adopted to control the victim which results in physical, sexual and/or psychological damage, forced social isolation or economic deprivation or behaviour which causes women to live in fear.* (1992: vii)

For me, the usefulness of this definition lies in the notions embedded in it. For example, that it is about behaviour that is ‘adopted’ or chosen, with the intention ‘to control’, with the ramifications spelt out. Such a definition provides a picture to men who use abusive behaviour, of what they do and what it causes.
Whilst the definition serves to clearly indicate that violence is more than physical, and includes psychological and other types as well, it seems to me that the definition attributed to Adams (1988) and cited by Stordeur and Stille is even more practical for educational purposes in a program such as the SHED Project.

*Violence ... is defined as any behaviour that causes the victim to do something she does not wish to do, prevents her from doing what she wants to do, or makes her afraid.* (1989: 20)

This links into a feminist analysis that conceptualises men’s violence and abuse of women and children in terms of power and control. This will be specifically addressed later in this chapter, in the context of the Duluth Abuse Intervention Pilot Project, (Pence and Paymar, 1993) and comprises session 7 of the men’s responsibility program (SHED Manual Section Four).

The concept of power and control is fundamental to an understanding of men’s violence against women (Dobash and Dobash, 1979; Scutt, 1983; Graycar and Morgan, 1990; Weeks, 1992; NCVAW, 1992; Thorne-Finch 1992), and informs the philosophy and intervention practice of the SHED Project (SHED Manual, Sections Two, Three and Four). The ‘No To Violence’ (NTV) minimum standards of practice and best practice principles articulate the concept of power and control clearly (Younger, 1995), within the context of men’s behaviour change groups.

Despite the strong evidence connecting men’s use of abuse and violence to maintain control, there is usually equally strong resistance by abusive men to that notion.

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14 *No To Violence* (NTV) is the name of the umbrella organisation for men’s behaviour change programs and develops policy and practice standards as well as training to ensure an adequate level of competency amongst men’s behaviour change program facilitators. Government funding is appropriately tied to these requirements.

15 The No To Violence (NTV) literature (Younger, 1995), refers to men’s behaviour change programs rather than men’s behavioural change programs, which is more grammatically correct. This adopted usage is simpler and clearer to understand by men, and hence is a more effective term to use in community education (SHED Manual, Section Five).
Indeed, men attending SHED groups often insist that they are the powerless ones in the relationship rather than their abused partners or children. They often feel sorry for themselves and out of control, convinced that their partner is deliberately winding them up, saying ‘She knows what buttons to push’ and they don’t believe it is their fault. I will now make the following points about a useful definition of men’s violence against women.

By including a number of oppressive behaviours under the definition of family violence, the general public is able to become more aware of what constitutes abusive behaviour (Ashcroft, 2000). However, it is problematic because this may also have the effect of diluting the more serious types of violence by including them in an all inclusive definition (Liddle, 1989: 766). Legal definitions of violence against women do not include the more subtle manifestations of abusive, controlling behaviour that are normalised in the community (Pease, 2002: 64). This enables abusive men to see themselves as normal, and to deny and minimise their abuse, whilst at the same time blaming someone or something else.

According to Kurz, violence against women at home ‘should be compared with related types of violence against women such as rape, marital rape, sexual harassment, and incest’ (1989: 498), because these forms of violence are regarded as being the result of male domination. Such a perspective would lead to men’s violence against women in the home being linked with other situations where men learn to use violence (Kurz, 1989: 501).

Regarding the use of language, Ashcroft makes the further point that in the endeavour to include every type of domestic injustice that occurs in a family, under the terms ‘violence’ or ‘abuse’, the danger is that the terms themselves ‘are in jeopardy of being rendered meaningless’ (Ashcroft, 2000: 6). And yet it is important to make connections between the many subtle forms of abuse that take place and those behaviours that are deemed criminal by our legislature. Hence, the dilemma of, on the one hand, not devaluing the notion of violence, and on the other, of drawing links between the various types and forms of controlling and abusive behaviour that make up men’s violence against women.
I will use the terms ‘family violence’, ‘violence against women’, ‘domestic violence’ and ‘intimate partner violence’ interchangeably, recognising the dilemmas and debates about which name is most appropriate. For example, whilst recognising that most violence in families is perpetrated by men (Archer, 1994), I take the view that using the term ‘family violence’ rather than ‘domestic violence’ includes all the possible forms violence in the home, including towards children and older people (Gondolf, 2002a: 3). Some authors point out that this takes the focus off the main issue, which is men’s violence to women (Walker, 1990; Meyer, 2001; and Kurz, 1997). For a detailed discussion see What’s in a name? (McDonald, 1998)

I believe that different terms for men’s violence against women are more or less appropriate at different times, the key factor being that they communicate the reality and do not minimise or hide it. In community education programs, presentations and talks, the clear connection has to be made and the arguments presented for why different names for men’s violence against women have evolved, how they are used and what that means. It is important in terms of community education, which includes the education of magistrates, police and solicitors, to make very clear definitions and connections between the violence and abuse, and who usually perpetrates it.

Berns theorises about how the ‘gendering of the problem and the degendering of the blame’ (2001: 265) for abuse, normalises ‘intimate violence’, diverts attention away from men’s responsibility for their abuse, as well as from ‘cultural and structural factors that foster violence’ (Berns, 2001: 265). This negatively impacts on any endeavour to ‘situate social problems within a patriarchal framework’ (Berns, 2001: 277), including education programs in men’s behaviour change, such as the SHED Project.

Understanding how language is used by men ‘to justify, camouflage and maintain positions of dominance within relationships to women’ (Adams, Towns and Gavey, 1995: 387) and to perpetuate their violence towards women is of great importance, especially in an attempt to educate participants in a men’s behaviour change program. Of particular importance in unravelling the ways men use language to support violence is an understanding of the discourses that operate in their use of language. In this work, the term ‘discourse’ is used in the sense of an evolving system of values,
understandings or meanings specific to particular cultures, contexts and times. These influence the language used and at the same time are conveyed by more than just language, and they in turn both construct and are constructed by the relationships of those they influence (Adams, Towns and Gavey, 1995: 389). This is evident in the prevailing discourse articulated by men attending the SHED Project.

Hence, there is a symbiotic relationship between the language used and how it affects and is affected by the values, attitudes and beliefs of the cultural context from which it gains its meaning. The culture is part of the meaning making of the language. In addition, young boys grow up learning the meanings that are inculturated in their lived context. In this way, those meanings truly ‘construct’ and are ‘constructed by’ their relationships (Adams, Towns and Gavey, 1995: 389). Again, the importance of childhood learnings becomes apparent in a men’s behaviour change program, and this is explicitly articulated in the men’s responsibility program, and particularly in the session of week four (SHED Manual, Section Four).

Hearn refers to the ‘contexts’ and ‘texts’ of men’s violence (1998). A question that this raises for me is: how much of the ‘texts’ men use in relation to their violence, are texts that are designed to ‘con’ others? Many of the accounts, versions, descriptions and other ‘texts’ that men use appear to be designed to deny, excuse or minimise their abuse and in this way they could legitimately be described as ‘con-texts’. Hearn describes how ‘distant past contexts may support excuses’ and at the same time ‘recent contexts may underpin justifications’ (1998: 73) by men for their violence towards women. Examples of the various social contexts used by men in this way include (un)employment, family of origin, being cared for by ‘the welfare’ in institutions, alcohol or other drug abuse, psychiatric illness and his relationship with his partner (Hearn, 1998: 73).

In an effort to be more specific about the types of behaviours that make up male domination in a relationship, Ashcroft (2000) identified two dimensions. The first is the ‘visible–invisible’ continuum and the second is the ‘active–passive’ continuum. According to Ashcroft, there are four quadrants defined by these dimensions that describe ‘dominant partner behaviour’:

1) domestic dodging (invisible/passive),

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2) domestic distortion (invisible/active),

3) domestic neglect (visible/passive), and

4) domestic domination (visible/active) (Ashcroft 2000:8).

It is this latter category of ‘domestic domination’ that is commonly identified with domestic violence. The new term ‘domestic domination’ is aimed at highlighting ‘the underlying element of control present in these relationships’ (Ashcroft, 2000: 13). Ashcroft’s conceptualization of male dominance makes a useful contribution to our understanding and to our ways of communicating to participants in the SHED Project about the interrelationship between the various types of abusive behaviours.

**Characteristics of abusive men**

When embarking on this research, one of my personal constructs was that men attending for their violent and abusive behaviour were not very different to other men. This is a view supported by Stordeur and Stille when they note that perpetrators of family violence ‘are more similar to other males than different from them (and this) reflects our experience and theoretical perspective’ (1989: 37). Ashcroft’s four quadrants, mentioned above, reinforce this notion that many men would do the first three dimensions of domestic dodging, distortion and neglect, but only violent men engage in the fourth dimension of domination (2000: 8). Stordeur and Stille make their comment above, in the context of a broader view that they put forward regarding men’s violence against women:

> There is a continuum of violence against women in our society that includes sexist and degrading language, pornography, wife assault, child assault, rape, sexual mutilation, resource deprivation, and murder. From this perspective, wife assault is seen as one behaviour on a continuum of behaviours that serve the purpose of maintaining the power and domination of a patriarchal society. (1989: 34–35)

Within this view, Stordeur and Stille situate the commonly cited characteristics of men who perpetrate violence. They identify the characteristics or ‘traits’ of these men,
not as negative attributes to be used in identifying a discrete group of people, but rather as ‘deviations from the “norm” that appear to maximise the potential for violence in intimate relationships and allow the batterer to justify its reoccurrence’ (1989: 37). They identify these characteristics as, first, ‘skills deficits’ including perceptual distortion, and an inability to communicate effectively; second, ‘defences’ including minimisation, denial, blame and externalising the problem; third, ‘individual traits and personality’ including jealousy, dependency, neediness, alcohol and drug abuse, depression, low self-esteem and a type of ‘Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde’; and fourth, ‘situational characteristics’ including isolation, stress, unemployment, ‘family background’ and ‘attitudes’ (1989: 38–52).

Despite this argument, however, it seems impossible to predict which one of a group of men will become abusive or violent, and which will not. The man who has witnessed abuse as a child or the one who has not, the one who is impulsive or the one who is very controlled. It is worth noting that although abusive men have been identified to have a number of traits including sexual aggressiveness, alcohol abuse, and lack of assertiveness (Hotaling and Sugarman, 1986), antisocial and borderline personality disorders (Hamberger and Hastings, 1986), and violence prone personalities (Walker, 1984), more recent evidence is that there is ‘increasing speculation that no conclusive batterer profile exists’ (Gondolf, 1993c: 107).

A major dilemma or problem in dealing with and changing men’s violence against women is the entrenched belief that anger causes men to be violent and that somehow men, therefore, are not really responsible for what they do. At times, this notion is used as a way to excuse the man’s violence, at others it is proposed as a reason for the degree of violence.

*The precise form of the abuse is partly determined by the degree of anger. Extreme anger may lead to an ‘all out’ attack, while lower levels of anger may preserve some degree of control, so that the assault results in less serious injury.* (Frude 1994: 166)

This belief that anger is responsible for how damaging a man becomes, is extremely problematic because it allows men individually and as whole to use it as an excuse to get away with behaviour which is abusive. Somehow, it is portrayed as unacceptable
behaviour which the man is not responsible for because he was not able to control it. Many men attending SHED groups over the years have attempted to use anger as a justification for their violence.

However, when other men in the groups have challenged them to look at what and who they are angry at and when they choose to express it, they see that they are clearly waiting to get home and behind closed doors before venting their rage or frustration at something that has happened. For example, one man talked about how he could tell from how his dog reacted to him how angry he was. Another man related how his young children would leave their toys and run away when they saw him arriving home at the end of a day. Clearly too, the consequences of men expressing those same feelings of anger in the workplace or in public would have had costly consequences for them. The SHED programs, like most other men’s behaviour change programs, are often referred to inappropriately as ‘anger management’ programs.

**Criticisms of the notion of ‘anger management’**

Pease, referring to Gondolf and Russell (1986) makes the following critical points about ‘anger management programs’ as a means of addressing men’s violence against women: (i) ‘anger management’ implies that the victim provokes anger and is therefore to blame for the violence; (ii) it does not take into account controlling behaviours that are planned; (iii) it dilutes the man’s taking of responsibility for his violence by giving him the excuse of anger and, hence, slows the behaviour change process; (iv) it is seen as a simple solution and might promote false confidence by women in their safety; (v) it does not hold the community responsible for its part in the perpetuation of violence; and (vi) it does not recognise or address structural issues, such as patriarchal values in society that sustain and maintain men’s power and control (2002: 153–4)

My experience in the men’s SHED Project is that anger is often used as an excuse by abusive men attempting to minimise and excuse their violence. In addition, it is still most common for the men’s behaviour change program to be referred to as an anger management program by those in the legal profession, solicitors, police and court registrars and it leads me to wonder if this is because it is more comfortable for men
to construe the violence as the result of anger, rather than as instrumental for their purpose. In this sense, the continued use of the term ‘anger management’ despite information and education to the contrary, can be regarded as a form of collusion on the part of those who use it with those who are abusive.

In addition to the negative ramifications of such collusion, when a man thinks that expressing his emotions makes him weak and vulnerable, his tendency is to stay silent. He wants to remain in control (Pease, 2002: 82) and yet the very lack of awareness about his emotions is likely to cause him to be anxious and confused because he does not understand what is happening to him. The man will not express fear, anxiety, hurt, sadness or guilt because these emotions have all been given a negative status in his (male) socialization process.

As a result of such socialization, they deny basic feelings for most of their lives and are unable to sustain intimate relationships because they are not able to express what they really feel, and most men enter the SHED group unprepared for what they encounter. For many participants, the Men’s Ongoing Group is the first time they have been able to begin to express what they feel about their lives, their families and their behaviour. For almost all the men, it is certainly the first time that they have been able to talk with other men in an honest way about their emotions, in the light of their abuse, and be able to express themselves without being judged, criticised or put down. And just as importantly, the participants are able to hear (and feel) the pain and hurt in the voices and stories of other men, and they learn to respond to it with support and honesty. This is not the same as colluding about their abuse, but rather, is a way of challenging each other about abusive attitudes and behaviour.

One of the concerns raised about men’s emotional illiteracy, apart from it incapacitating them in relationships, is that it is used by some men as a means to remain in control and ‘maintain their positions of privilege’ (Sattel, 1989).

Hamberger and Hastings (1991) suggest that there is little difference in the comparison of an abuser’s group to the general population that might lead us to predict who might be abusive and who might not. At the same time, Harway and Evans make the useful distinction between the abusers on the one hand, and their pattern of abusive behaviour on the other. They conclude that although there may be
no common profile of ‘personality traits or characteristic pathology’ of abusive men, there is still ‘a common pattern of behaviour’ (1996: 360). The distinction is useful because in a men’s behaviour change program, it is the violence and abuse that is condemned rather than the individual man, even though he is the one responsible. Another way to conceptualise men’s violence against women is in terms of privilege.

**Male privilege**

According to Bailey, privilege can be defined as ‘systematically conferred advantages individuals enjoy by virtue of their membership in dominant groups with access to resources and institutional power that are beyond the common advantages of marginalised citizens’ (1998: 109). This sense of privilege and entitlement leading to violence (Connell, 2000: 3) is related to what Russell (1995) calls ‘centrality’. This occurs when a man regards something as his right because his construction of reality has himself and his convenience at the centre.

Because all men are part of a process of male socialisation that legitimates, encourages and fosters such attitudes of privilege and entitlement, there is pressure on individual men to conform to a system that subordinates women (Brittan and Maynard, 1984). This can be likened to a ‘constellation of male privilege’. Pease, following Messerschmidt (1993), states that ‘patriarchal men believe that they have the inherent right to control decision-making and the division of labour in the family’(2003b: 45). As a result of this, women’s work in the home is seen as an indication of their (men’s) right to service and when it is not carried out they become frustrated that their expectations of entitlement are not fulfilled. Hence, this construction of reality becomes ‘pre-emptive’, in much the same way as the term ‘pre-emptive strike’ is being used by those (men) who seek to justify their use of weapons (of mass destruction). I will address the notion of pre-emptive constructs in the following chapter, and will now return to the concept of male privilege.

Pease (2003a) lists a considerable body of research that indicates the various influences of a patriarchal sense of entitlement and privilege on men and their behaviour at home. Kimmel, in his cross-cultural study writes that a man’s propensity for violence is directly linked with his definition of masculinity (2000: 5). Research by Websdale and Chesney-Lind indicates that violence against partners is more likely
to have been perpetrated by men who have patriarchal beliefs about their rights to privilege and entitlement (1998: 58). This view is supported by other research (Smith, 1990; Russell, 1995). These patriarchal beliefs are learnt and socialised in childhood from family, relations, friends, the community and from education. The SHED Manual addresses this in a number of ways, beginning with the assessment (Section Two), the introduction of the agreement sheet in the men’s ongoing group and, specifically, in session four of the men’s responsibility program (Section Three).

In relation to men being socialised to legitimise their power over women, Poon (1993) holds that they have the choice to resist the process and change. However, Kaufmann (2001) points out that if a man’s sense of privilege and entitlement is unconscious, such change becomes difficult. Part of that difficulty in changing also resides in the language that men use to legitimate their entitlement (Hatty, 2000: 58; Adams, Towns and Gavey, 1995) and to justify men’s violence against women.

Concerning the possibility of addressing and countering men’s violence against women, Marin and Russo argue that the fundamental step will be to challenge men’s ‘natural or God given right to privilege and entitlement over women’ (1999: 25). This notion again relates to Kimmel when he states that ‘men’s violence against women is the result of entitlement being thwarted’(2000: 251). I agree with both Marin and Russo, and with Kimmel above, based on this research and strongly believe that it is important to challenge individual men in groups about their belief in male privilege. At the same time, it is also important to engage in community education that addresses the perception of men’s inherent right to privilege on the basis of sex. It is the responsibility, primarily, of men to challenge this abusive belief (Russell, 1995), because all men benefit from the culture that it creates.
Responsibility

Regarding the notion of ‘responsibility’, the V-Net Manual makes the following statement:

The use of violence is a choice each man is responsible for. Although a man may have been socialised to believe in his right to control women and children, or even been trained to use violence, he can still choose to take responsibility and learn non-violent ways of relating’. (Younger 1995: 9)

Thus, men attending men’s behaviour change programs should be challenged to change from a mindset that allows them to construe themselves as objects being acted on beyond their control, to subjects who are making decisions about how they will respond (Domestic Violence Prevention Unit, 2000: 8).

Even this notion that men are ‘responding’ to something is problematic for their behaviour change, in so far as it is used by them to deny agency and to construct their behaviour as having been provoked, and therefore justified (Brown, James and Seddon, 2001; James, Seddon and Brown, 2002). It remains that the basic philosophy of many men’s behaviour change programs is ‘that men are solely responsible and they can change their attitudes and their behaviour’ (Pease, 2003b: 55), and to the extent that this constructs violent men as fully autonomous and rational (McKendy, 1997: 152) is also problematic.

There is a complexity and multiplicity of analysis by feminists concerning men’s violence in general and men’s violence against women in particular (Dobash and Dobash, 1979, 1992, 2000; Scutt, 1983; Pence and Paymar, 1986, 1993; Weeks, 1992; Russell, 1995). Historically, the origins of men’s violence against women are seen as rooted in a patriarchal structure that oppresses, marginalises and subordinates women.

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V-Net (Victorian Network for the Prevention of Male Family Violence Inc.) was the original name for what is now NTV (No To Violence) the umbrella body for men’s behaviour change programs. The manual referred to
Hence, violence and abuse by men becomes the logical follow-up in a system that has its foundations in an imbalance of power favouring men (O’Toole and Schiffman, 1997: 8). In the context of a men’s behaviour change program, it is worth looking at how patriarchy has men’s violence as a logical consequence.

**Men’s violence as a consequence of gendered inequality of power**

Feminists have traditionally drawn a clear link between violence against women and the ‘patriarchal structures that subordinate and oppress women’ (Pease, 2003b: 44). According to O’Toole and Schiffman, violence against women is ‘a logical output of the imbalance of power between men and women’ (1997: 8). In a survey of research addressing anthropological and cross-cultural issues, Kimmel found that the biggest cause of men’s violence against women is gender inequality, and that ‘the less gender differentiation between women and men, the less likely will be gendered violence’ (Kimmel, 2000: 245). Other research also shows that gendered power inequality ‘increases the probability of marital violence’(Williams, 1995: 236).

There is a need for a fundamental structural change in society that addresses patriarchy and challenges the unequal gendered power positions in the family that subordinates women. Without such changes in the society that challenge the gendered domination of females, violence against women by men will continue because it is a logical consequence of such a structure (Warters, 1992: 9). In such a situation, the issue for men’s behaviour change programs is not only one of how to address the violence of individual men and get them to change, but also of how to contribute to a process of change in a society that acknowledges and supports the rights of women and girls to basic equality of treatment, as well as safety and well-being.

When this power inequality is challenged, and men’s sense of entitlement and convenience is threatened, there is likely to be more violence in the short term, rather than less, because violence is an expression of that power (Kelly, 2002: 15). This notion that a man who is required to change his abusive behaviour will initially become more violent rather than less, is very important for those engaged in men’s behaviour change programs because this is a time of substantial risk for the families.
The priority given to women’s safety, and women’s accounts of what happens in the home, is reflected in the SHED Manual.

According to statistics (Pearce, 2004), it is when a woman attempts to leave a violent man that she is most in danger and it is when male entitlement, or sense of privilege, is threatened that violence becomes the ‘normal’ response by some men. I will now look at one model of men’s behaviour change that has been very influential.

**Duluth Abuse Intervention Project**

When I began researching the area of men’s violence against women more than 10 years ago, most of the literature about programs for men’s behaviour change was from the USA. Programs such as the Duluth Abuse Intervention Pilot Project (DAIPP), Pence and Paymar (1993) and others were influential among those committed to working with abusive men. Arguably, DAIPP has had the greatest impact with its Wheels of ‘Power and Control’ and ‘Equality’, and a philosophy that is acceptable to women’s groups. That it is acceptable is not surprising since the analysis of men’s violence on which DAIPP is based originated in the women’s refuge movement in Duluth. The SHED Project had similar beginnings in that it was female workers helping abused women who were instrumental in the establishment of the SHED Project.

DAIPP has also been very influential in the field of addressing men’s violence for other reasons. Not only is its analysis of men’s violence comprehensive and extends beyond the narrow definition of physical violence to include all types of abuse, but it also stresses the need for an adequate response to this violence to be based on an inter-agency intervention. DAIPP models a way for agencies to collaborate in addressing men’s violence within the criminal justice system.

Such collaboration requires commitment in the form of government expenditure and resources, and it is specifically designed for the city of Duluth and its population. This, according to its critics, makes it of limited use in Australia where the demographics, principally population, police districts and justice system are different. They also point out that it focuses only on ‘mandated’ men and neglects to address the notion that most incidences of men’s violence in the family go unreported (Mullender,
In addition, the critics say the stress on a collaborative, inter-agency approach can lead to loopholes in the system not being addressed, and the Government using such an approach to avoid accountability for its lack of response.

Despite its limitations, the Duluth (Duluth Abuse Intervention Pilot Project) model, (Pence and Paymar, 1986; 1993) has been replicated, or rather, inculturated into Hamilton, New Zealand (Hamilton Abuse Intervention Pilot Project; Busch and Robertson, 1993) and Armadale, Western Australia, (Armadale Abuse Intervention Pilot Project; Gardner, 1995). These two projects in particular became significant in the ongoing formation and formulation of policy in the SHED Project, particularly in its stress on inter-agency collaboration and the articulation of protocols between agencies and the statutory bodies. Not only were key writings about these two examples of abuse intervention projects disseminated, reflected on, debated and discussed by the key agency workers in the SHED Network\textsuperscript{17} monthly forums, but key figures in their development were invited to the region to give us a first hand account of them. Neville Robertson from Hamilton (New Zealand) and Jennifer Gardner from Armadale (Western Australia) came to Moe in Gippsland on different occasions to present practical seminars and workshops on their experiences of the main issues and what we might learn from them.

As well as giving us a reference point, these seminars, workshops and writings from HAIPP and AAIPP gave us something with which we could compare our own position. It resulted in us having a greater practical sense of two key philosophical principles underpinning intervention projects to address men’s violence against known women and children. These two principles are first, women and children’s right to safety and well-being and second, men’s responsibility for their behaviour. In order to operationalise these principles, there is a crucial need for a consistent response that reflects them from all agencies and workers involved.

\textsuperscript{17} Now known as the Gippsland Family Violence Network and funded through the Gippsland Women’s Health Service.
Abusive beliefs

Russell (1995) focuses on the attitudes and beliefs behind abusive behaviour and describes intervention strategies to address them. Belief systems theory holds that our personality depends on individual beliefs that guide our behaviour at the same time as influencing emotions and cognitions (Ball-Rokeach, Rokeach and Grube, 1984; Rokeach, 1979). Hence, according to Russell, abusive behaviours:

*Can be conceptualised as reflecting basic beliefs about the self and the other in relationships. These beliefs both direct and support abusive behaviours as well as mediating the affective and cognitive processes that accompany abuse.* (1995: 7)

The above notion about self, beliefs and others put forward by Russell has links with the discussion about self-concept and change in PCT. Russell refers to beliefs as ‘individual expressions of basic values’ and goes on to say that, as basic elements of personality, they ‘influence a range of behaviours and are influential in directing much of social interactions’ (1995: 7).

Referring to changing abusive behaviours, Russell advocates a method of confronting abusive beliefs. She defines abusive beliefs systems as those ‘characterised by beliefs in the centrality, superiority, and deservedness of the self (Russell 1995: 7). As such, many of the abusive beliefs that Russell refers to relate to the notion of male privilege based on gender, as outlined above. Any program seeking to address men’s violence against women necessarily must address such abusive beliefs. Russell proposes the following definition of abuse:

*Abusive behaviour is behaviour that inflicts hurt or injury through disregard, domination, or inequitable demands of the partner. Abusive behaviours include use of physical violence, demeaning language, domination, and demands for service.* (1995: 8)

Russell goes on to say that it is the abusive beliefs that ‘provide a context that can support abuse’ (1995: 8) and as a result, if we are able to change the abusive beliefs, we may be able to change the behaviour. It is the experiences of the victims of abuse
and the consequences for them of the abusive behaviour, which defines the abuse. This is an important point because it focuses the need for change on the effects of abuse for those who are abused and in so doing, makes them central to the issue, rather than the man and his needs. This has ramifications for a men’s behaviour change program both in keeping it accountable and in engaging men to change by communicating a sense of the costs of their abusive behaviour. This will be seen in the SHED Manual (Section Four, Week Two).

Cavanagh and Lewis echo the need and ‘crucial importance’ for abusive men to be motivated to change in order for them to accept responsibility and get past their denial, minimizing and blaming (1996: 109). In contrast to her definition of abuse, Russell proposes an alternative, which she calls ‘respectful behaviour’ and defines it as follows:

*Respectful behaviour is behaviour that conveys consideration for the partner as an equally valued person and connects with her in a mutually engaged fashion.* (1995: 9)

Such behaviour is based on a philosophy of ‘connectedness, equality, and mutual engagement’ (1995: 9). To enable change from an abusive belief system to a respectful one requires a context in which male privilege and ‘centrality’ can be confronted and alternatives explored (Russell, 1995: 10). Russell identifies the kinds of beliefs that support abusive behaviour and they are ‘beliefs in the centrality, superiority, and deservedness of the self’ (1995: 7). Russell’s emphasis on beliefs that underlie and generate abusive behaviour by men is crucial if we are to effectively address underlying causes of men’s violence (SHED Manual, Section Four).

Confronting such beliefs complements the Duluth Abuse Intervention Pilot Project’s approach of focusing on power and control. Smith demonstrates the need to challenge abusive beliefs as follows:

*... the primary source of the violence was a husband’s feelings about his wife’s alleged failure to live up to his ‘ideals’ and ‘expectations’ about what it means to be a ‘good wife’. These ‘ideals’ and ‘expectations’*
The terms ‘ideals’ and ‘expectations’ are equivalent to what Russell (1995) calls abusive beliefs. They are based on beliefs by men that regard their view as the most valid, if not the only valid one to consider. They are grounded in male privilege and a patriarchal view of the world founded on men’s power and control, and aimed at men’s convenience. These abusive beliefs could be termed male centric, insofar as they revolve around men’s needs. They are ‘ab-usive’ in that they are about ‘using’ others, especially women, for their own needs, wishes or designs. Those who are ‘used’ in this process feel ‘ab-used’, not respected as a person but treated as a means to fulfil someone else’s wishes. They feel disregarded, dismissed, humiliated and hurt. A woman treated in this way will also often feel angry and vengeful, as well as helpless.

According to Robertson (1999), most men’s behaviour change programs operate using cognitive behavioural techniques based on the Social Learning Theory of Bandura (1977). Pease points out that these ‘approaches involve teaching abusive men the damaging and self-defeating consequences of their violence’ (2003b: 51) as well as helping them discover alternative ways of behaving that replace abusive ways with ‘pro-social ways of interacting’ (Cunningham et al., 1998:16). Tolman and Edelson describe how they focus ‘on sex role socialisation and how it shapes men’s abusive behaviours and the beliefs that underlie those behaviours’ (1995:264).

It is noted by Cunningham et al. (1998) that most programs use ‘a combination of cognitive behavioural psychology and a pro-feminist educational approach’, whereas Gondolf argues that there has been a convergence of the two (1997: 86) and Robertson (1999) calls it an integration. Psychological models of men’s violence and how they influence men’s behaviour change traditionally fall into the categories of psycho-analytic, behavioural and family systems (Pease 2002:152).

The psychoanalytic perspective is that a man becomes violent because he himself was abused in childhood and as a result, he feels inadequate, has low self-esteem and is unable to be intimate. This model encourages men to express their feelings, learn self-care and build self-esteem (Adams, 1988). However, this approach can be problematic.
in so far as it may lead men to use their past as an excuse for their violence towards women. In addition, not all men who have been abused in childhood become abusers, just as some who have not been abused as children do.

The behavioural model is concerned mainly with the management of anger, using such things as anger logs to identify and track cues to their anger in such a way that they learn to better control it (Adams, 1988). However, it is clear that men choose when, where and with whom to get angry, and to express it violently (Paymar, 2000). Therefore, it is not the emotion that is the problem for those being abused, but the decision to act on the emotion in an abusive way. At the same time, the emotion can be debilitating for the abuser.

The other psychological model of men’s violence is that of family systems. In this model, both parties are seen as responsible for the violence and women’s behaviour is seen as provoking men’s anger and violence. It is seen as a relationship issue that needs to be treated accordingly, namely, by improving relationship skills rather than blaming the man (Adams, 1988). However, the emphasis in a feminist analysis is on ‘the way in which the structure of society creates the conditions that encourage men’s violence’ and especially, the way men’s violence is located in ‘patriarchal power relations’ (Pease, 2002: 155). The SHED programs include in their curriculum the challenge of patriarchal power relations and link that analysis to a discussion about reactive violence.

**Reactive or instrumental violence**

It is important to make the distinction between ‘reactive violence’ used by those who are more impulsive, lose control and become violent following provocation, and ‘instrumental violence’ used by those who plan deliberate acts of violence and abuse to attain certain ends (Dutton, 1998; Winter, 2003b). This is not to say that provocation is an excuse for violence, rather that the context can sometimes help in the man finding ways to remain non-violent. A similar distinction is made between ‘exploder violence’ in which ‘. . . men experienced their violence as being out of their control’ (James, Seddon and Brown, 2002: 5) and ‘tyrannical violence’ in which men ‘. . . used aggression, intimidation, verbal abuse and physical assault to assert domination and control over their partners’ (James et al. 2002: 4).
Regarding men who use tyrannical violence, James et al. related that:

*In describing their violence, there was a sense that these men knew what they were doing and they intended to frighten, intimidate and punish.*

(2002: 4)

In this research, of the participants in the third cohort; Matt, Brad, Lou and Henry, fit this description of ‘tyrannical’, whereas Hank and Bart displayed ‘exploder violence’, which ‘... most often occurred in response to their partner’s criticism, challenge, or continued pursuit’ (James et al. 2002: 5).

Fonagy makes a similar contrast between what he terms ‘predatory violence’ and ‘affective violence’ (2001). The former term he uses in a similar sense to ‘tyrannical violence’; to describe the behaviour of men who use violence in a planned and purposeful way. In contrast, he uses the term ‘affective violence’ in relation to violence which is the result of a heightened arousal of the emotions following a reaction to a perceived threat.

I believe the above discussion is important because it gives an insight into some of the complexity in responding effectively with men attending a behaviour change program, such as SHED. Although these different views of men’s violence have their validity, the notion of men’s violence against women being primarily about power and control is grounded in an understanding of patriarchy and structured male privilege in our society, and it is these notions that are most effective in challenging men’s violence. Whatever the conceptualization of the types of violence, men need programs to enable them to take responsibility for what they do and to change what needs changing in their behaviour.

**Men’s behaviour change programs**

In regard to intake interviews for men’s behaviour change programs, Edelson, Miller, Stone and Chapman make the following observation:

*It appears that contact with a helping professional during the initial intake interviews and the offering of minimal prescriptive advice and of a*
contact telephone number had an immediate positive effect on the rates of spouse abuse. It is thus difficult to separate the effect of the intake interviews from that of the group-change procedures. (1985: 21)

With this connectivity between the intake process, assessment and the groups it is important that any men’s behaviour change program takes a multidimensional, integrated approach to working with men. Those engaged in the assessments are preferably also engaged in facilitating groups, community education, training of other workers, and ongoing evaluation and research. In this way, there is an ongoing integration of theory and practice through a process of praxis (Warren, 1998) and through action–reflection–action; a continuous cycle of evaluation on the work that in turn is based on the theory. There is a parallel conceptualisation of this process in the experience cycle described in Chapter One and in the SHED Manual, Section Four.

Although each man who attends the men’s behaviour change program has to be regarded individually and intervention strategies need to be designed to his peculiar /particular story. At the same time, it is important that the various elements of the program are interlinked and have an internal consistency with the overall aim, namely, the safety of women and children and addressing men’s violence broadly, not only individually (Laming, 1993).

Regarding assessments, because many clients, especially involuntary ones, are likely to fail to present for a second interview, what is needed is a way to engage them during the first interview. Fisher suggests providing ‘help and assistance to the individual in order to allow them to make immediate sense of the feeling of threat, chaos, and fragmentation that can occur during the early stages of change (2000: 436). He goes on to say that one method of doing this is to adopt a type of ‘fixed role therapy’ (Kelly, 1955/1991), a description of which is given in the SHED Manual, Section Four, Session Three.

Francis and Tsang state that men’s programs do not acknowledge the implications of a feminist analysis and critique of men’s violence, that ‘as a political problem requiring structural change is reconstructed as an interpersonal problem requiring appropriate therapeutic technique’(1997: 212–13). This restructuring can have a profound effect on how men’s violence is then challenged and addressed. Walker
describes how such a process of restructuring can ‘obscure a number of contradictions’ (1990: 85).

Violence usually occurs when men try to get their partners to do something that they do not want to do (Kurz, 1989) or when men want to punish them for something they don’t like (Paymar, 2000). Men are violent towards women in the above circumstances because they believe that they have a right to dominate women by using violence (Russell, 1995; Pease, 2002). ‘In order for a man to be violent, his belief system must include a belief in violence as a legitimate way of solving problems and a belief that it is acceptable for men to control women’ (Pease, 2002: 155). Hence, for any intervention with violent men to lead to behaviour change, it must challenge both these beliefs and also challenge men’s societal and cultural beliefs about women’s roles in relation to them. One of the ways to address inculturated sexism is to provide anti-sexist education as part of the men’s behaviour change program, not only in the content of the sessions, but also in the process of how the groups are facilitated (Pence and Shepard, 1988).

Those who critique men’s behaviour change programs say that they offer false hope that a man might change, and thereby potentially endanger his partner. A woman might feel safe to stay in a relationship longer by virtue of the men’s behaviour change program’s existence, and risk exposing herself and her family to escalating violence. My reply to this is that it is the responsibility of the men’s behaviour change program workers to give the abusive man’s partner, as well as the abusive man, as clear a picture as possible of the limitations of the program, as well as the potential it has to challenge men’s violence and abusive attitudes. It can be very important for the partner to hear from a man that the abuse she has been experiencing is not her fault. Part of the worker’s job is also to ensure that the partner is well supported and has contact with the women’s domestic violence support worker (SHED Manual, Session Six).

Do men’s behaviour change programs take resources away from women’s services? Do men’s behaviour change programs act to impede the criminalisation of men’s violence against women? Hearn argues that men’s behaviour change programs ‘mystify men’s power by obscuring the extent to which men’s power is embedded in
the structures of patriarchal society’ (1998: 198) and in doing so act to prevent real change in the power structure that enables and is sustained and maintained by men’s violence. I would argue that Hearn’s view is valid to the extent that men’s behaviour change programs neglect to make the connection, for the participants, between an individual’s acts of violence and abuse, and our society structure that privileges males and allows their controlling behaviour.

However, effective men’s behaviour change programs do make the connection between the individually-willed violence and socially constructed violence, and I believe that Hearn would not want to prevent the opportunity for individual men to change their violence and abusive behaviour, because a given program concentrated on the needs of individual families rather than on ideological change. Both are important, however. Small programs such as the SHED Project, are barely able to cope with the needs of those referred, let alone work towards wider change in the power structure as Hearn, rightfully, would have it.

Regarding the effectiveness of men’s behaviour change programs, Frances makes the following observation that ‘they may prove to be a useful addition (not an alternative) to legal and justice responses’ (1996: 43). At the same time, Dobash et al. state that ‘while abuser programs are a vital part of the overall societal response to violence against women in the home, they certainly cannot be the only part’ (2000: 184).

I will now summarise some of the perceived strengths and weaknesses of men’s behaviour change programs.
### Strengths

1. They offer an opportunity for men to change.
2. Ideally, they engage with men in a non-patriarchal way, with pro-feminist principles of equality, transparency and natural justice that are not overridden by sexist male hegemony.
3. They challenge men who would otherwise not be challenged.
4. They connect individual men’s violence and abuse with a patriarchal culture.
5. They present an alternative culture to men, for example, in how they communicate their emotions and learning what is normal.
6. They are able to play a part in a holistic response to men’s violence and be part of an inter-agency intervention that seeks to provide a consistent response.
7. They provide an opportunity for women partners to hear from a man that she is not responsible for what this man is doing to her and her children.
8. They enable community education to be grounded and present a more transparent picture.
9. They offer the hope that men can change and that violence ‘could be ‘unlearned’ if participants were sufficiently motivated and appropriate techniques were applied’ (Frances, 1996: 237).
10. They provide a place where men can honestly begin to address those parts of their behaviour that are abusive and violent.

### Weaknesses

1. Men’s behaviour change programs may divert much needed resources away from support services for women who have been abused.
2. Feminists supporting victims state that there is no evidence that the men’s programs are effective in changing men’s violence, nor that women’s safety is a priority (Gondolf, 2002a: 5). Frances notes in her research into men’s behaviour change programs in Victoria that ‘feminist concerns that program attendance does not necessarily lead to cessation of violence are justified’ (1996: 235–6).
3. False hope given to victims who think that there is a realistic chance that the abuser will change, thus potentially leading them into even greater danger when he does not. (Pease, 2003b: 43)
4. The articulated standards of practice espoused by men’s behaviour change programs are not monitored. (Pease, 2003b: 43)

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**Table 1**
The SHED Manual provides a structure by which these strengths can become actualised, and the risks to abused women and children minimised.

I believe that it is important for those engaged in men’s behaviour change to acknowledge the above concerns in table 1 and endeavour to address the potential weaknesses in their program structure. One key strategy to achieve this is to build in transparency of process and accountability by the men’s behaviour change program to the women’s domestic violence support service. The SHED Project endeavours to do this by having the women’s program coordinator as a member of the reference group, as well as other key women engaged in domestic violence intervention (SHED Manual, Section One). This research also contributes to the offering of transparency of process in relation to the SHED model of practice response.

Warters, writing shortly before this research commenced, made the following statement regarding men’s behaviour change programs:

The programs are at risk of simply teaching men how to be more subtle and discreet controllers of women, perhaps just more ‘middle class’ in their abuse, without challenging underlying assumptions regarding male dominance as a taken-for-granted assumption (1992: 15).

This view was widely echoed in the field at the time that the SHED Project was being established and was a reminder for the program facilitators to be vigilant regarding such ‘slippage’. Such a critique also influenced the design of the SHED Project to include accountability mechanisms, as well as community education and the inclusion of linkages between the different types of abuse in the curriculum of the group program.18

Warters expresses the concern that men’s behaviour change programs concentrate solely on the individual violences of individual men at the expense of including a focus on ‘a patriarchal and male dominated society, and an analysis that demands

18 For an example of this see appendix K, which includes the section from a book called Developing Adult Learners, where I describe an exercise we developed as part of the MRP curriculum.
important structural changes’ (1992: 15). In the light of this ‘men as a class oppressing women as a class increasingly gets lost in the shuffle’(Warters 1992:15). Part of Warter’s argument is that by increasingly concentrating on the violence of individual men, ‘normal men’ are able to separate and regard themselves as moral and ‘socially responsible’ and by doing so are focusing narrowly on abusers in a way that ‘does not encompass men and social structures that dominate and suppress women’(1992:15). I mention this because it symbolizes the balance that is needed in a men’s behaviour change program like the SHED Project, to address individual men’s violence in such a way that the systemic injustices are also addressed, both in the group process, the individual assessment, and in the other components of the program such as community education (see the SHED Manual, Section Five).

**Dilemmas**

A key dichotomy in any approach to addressing men’s violence against women is between violent behaviour that is both ‘socially constructed’ and ‘individually willed’ (Dankwort and Rausch 2000: 937). This dichotomy is articulated in the SHED Project’s attempt to stress both the individual man’s responsibility for his abusive behaviour, and at the same time, to acknowledge the environment in which he grew up and was socialised (see the SHED Manual, Section Four). Perhaps, a weakness in the approach of the SHED Project is that not enough focus has been put on the influence of the social construction of men’s violence against women, whilst maintaining the focus on responsibility for behaviour change, by individual men.

In defence of the SHED structure, the pressing need presented to the worker by the abusive man, his partner and by the referring agency, is to enable the man to stop being abusive, and to learn strategies to remain non-violent, and improve the quality of their relationship. With scarce resourcing, the capacity to focus on the social construction of men’s violence and address that, is limited. However, the SHED Manual endeavours to incorporate a balance of foci in Section Five on community education, and the following paragraph illustrates why I believe this is essential.

Brienes and Gordon make the point that acts of violence ‘may be expressive in the individual case but instrumental in the collective’ (1983: 515). In other words individual men may act violently for all sorts of reasons which might appear
irrational, however ‘collectively’ they serve as ‘an important ingredient in the continued subordination of women’ in general, not only of those who are victimized (Brienes and Gordon 1983:153). This further re-inforces the need by men’s behaviour change programs, like SHED, to address not only the individual acts of violence but societal violence that is the everyday violation of human rights that results from social injustice (Gil 1996).

In setting up a men’s behaviour change program, such as SHED, there need to be policies developed ‘regarding a) program guidelines, b) a framework for funding them, c) program evaluation, and d) staff training requirements’ (Dankwort and Rausch 2000: 939). Whilst this statement applies to the Canadian context it is equally applicable elsewhere. These authors go on to say that guidelines were developed there that identified men’s violence against women ‘as a criminal act’ for which a violent man must take responsibility, and which recognised the need for behaviour change programs to do more than provide individual therapy, and which gave ‘priority to victim safety’ (Dankwort and Rausch 2000: 939). However, they expressed concern that no mechanisms were put in place to monitor the implementation of these guidelines and evaluate programs to ensure their accountability (Dankwort and Rausch 2000: 939). In the SHED Project the reference group is used as an accountability mechanism, however it is limited in its effectiveness. I will now look briefly at the types of approaches that are employed in men’s behaviour change programs, particularly an eclectic approach.

**Eclectic Approach to Men’s Behaviour Change**

Shaw, Bouris and Pye (1996) advocate an eclectic approach to addressing family violence, which includes systems theory, psychoanalytic, feminist, narrative and social constructionist. According to Baldrey et al. (2002), whilst there are a number of different approaches used by men’s behaviour change programs in Australia, it is unclear as to whether one approach is better than any other. At the same time, men’s behaviour change programs in Australia generally advocate psycho-educational rather than therapeutic approaches (Keys Young 1999). The main approaches that inform the SHED Project are the Duluth Abusive Intervention Project (Pence and Paymar 1986, 1993), Confronting Abusive Beliefs (Russell 1995), Narrative Therapy
(Jenkins 1990), and Personal Construct Theory (Kelly 1955/1991). This eclectic approach is reflected in the SHED Manual, in the balance between the priority of women’s safety, and the emphasis on listening to the man’s story in order to get him to recognise and take responsibility for his abusive beliefs, and construct alternative non-violent ways of behaving.

What makes most sense to me is that those engaged in men’s behaviour change programs employ a variety of intervention strategies or ‘tools’ according to what is most useful (Laming 1998). The use of this ‘interventive repertoire’ (Bartlett 1970: 81) would depend on a variety of factors, for example, the safety needs of the family, the pattern of violence, the capacity of the man and his readiness to change. In addition, there needs to be an internal consistency between the various strategies employed. For example, if a facilitator is addressing the issue of men’s controlling behaviour, with a group, and is himself acting like a bully and abusing power, then there is a contradiction, and a philosophical difficulty between what he says and what he does that will impact on the effectiveness of the program. A men’s behaviour change facilitator needs to be careful ‘that our responses to woman abuse do not unwittingly replicate the same values, attitudes, and structures that contribute to woman abuse’ (Dankwort and Rausch 2000: 955).

Pease states that a pro-feminist men’s anti-violence campaign ‘aims are to provide a means for men to make a public statement about men’s violence and to acknowledge that all men have a responsibility to stop men’s violence against women’ (Pease 2002: 164). I agree with the importance of men in general being committed to stopping men’s violence against women, and in the ‘agreement sheet’ (SHED Manual, Section Three) this is stated. Pease goes on to say that ‘profeminist men should not put all their energy into counselling violent men at the expense of efforts at institutional change’ (2002: 164). Again, I agree with this, and yet the reality for a practitioner engaged in men’s behaviour change, is that there is not enough time for everything, and if it is a choice between enabling an abusive man to change, and working towards institutional change, then the former, usually gets preference in the short term.

Regarding community education about violence against women, it is clear that large scale programs are required (Melvin, Muller, Chapman, Shine and Edwards, 1999;
According to Klein et al. (1997: 88), ‘one reason that domestic violence continues to flourish is because of the ways that society implicitly accepts and condones disrespect of and violence against, women’. There is a need for collective action that addresses wider societal attitudes that support and maintain men’s dominance, as well as challenging and changing the abusive behaviour of individual men. In the SHED Manual I give examples of how this might be carried out.

In this Chapter I have looked at some of the research literature that has influenced and informed the formation of the SHED Manual. In Chapter Four of this exegesis I will show how PCT is not only relevant to this area of work, but also provides the research methodology to elicit the data in Chapter Two and provides a number of key concepts, tools and strategies employed in the SHED Manual.

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19 The SHED Manual aims to address both the need for individual men to change their abusive behaviour and for society to change its communal attitudes that support and perpetuate it. The principles, standards and practices that underpin this model are well documented (Jenkins, 1990; Pease, 1991; Frances, 1994a, 1994b, 1997; Younger, 1995; Cavanagh and Cree (eds) 1996; Dobash, Dobash, Cavanagh and Lewis, 2000; Strategic Partners, 2003a).

Key practices include a referral process that reflects inter-agency protocols to ensure a consistent response to men who perpetuate, an assessment that invites the man to identify the constraints to his taking responsibility (Jenking, 1990), a group curriculum that focuses on the structural causes of men’s violence against women, a broad based reference group that ensures transparency and accountability to women’s services, and priority given to the safety of women and children. In addition, community education about the causes and ramifications of men’s violence as well as a built in evaluation regarding the effectiveness, or not, of the men’s behaviour change program is essential.
CHAPTER FOUR: PERSONAL CONSTRUCT THEORY AND ITS RELEVANCE TO THIS ENQUIRY

Introduction to Personal Construct Theory

In Chapter One, I described both the setting for this enquiry and the importance of Personal Construct Theory (PCT) in the process. The research methodology described at the end of Chapter One and the intervention strategies outlined in the SHED Manual both indicate how central PCT is to this research. In Chapter Two, I presented findings from the applied PCT methodology and in Chapter Three I examined the literature related to men’s behaviour change programs and related it to this enquiry.

The purpose of this chapter is to show how PCT relates to this area of investigation and how it is central to my focussed enquiry. I will give examples of how PCT is relevant to disparate areas of knowledge concerning men’s violence against women, and men’s behaviour change programs. I will indicate the key points in the PCT literature that have inspired this research and the possibility it presents for working with men’s behaviour change in a more effective way, whether this be in terms of the content of the program or the process of change, or what happens when certain intervention strategies are used. This chapter examines the potential for PCT to be utilised in working with men who have been violent or abusive in a way that encourages positive change in their behaviour and enhances the safety of women and children.

George Kelly

According to George Kelly, an American psychologist and academic who grew up in the depression and was the founder of PCT, ‘man [sic] is neither a prisoner of his environment nor the slave of his biography’ (1955/1991: 730). Kelly saw that this was a potential path to change for a person. PCT has its philosophical roots in ‘constructive alternativism’, that is, a belief in a person’s ability to construe and construct her or his life and relationships and inter-relationships in an infinite number of different ways (Kelly, 1955/1991: 3–4).
We assume that all of our present interpretations of the universe are subject to revision or replacement ... We take the stand that there are always some alternative constructions available to choose among in dealing with the world. No one needs to be completely hemmed in by circumstances; no one needs to be the victim of his biography. We call this philosophical position constructive alternativism. (Kelly, 1955/1991:15)

When referring to constructive alternativism, at one stage Kelly made the following comment, ‘Our view might even be called a philosophical position of epistemological responsibility’ (1970: 4). This is because we each take personal responsibility for our construction of events, our hermeneutic, which is part of our personal construction of future events. Kelly outlined what he called a fundamental postulate for PCT. This can be found in Appendix I, along with the 11 corollaries that Kelly expounded.

**Philosophical underpinnings of Personal Construct Theory**

The philosophical position of PCT needs to be further explored and the question of why PCT is appropriate to this area of inquiry demonstrated. As the originator of PCT, George Kelly (1905–1969) did not leave us with an unequivocal clarity about where the theory resides among the various schools of thought in philosophy. Indeed, the ambiguity or sense of paradox which Kelly left behind regarding PCT does nothing to clarify the picture. For example, of PCT, Kelly said:

> What we are proposing is neither a conventional philosophy nor a conventional psychology. As a philosophy it is rooted in the psychological observation of man. As a psychology it is concerned with the philosophical outlooks of individual man. (1955/1991: 16)

It is this ambiguity and sense of paradox about PCT that continues to confound the critics of the theory. Regarding the epistemological implications of PCT, Kelly

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20 Quotations from George Kelly will continue to reflect his use of the gender specific language of his culture and era, though I clearly construe an inclusive meaning in what he writes.
situated it within the area of epistemology called gnosiology, with links to positivism, (through pragmatic logic), empiricism, rationalism and realism (1955/1991: 17), and later he wrote:

_It must be noted that this philosophical position of ‘Constructive Alternativism’ has much more powerful epistemological implications than one might at first suppose. We cannot say that constructs are essences distilled by the mind out of available reality. They are imposed upon events, not abstracted from them. There is only one place they come from; that is from the person who is to use them._ (Kelly, 1970: 13)

I think that for men who are abusive, this statement of Kelly’s can have powerful implications. They can begin to see that their constructions of reality really are their own (man made) constructions and, hence, that they can be changed and that they can learn ways to change them. This realisation can have enormous implications for their families, since the man might now be in a position to make a choice to be non-violent, whereas before he might have construed that violence as ‘reasonable’ behaviour because it had been socially constructed as such, both when he was growing up as a boy and currently by many of his peers.

In relation to ontology, Kelly aligned his theory with Substantive Monism (1955/1991: 17). At the same time, Kelly recognised the influence of Phenomenology, or rather, what he refers to as Neophenomenology, on his work. He referred to it as part of the “Design specifications for a Psychological Theory of Personality” (1955/1991: 22). It is worth drawing the distinction between how Kelly himself constructed PCT in relation to the philosophies of his time and how later followers of his and commentators constructed him and his theory. Warren refers to PCT as ‘ideographic’ rather than nomothetic and he talks about the line PCT takes as limiting its capacity ‘to resolve the core questions in philosophy’ (1996a: 8). As Warren says, Kelly himself saw PCT more as a ‘broadened psychology than as a limited philosophy’ (1996a: 10). Perhaps this is why Kelly called his magnum opus _The Psychology of Personal Constructs_ (1955/1991).

George Kelly saw it as imperative to go outside the traditional view of science, which regards the world as knowable and researchable. Kelly referred to this view as
‘accumulative fragmentalism’, (1955/1991) because it is based on the concept of piecing together, or accumulating, fragments of knowledge on the basis of hypotheses in which a newly-found fragment of knowledge, or ‘truth’, can supplant the old. Kelly’s philosophical concept of constructive alternativism presents a more challenging and radical view for science and, in particular, for the science of psychology. In the debate about where to situate PCT in the philosophical spectrum, Warren expresses that if it develops as he would hope, then it will be as ‘phenomenological psychology within the broader context of a philosophical anthropology’ (1996a: 10). For Warren, PCT focuses on the meaning of things and in so doing provides an insight and a methodology which is “… concerned with meaning, not truth, with psychologic not logic” (1996a: 4). However, if PCT is not concerned with truth, then where does it stand with regard to ethics and morality? One of the criticisms levelled at PCT is that it is amoral, hence it is worth looking at PCT in relation to ethical issues.

Where does Kelly stand regarding, for example, the ethical issues of truth, justice, right and wrong? In later writings, particularly his essays, for example in “Sin and Psychotherapy” Kelly had this to say about what a psychologist should do to assist someone:

The task is to assist the individual man [sic] in what is singularly the most important undertaking in his [sic] life, (that is) the fullest possible understanding of the nature of good and evil. (1969b)

and later in another essay “Confusion and the Clock”, Kelly stated the following about truth:

From the moment that we assume that truth is a stationary achievement, rather than a stage in a lively quest, it is only a matter of time until things start spinning round and round. Truth is neither reality nor fantasy. It needs to be understood instead as a continually emerging relationship between reality and ingenuity, and thus is never something that can be skewed by a phrase, a moment or a place. (1978: 228)
The whole notion of ‘truth’ is quite apposite in family violence matters where versions of what happened vary enormously and Personal Construct Theory holds out hope for those stuck in ‘a disordered and simply unsatisfying perception of themselves’ (Chiari and Nuzzo, 2003: 48). At the same time, this does not mean that science is hindered by constructive alternativism. Rather, science is seen as ‘a constructive venture instead of an attempt to reproduce reality’ in which scientists are invited to ‘transcend the obvious’ (Chiari and Nuzzo, 2003: 48–9). About this notion Kelly had this to say:

*what we think we know is anchored only in our assumptions, not in the bed rock of truth itself, and that world we seek to understand remains always on the horizons of our thoughts. (1977: 6)*

This ongoing struggle for understanding is played out again and again in the SHED groups, amid the ebb and flow of continuing disputes and changing emotional states. The navigation of this struggle in order to reach non-violence is part of the role of the group facilitator (SHED Manual, Section One).

**Critics of Personal Construct Theory**

One criticism of Kelly’s PCT is that it does not deal with emotions (Bruner, 1956) and that it is too intellectual (Rogers, 1967), despite his explicitly stating that construing involves both feeling and thinking, emotions and cognition (Kelly, 1955/1991). PCT then, is holistic and rejects the artificial division of the person into parts such as thinking (cognitive) and emotions (affective), that curtail our understanding. As Fransella puts it:

*Kelly integrated emotional experiences within his theory by seeing them as relating to an awareness that our construing system is in a state of transition or an awareness that it is inadequate for construing the events with which we are confronted. We ‘feel’ when we are aware that our system for construing the events milling around us is inadequate or seriously lacking or is about to change in some radical way. Experiencing and construing are part and parcel of the same process. We can no more*
construe without experiencing than we can experience without construing
... construing includes feeling. (1995: 115)

Hence, the emphasis put in the SHED program, on the ‘Experience Cycle’ in enabling the men to shift their construing, and the meaning they make of their relationships and how they behave (SHED Manual, Section Four).

Another criticism that has been levelled at Kelly and his theory is that it is not socially aware, that it is about individuals (Holland, 1977: 59). Kelly was an individualist and in his theory we have the product of the various disciplines he had trained in – mathematics, physics, engineering, psychology – as well as the deep influences of his childhood. In addition, Kelly was able to creatively ‘re-invent the wheel’ outside the traditional terms of reference of the various philosophical systems. Perhaps this is why it is hard to pin down PCT as being part of a particular philosophical tradition. Kelly applied the principle of constructive alternativism in his development of PCT.

Salmon is one of those concerned with PCT being too individualistic a theory, saying that the influence of social factors is ignored or minimised in favour of a ‘… purely private and individual solution on problems that are essentially social and cultural in character’ (1990: 12). This reflects a criticism of PCT, that it is about individual persons and does not concern itself with society and with social issues such as injustice. Others take a different view (Viney, 1996; Warren, 1998; Kalekin-Fishman, 2003; Fransella, 2003; Scheer, 2003a and 2003b; Horley, 2003; Bannister, 2003; Stojnov, 2003). PCT is fundamentally about relationships; the relationship between one person and another, the relationship between a person and their history, between a person and their life, their work, their family, their health, their commitments and so on. To that extent PCT, is about social issues, ethics and injustice.

In this regard, PCT is not about a self-centred introspection, but about learning, growing and changing. It is about the self as an active agent involved with, and relating to, the world around. In this regard, PCT and post-structural thought are in agreement (Kelly, 1955/1991; Foucault, 1979). Both also reject the absolutising of metanarratives that seek to define the truth. In a real sense, post-structuralism deconstructs that truth and PCT constructs the truth as something that is relative and dependent on meaning making by those who are doing the construing.
Both PCT and post-structuralism, however, are not in agreement with how the agency of the individual is exercised. The PCT practitioner regards the individual as carrying out their construing in the context of the social world, whereas the post-structuralist would not focus so much on the individual but on the processes of relating. In addition, for the post-structuralist, power resides not with the individual as agent, but with knowledge and how it is organised (Foucault, 1979: 27).

Kalekin-Fishman (2003) observes that in Critical Theory, ‘the ideology, is part of the strategy for preserving social arrangements that benefit the few’ (2003: 150); those who are privileged. She notes that the prevailing ideology, like patriarchy, is communicated in many different ways through education, the media and in cultural events. Therefore, those notions, which in essence ‘express the interests of the ruling classes become the ruling ideas; they are taken for granted as representing the true and the good in society’ (2003: 150). Kalekin-Fishman goes on to say that these beliefs and concepts continue to become ‘multi-faceted tools of concealment’ because they are seen as natural and logical (2003: 151). However, according to Kalekin-Fishman, there is hope:

> Although every person is susceptible to the ruling ideology, at least in part, informed use of personal construct theory can shed light on how to let go of the fetters of ideology. The view that the least permeable constructs are likely to contribute to the preservation of the status quo in society can indicate to the psychologist what types of situated construals can prey open the limitations of ideology-the nexus of impermeable constructs. (2003: 151)

Hence, if a practitioner in a men’s behaviour change program is able to elicit how a participant regards the world, his relationships and his right to certain things, they might be able to temper that impermeability\(^\text{21}\) of construing that is determined to see

\(^{21}\) See the glossary for a fuller explanation of impermeability
things only according to the constellatory constricting of male privilege, and the subsequent right to defend it.

This has powerful implications in practice, not only for the individual man who is abusive or violent and who is being challenged to change his behaviour, but also for men in general. If connections and links are able to be made between the man’s inflexible view of the world and its unreasonableness in the face of other’s opinions or a sense of fair play, then there is the possibility of a different view of things ‘permeating’ his construct system. Admitting that there could be another way of seeing things opens him to the possibility of changing his personal construction about male privilege and his ‘right’ to defend it. It is precisely for this sort of process to occur that the men’s behaviour change groups are important, because they offer the cultural opportunity for what Kelly refers to as sociality. The SHED Project focuses on group interventions with men, because of their value for individuals to be both supported and challenged.

It seems to me that when Kelly reinforces the idea of sociality, he is talking of a hostile person as one who is trying ‘to make others conform to a view that is out of touch with the social reality’ (Walker, 1996: 15). The hostile person’s construction is out of touch with reality precisely because it is already construed by others as a failure and yet he still persists (Kalekin-Fishman and Walker, 1996: 4).

Walker makes the point that for Kelly, cultural factors were very important ‘... because it is validational material for the client’ (Kelly, 1955/1991: 689). She goes on to say that Kelly, writing in the 1950s in the USA, saw community as a place where there is a common system of shared meanings and where commonality of construing is widespread. Here Kelly’s view of society is in stark contrast to critical theorists who see community as embodying power inequality, exploitations and conflicting interests. My reflection on this difference is that George Kelly’s view was reflective of his social and historical circumstances, as well as by having an optimistic view of

22 Again see the glossary.

23 The sociality corollary is stated in Appendix E.
life and relationships. His focus was more on constructions than on destructions, a compassionate gaze rather than a revolutionary one, a clinical perspective rather than an ideological or political one.\footnote{This distinction does not preclude a clinician from having ideological or political views, values or beliefs.}

For Kelly, it is one’s community’s expectations that confirm or not whether a person’s construct system is efficient in its anticipations (1955/1991). In other words, both community and group play an important role in the way people, women and men, form their personal constructs, and whether they choose constructive alternatives if their construct is invalidated, as happens with dominant ideologies that influence people’s thinking and lives, and become the ‘norm’ as constellatory\footnote{See glossary} constructs. This includes what is referred to and theorised by Foucault (1980) as ‘subjugated knowledge’, that ‘refers to ways of knowing that have been buried under the dominant forms of knowledge’ (Danaher, Schirato and Webb 2000:103). In this way history acts to silence and marginalise ‘women, indigenous peoples and colonised peoples’ (Danaher et al. 2000:103).

**The relevance of Personal Construct Theory**

In recent years, there has been an effort to show that PCT is also about the social. Warren notes that PCT ‘address(es) the broader frame of human behaving to take in the external context in which human beings operate’ (1996b: 10) and is about having an ‘inner outlook’ that encompasses ‘the interpretation of events, the development of understanding, [and] the making of meaning’ (Warren 2005: 346). PCT ‘can be interpreted as a practical theory that facilitates social action and furnishes a moral framework for living one’s entire life’ (Kalekin-Fishman and Walker, 1996: 307).

Epting and his colleagues were interested in showing how PCT is more about values and fundamental life principles than about techniques for treating people with disorders (Epting \textit{et al.}, 1996: 309). The relationship between the person and the...
social world can be seen as like the relationship between a construct and an event or element. There would be no construct with nothing to construe, and there would be no meaning to an event if that event had not been embraced in a personal construction (Epting et al., 1996: 309). This is a crucial point in relation to working with men for behaviour change, and is reflected in the data presented in Chapter Two.

PCT is all about relationships and about how they determine or influence the way we make meaning of the world around us. The individual and the social are intimately connected and one does not have meaning without the other. The relational aspect of the theory also connects with the notion that abusive men are often self-centred and focused on their needs and controlling how they meet them. If men who use abuse to get what they want in a relationship can be shown how this influences the way they see the world and how it becomes part of the way they construct their lives, they might be able to choose an alternative way of relating. The dynamic of making this connection is more effectively carried out in a group than individually, hence, the importance of groups in the SHED Project structure (SHED Manual, Sections Three and Four), as previously noted in this chapter.

Butt and Burr articulated the need to situate personal construing in a social context:

The extent to which we find ourselves able to take up, challenge or resist the locations in discourse which are offered to us and thus the particular form our conduct takes will depend upon the personal meanings we bring to bear upon our experience (1992: 1).

The social discourses and interpretation of ideology are construed differently by the individuals who make meaning of them. They develop their own personal constructs on the basis of their experience and in terms of how they anticipate those discourses and ideologies that might elaborate their personal constructions of reality. The individual then acts on the basis of this construction, which is not static but evolving and whose description is elusive. This connects with the notion elaborated in the previous chapter of men’s violence against women being ‘individually willed’ and socially constructed.
According to O'Sullivan, feminists, in their struggle against patriarchy, have chosen reconstruction over minor adjustments and they ‘have lived the philosophy of constructive alternativism’, and challenged the subordinate roles assigned to them by men. She goes on to say that, ‘in posing alternative constructions, feminists have demonstrated implicitly the constructivist nature of our engagements with, and understanding of, reality” (1988: 468).

In particular, O'Sullivan identifies what she says are the features of PCT which have most relevance to feminist work. They are constructive alternativism, which respects the validity of others’ personal constructions; anticipation which connects with Oakley’s comment that it is more important for women ‘to know where we’re going to than how we got there’ (1981); and credulous listening which gives ‘recognition of the need for negotiation and transition rather than defeat by a better, more correct, perspective’ (O’Sullivan, 1988: 469). O’Sullivan goes on to add that the personal construct theory approach ‘resonates with the notion of the importance of the subjective and contributes to the co-experimenter roles’ (O’Sullivan, 1988: 469) more than most others (Bannister, 1983). She goes on to say that such an egalitarian approach resonates with feminism.

This respectful, co-experimenter approach is what is at the heart of PCT and is the reason why it is so appropriate for this area of work with men’s violence. Most often, women feel disrespected and treated as objects rather than respected and treated as persons. In work with violent men, where the targets of their violence have been for the most part women and children, it is essential to have a philosophy and methodology that is respectful and values equality.

**The reason Personal Construct Theory is central to this study**

PCT is central to this dissertation because of its flexibility and structural integrity that are grounded in ‘constructive alternativism’ which complements the philosophy of ‘responsibility’ (Jenkins, 1990; Pence and Paymar, 1993), giving an insight into choices possible, choices made and the hope of change. Such a philosophy of responsibility is based on the premise of a person’s ‘response-ability’ or capacity to choose one or other ways of relating and, therefore, being response-able for the choice made, and being accountable for it. In the event of an intellectual disability, a
psychosis, or an addiction, a person may be found to have a limited response-ability, or indeed very rarely, no capacity for responsibility at all. The concept of responsibility is an important one for this area of work with violent men and also for this research.

PCT holds that everyone has to acknowledge their responsibility for their own behaviours and attitudes (Dalton and Dunnett, 1992; Winter, 1992). For someone to change, they must first acknowledge what they do and take responsibility for it. According to PCT, ‘all our present interpretations of the universe are subject to revision or replacement’ (Kelly, 1955/1991). This relates back again to the philosophical assumption of ‘constructive alternativism’ (Winter, 1992).

**Personal Construct Theory and its use for abusive men**

It is the philosophical position of ‘constructive alternativism’ which is very applicable to working with men who behave abusively or violently. It says to them and to the world at large that they do have a choice about the way they behave, that if they are abusive they are choosing that alternative out of a range of options, and that there is hope for change if they accept their response-ability, as previously discussed.

This is usually a very new re-framing of their position as abusive men, when it is put to them. Most men do not seem to entertain the possibility that there are other ways of interpreting a situation. It is very confronting of their traditional excuses that they have no control over their behaviour because it is the result of anger, reaction to being ‘wound up’, being intoxicated or a range of other reasons to blame. At the same time, to state that there is a choice and that ‘… no one needs to be completely hemmed in by circumstances …’ (Kelly, 1955/1991) offers hope to both the perpetrator and to the victim that he can and will cease being violent.26

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26 This latter as a source of hope for victims is problematic if it is false and leads them into further danger, an important factor to be considered, as identified in the literature. (Frances, 1997)
We are each responsible for our own construing and no one need be a victim of their biography. This means that if a person finds themself stuck in a difficult situation, that there is a way out. Kelly puts it this way:

*Freedom of movement is first of all a matter of one’s dimensioning of life; no matter how much he [sic] pays for railroad fare, one cannot move along a psychological track which for him [sic] does not even exist.*

 *(1955/1991: 694)*

Working with violent men in the SHED Project is about educating them about both the abusive ‘track’ they have been following as a result of lessons learnt growing up, and also about other alternative tracks they could choose instead of the abusive one. A boy growing up with abusive role models may never have had a chance to choose something different or even to know that an alternative track exists. Hence, SHED is about providing men with a chance to experience such an alternative and it is also about empowering women to see that they have a right not to be left on an abusive track, looking over their shoulder anxiously to see whether the ‘train’ is approaching to run them over.

In a men’s behaviour change program, it is the meanings of individual men that might lead to the possibility of their individual change. As Horley puts it:

*What all constructivist theories emphasize is personal meaning, language, and experience. The world view, or life philosophy, of the individual is not just relevant but central to constructivism – how the client construes his or her own world must be understood before a means of successful intervention, in the form of altering the client’s perspective is achieved.*

 *(2003: 3)*

One of the basic means employed in any successful intervention is an assessment of the person. From both a traditional social work axiom of ‘begin where the client is at’ and from a personal construct theory perspective of ‘If you want to know what is happening with the client, ask them’ *(Kelly, 1955/1991)*, the assessment process is crucial as can be seen in the SHED Manual (Section Two).
According to Kelly, the constructs of threat, fear, anxiety, guilt, aggressiveness and hostility are indicative of periods of transition in a person’s life, and for Kelly:

*Threat is the awareness of an imminent comprehensive change in one’s core structures. Fear is the awareness of an imminent incidental change in one’s core structures. Anxiety is the awareness that the events with which one is confronted lie outside the range of convenience of his construct system. Guilt is the awareness of dislodgment of the self from one’s core role structure. Aggressiveness is the active elaboration of one’s perceptual field. Hostility is the continued effort to extort validational evidence in favour of a type of social prediction which has already been recognised as a failure.* (1955/1991: 533)

It is important to note here that Kelly does not use the terms threat, fear, anxiety, guilt, aggression and hostility in the usual way, as emotions, but rather as constructs. For most of the men attending the groups, there is a continual movement from one of the above constructs to another and back. For example, from threat, to anxiety, to fear, to hostility, to aggressiveness, to guilt, to threat and so on. This is not surprising given the relationship between these constructs of transition and ‘the threat of imminent change’ in the person’s life. When Kelly defined *guilt* as ‘the awareness of dislodgement of the self from one’s core role structure’ (1955/1991: 565) he showed that he was concerned with core constructs that were utilised ‘to predict and control the essential interaction of himself with other persons . . . one’s deepest understanding of being is maintained as a social being’ (1955/1991: 502).

This is an important concept in work with violent men. A feeling of guilt is commonly understood in Western societies and at the same time it is the power of the social setting – the group – which can mould that guilt into change to non-violent behaviour, rather than into self-pity and justification. ‘We are dependent for life itself upon an understanding of the thoughts of certain other people (hence) the essential importance of social constructions’ (Kelly, 1955/1991: 503).

The notion of ‘subjugated knowledge’ (Foucault, 1980) is related to the effect communities and culture play in the perpetuation of abusive behaviours. If a community condones or allows its members to be abusive, then it reinforces the
abusive constructs rather than invalidating them and influencing change. This highlights the need for community education to be a central part of any men’s behaviour change program (SHED Manual, Section Five). It is clear that whilst some groups in the community condone the violence, there are at the same time others challenging the culture of violence (Pease, 1997).

It is important to note here that in Kelly’s PCT, the individual is not set apart from the social. Instead, for Kelly, the person I am is inextricably bound up in the relationships that I have engaged in and which I continue to be a part of. Kelly theorized most about ‘the person in relation’ (Walker, 1996: 14). Many of these points are highlighted in the interactions of the SHED Project groups and relate back to the concepts of ‘role’ and ‘self’ and how central they are in PCT.

Based on my observation and study, most often men attending a SHED group have a self-definition or self-concept which does not include being violent or abusive, and it is this that allows them to maintain an outward show and continue to behave the way they do. In terms of their construct system, they have a super-ordinate27 (constellatory) construct that enables them to continue justifying and rationalising abusive behaviour, whilst maintaining they are right. Kelly named ‘self-concept’ a person’s ‘basic role’ and referred to it as ‘ . . . one’s deepest understanding of being maintained as a social being’ (1955/1991: 502) and saw it as essential to the ‘maintenance of identity’ (1955/1991: 503). Kelly went on to say that a person’s constructs of ‘self-concept’, ‘operate as rigorous controls upon his behavior . . . much of (a person’s) social life is controlled by (it)’ (1955/1991: 131).

In this way, a person experiences ‘guilt’ when he has a ‘perception of (his) apparent dislodgment from his core/role’ (1955/1991: 502). Here Kelly makes the connection with the feeling of threat one might get at the prospect of change in one’s core-role construing, and ‘by a new “realization” of what he has been doing . . . by mounting proportions of an alternative interpretation of himself” (1955/1991: 493). Again, this is evidenced by the experience of facilitating groups in which men sometimes have a

27 see the glossary for superordinate construct.
sudden insight into the ramifications of their behaviour, and what that means to them
and to their self-image. In a way, it is as if they begin to see a glimpse of themselves
as their families see them and as someone they despise. This can be a very strong
motivational influence for change.

It is this alternative interpretation of himself that happens to a man in the group.
Kelly’s PCT and especially the central tenet of constructive alternativism prepares
one for the possibility of social action. The difficult task is to map out the social value
implications of PCT. On the one hand, a rigid stance on social issues is difficult, given
constructive alternativism, and on the other hand, it seems to me that there is a clear
imperative and responsibility to respect the ways or constructs of others. Leitner and
Pfenninger use the term ‘transpersonal reverence’ to show how ‘personal’ constructs
have a ‘social responsibility’, so that ‘the degradation of any race, sex, nationality
etc., becomes a problem for the entire human race’ (1994: 29). This notion is
reinforced in men’s behaviour change groups to show the need for community
education towards stopping men’s violence.

From the above, I argue that Kelly’s Fundamental Postulate (Appendix E), is
theoretically relevant for the operationalising of ‘men’s behaviour change programs’.
The corollaries (Appendix E) illustrate a number of ways in which an abusive man’s
construction of reality (the meaning he makes out of life) can be influenced in a men’s
behaviour change program. In addition, they also show that an abusive man has the
capacity to influence others, both in terms of collusion that supports abusive
behaviours and by his ability to understand another abusive man’s view of the world
because he too has a view very akin to it. Hence, if he chooses to challenge the abuse,
he is able to be more effective in doing so.

Clearly, the aim is that his influence of others be towards non-violence (for example,
by convincing others that it is worth their while). However, in the group, the danger is
always there for collusion to occur which fosters abusive attitudes and denial of
responsibility. The co-facilitators’ job is to nurture and ensure the former, and to
contain the latter. This role is crucial in enabling men’s behaviour change programs,
such as SHED, to have any chance at creating an environment in which men who
have been abusive or violent might choose to change and stay non-violent (SHED Manual, Section One).

For men who have been violent at home, this understanding is very relevant. It means that they need not be victims of their biography, or see themselves as such. They can create their own hermeneutic and, hence, reconstruct their lives. They do not have to feel hemmed in by circumstances. There are always alternative constructions of reality available to choose from (Kelly, 1955/1991). In other words, they are presented with the possibility that they do not have to remain violent. They are able to change. There is reason for hope. They are able to change and they are able to choose which direction their life might take. Here too, there is a question of reflexivity in that the researcher is challenged with the same possibility.

I shall now examine some of the PCT literature in order to assess its usefulness in the area of work with men who have been abusive or violent. PCT is not presented here as a theory to use in isolation from others but to complement an eclectic approach with some other theories, (Learning theory, feminist theory and cognitive behavioural theory). There have been a number of studies since the 1970s detailing the application of repertory grid techniques in the research of prisoners, juvenile delinquents, young offenders and child molesters (Fransella et al., 2004: 213–214).

Two books have particular relevance for this research. Although not specifically about male perpetrators of family violence, *Making Sense with Offenders: Personal Constructs, Therapy and Change* (Houston, 1998) is pertinent to the area of assessment of offenders. Houston’s use of the term ‘offenders’ is a fitting one here because perpetrators of family violence do ‘offend’, even if they are not convicted. Most are not convicted, either because they are not charged or because there is insufficient evidence, according to the police, to secure a conviction28. The second book is *Personal Construct Perspectives on Forensic Psychology* (Horley, 2003), in which the SHED Project is appropriately mentioned in a section titled ‘Treatment of

28 Such a case is then dismissed or the victim drops her allegations or fails to appear in court to make her statement.

PCT has been used in an increasing number of settings, both for research purposes and as a part of intervention strategies (Viney, 1988; Dalton and Dunnett, 1992; Winter, 1992; Kalekan-Fishman and Walker, 1996; Leitner, Begley and Faidley, 1996; Oxley and Hort, 1996; Procter, 1996; Scheer and Catina, 1996; Walker, Costigan, Viney and Warren 1996; Houston, 1998; Macrae and Andrew, 2000; Neimeyer and Neimeyer, 2002; Cummins, 2003, Chiari and Nuzzo, 2003; Fransella, 2003; Horley, 2003; Winter, 2003a, 2003b and 2003c; Cummins, In press). By including personal construct elicitation in a structured psycho-educational men’s behaviour change program, the learning process and self-awareness is potentially enhanced.

Ten years ago, there was very little published about the application of personal construct theory, specifically in relation to men’s violence and abuse. Houston (1998) focused more on offenders in general than on men who are violent to women, and she sums up the applicability of PCT to working with violent men by making a number of points: (i) PCT offers a framework for understanding the world as offenders see it; (ii) it enables the possibility of a better understanding of the reasons why offenders fail to learn from their past; (iii) PCT gives an insight into offenders’ resistance to change; (iv) PCT offers a more collaborative means of working with people, in which some responsibility for the change process is taken by them; (v) it creates space for offenders to change; and (vi) it provides the tools for understanding better how offenders view and construct their world, and also provides a means for measuring changes in that construction (1998: 26–27).

It is the applicability of constructive alternativism for working with men who have been abusive or violent that is most appealing. This is because it presents the possibility for change, links it with response-ability and then ‘skills him up’ to be non-violent. Constructive alternativism for the practitioner can mean that there are many different methods, tools and strategies, as well as perspectives, views and constructs to choose from. For the researcher, constructive alternativism means there
are many different ways of undertaking and seeing the research that, put simply, challenges them to learn from their mistakes. For the abusive man, it means that he can choose to construe his life and relationships differently and to live non-violently, even though this may be very difficult for him. He is able to make such a choice because he has been enabled to anticipate that the results will be better for him if he does (e.g. not lose his family, not get a conviction nor go to jail).

In relation to the notions of ‘centrality’ (Russell, 1995) and male privilege, whereby a man’s construction of reality places himself and his convenience at the centre, is ‘all-embracing’, both notions are also what personal constructivists refer to as pre-emptive\textsuperscript{29} and constellatory. Such an attitude or construct has a profound influence on a person’s other (sub-ordinate)\textsuperscript{30} constructs.

The posing of ‘what if …?’ is an important strategy of Kellian practitioners and theorists. ‘Kelly didn’t accept the idea that one theoretical principle had to be discredited before the possibilities for another be entertained’ (Walker, 1996: 12).

In working with violent men, the strategy of putting to them the question ‘what if?’ regarding their behaviour change to non-violence can be very powerful. In addition, proposing the use of PCT does not discount other ways of working with men, rather it is used to complement existing techniques (SHED Manual, Section Four).

So what is it that is unique about PCT, particularly in relationship to challenging men’s violence against women? What is it that it contributes to the body of knowledge in this area of working with men who are abusive or violent? Because each theory offers its own particular contribution or perspective on the world, what is the particular view of the ‘psychological world’ that PCT offers? Mair gives this answer:

\textsuperscript{29} See glossary for explanation of pre-emptive construct.

\textsuperscript{30} See glossary for explanation of sub-ordinate construct.
It is a world of edges, exceptions, extremities, incidents, moments, intimacy, opportunity in crisis, tragedy, uncertainty, transformation, lack of solidity, risk, demand, personal involvement, radical involvement of who we are and are to become. It is a world of profound moral demand, or at least moral opportunity, in which good and evil between man [sic] and man, man and world are major protagonists. (1985: 9)

PCT allows an abusive man to build a different perception of himself and his behaviour by enabling him to see it in relation to a number of different people important to him, including himself, and to choose non-violence over violence and respect over abuse. I argue in the next section, that a group culture can provide the sort of environment that enables an abusive or violent man to begin to look outside himself, and see non-abusive options for behaviour, by listening to others and hearing others’ stories.

The potential of PCT for men’s behaviour change groups

There is growing evidence of the application of PCT in a variety of group settings (Koch, 1985; Llewelyn and Dunnett, 1987; Dunnett and Llewelyn, 1988; Dalton and Dunnett, 1990; Tooth, 1996; Viney 1996; Horley, 1999; 2003; Bannister, 2003; Cummins, 2003). Group participants are enabled to ‘construe’ themselves differently and particularly how they relate to other people. ‘Construing’ (outlined in Chapter One) is meant as an active process which is ongoing and in which we each continually try to make sense of our world and to predict future events’ (Winter, 1992: 4). Llewelyn and Dunnett put it this way:

The group provides an opportunity for participants, including the leaders, to explore the implications of their particular construct systems, to examine the implications of specific pre-emptive or constellatory constructions, and to bring to the group results of experiments taking place both inside and outside the group setting. (1987: 251)

This concept of providing an opportunity relates back to the commonality and sociality corollaries (Appendix E) insomuch as the men attending the group have an opportunity to be heard and understood, and to influence each other to change. The other point
Llewelyn and Dunnett (1987) make above is that for change to occur, the constructions that are ‘pre-emptive’ and ‘constellatory’ (all-embracing) need to be examined in the light of what they lead to (their implications). An example of such a ‘pre-emptive’ or ‘constellatory’ construct that is all-embracing is that of male privilege in our society.

The importance of providing an alternative milieu, environment or culture in which men can be confronted and challenged about their specific abusive beliefs, and supported in their attempts to change, cannot be overstated. In addition, the group experience provides an opportunity for men to share their experiences, gain a sense that they are not alone in their efforts to change and together learn new ways of respectful relating, grounded in the reality of their lives. When the group co-facilitators are able to model respectful relating, including non-abusive disagreement, the participants have a first hand example of an alternative to abusive beliefs.

Before moving on, I would like to return to the Kellian notion of ‘hostility’ defined earlier in this chapter as ‘the continued effort to extort validational evidence in favour of a type of social prediction which has already been recognised as a failure (Kelly, 1955/1991: 533). Most men attending a men’s behaviour change group come with some degree of ‘hostility’ in the above sense, in which their denial of abuse, minimising of the effects of their violence on others, excusing and blaming, all reflect a refusal to accept responsibility. It is the group experience, as mentioned above, that provides them with an opportunity to get over (literally) their hostility that is preventing them from changing and accepting alternative constructions. Kelly regarded groups as prime sites for generating constructive alternatives for the participants (1955/1991: 1156).

Kelly regarded groups as not only a useful part of a therapeutic process, but he also notes a number of reasons why they might be more beneficial than individual counselling; as a ‘base for experimentation’; to enable ‘discrimination’; as an ‘approach to preemption’ and ‘constellatory construction’; as a place that might provide a ‘variety of validational evidence’; as an opportunity for the ‘dispersion of dependency’; and as more ‘economical in its demands upon the therapist’s time’ (1955/1991: 1156–1158). Those who fund men’s behaviour change programs have also recognised that the running of such groups is a more attractive alternative than individual counselling because it is ‘cost effective’.
According to Dunnett and Llewelyn, ‘PCT does not specifically provide a group methodology’ (1988: 199). However, they go on to say that ‘the group provided a useful social context in which reconstruing and experiment could take place’ in using PCT to understand and work with individual issues (Dunnett and Llewelyn, 1988: 199). Winter elaborates on this point, describing ‘group treatment approaches’ as having the capacity to be ‘particularly facilitative of experimentation’ because they ‘provide opportunities for a greater variety of social experiments, of anticipations of the construing of others, and of validational evidence’ (1992: 275). He also supports Kelly’s view that a group ‘is likely to facilitate the revision of pre-emptive and constellatory constructs’ (Winter, 1992: 275).

Llewelyn and Dunnett note that one of the advantages of using PCT techniques in a group, is that it shortens the process by encouraging the participants to transfer to the outside world the experimentation they have been doing in the group around relationships using ‘enactments’ (1987: 250). In his original work, Kelly situated his writing about groups in the section on enactments (Kelly, 1955).

My view is that group facilitators are there to promote and facilitate a process (SHED Manual, Sections Three and Four). However, it is the participants themselves who provide each other with multiple examples of alternative behaviours and multiple points of support for respectful ‘newly developing beliefs’ as well as confrontation for old ‘socially pervasive’ abusive beliefs (Russell, 1995: 51). Such a multifaceted therapeutic environment offers many supports and opportunities for men to reinforce their change process from abusive beliefs to respectful ones. In this way, ‘therapeutic groups, rather than individual therapy’, are regarded as the best intervention strategy (Russell, 1995: 51). A key question remains about what needs to take place in the group in order to engender the required change.

The central role of the group facilitators, in my view, is to ensure that the group process is one that fosters change towards non-violence, and not one that colludes to perpetuate it. Llewelyn and Dunnett describe various techniques employed in groups that they run including warm-up exercises, self-disclosure by using dyads and reporting back on ‘homework’ (1987: 251). All these are utilised in the SHED Project groups (SHED Manual, Section Four).
Viney poses the following examples of what she refers to as facilitative questions by group leaders, to encourage participants to ask themselves and answer in dyads: ‘Who am I?’, ‘How can I give help to others and get help from them?’, ‘When do I feel safe, and when do I not?’, ‘What would I most like to say to each group member?’ (1996: 158). Such a process can be very powerful for participants who usually come to a group with high levels of anxiety. In Kellian terms, this is one ‘dimension of transition’ and he defines anxiety as ‘the recognition that the events with which one is confronted lie outside the range of convenience of one’s construct system’ (Kelly, 1955/1991: 495).

For a man who has never attended a behaviour change group before, there is nothing in his experience on which to base his anticipation of what might or might not happen. Hence, it is an unknown that causes anxiety. For Kelly, the focus in the initial phase of group development was to provide ‘the initiation of mutual support’ followed by phase two, ‘the initiation of primary role relationships’, then phase three, ‘the initiation of mutual primary relationships, then phase four ‘exploration of personal problems’, then phase five, ‘exploration of secondary roles’ and finally phase six, ‘exploration of secondary enterprises’ (1955/1991: 1160).

Kelly, in his articulation of group development, underlines the importance for the facilitator of initially establishing rapport, acceptance and trust with the participant, before moving to establishing relationships between the participants in order to explore personal problems, leading to a constructive alternative. This is similar to the notion in Narrative Therapy of identifying the ‘dominant story’ in order to explore alternative narratives (Morgan, 2000).

The group culture enables the possibility of the participants relating their narratives and experiencing, in a non-threatening environment, the ways changes in their violent behaviour effects others, and what that might mean to their relationships. Viney emphasises the importance of people being able to relate, not just distantly, but intimately, and stresses the need for an empathetic approach. She distinguishes the range of abilities to be fostered in the group participants by the facilitator:

1. discrimination or the ability to recognise differences among people,
2. creativity to be able to build new ways to make sense of others,

3. flexibility to use alternative constructions,

4. openness or the readiness to reconstrue if constructs are invalidated,

5. commitment by agreeing to validate the construct system of clients for some time,

6. courage to have a clear view of one’s own construing,

7. forgiveness that requires a reconstruction of the way they see themselves and others for the relationship to survive,

8. reverence that stems from an awareness of the privilege in being part of another person’s construing at a deep level the duty of care involved,

9. responsibility to examine one’s own construct system and be reflexive.


The above listed attributes embody respectful practice and enable an abusive man to find new hope and confidence that he is able to change. As Matt put it, ‘listening to others in the group really helps self-awareness’. Another factor that helps is the capacity for reflexivity that the facilitator demonstrates.

**Reflexivity**

Reflexivity is a key principle in Kelly’s philosophy, which concerns some assumptions about our nature in general and focuses on the nature of individual philosophical outlooks in particular (Fransella, 1981: 150). The reflexivity of PCT is seen in the following quotation from Kelly as he introduces his general principles:

*We have taken the basic view that whatever is characteristic of thought is descriptive of the thinker; that the essentials of scientific curiosity must underlie human curiosity in general. If we examine a person’s philosophy closely, we find ourselves staring at the person himself. If we reach an*
understanding of how a person behaves, we discover it in the manner in which he represents his circumstances to himself. (Kelly, 1955/1991: 16)

This reflexivity of PCT is relevant to this research because the researcher is part of the research and the group participants are also very much co-researchers. This goes to the heart of why PCT is appropriate to this research with men who are attending a men’s behaviour change program. It is the men themselves who have to make choices and take responsibility for their behaviour change. At the same time, it is also important for all non-violent men to take some responsibility in challenging the culture of violence and patriarchy that fosters the possibility of individual men’s abuse, as I have stated in the previous chapter.

As Houston puts it:

[Personal construct psychology] is an approach which can be used to understand why one person may hit out in an argument, whilst another would walk away. Clinicians using PCP should be able to apply the approach to themselves and their own behaviour just as easily as to that of their clients . . . (1998: 8)

This is both challenging and exciting, as well as being encouraging of a very respectful process in which the power differential between ‘client’ and ‘(social) worker’ is evened up, to the extent to which the process is honest.

I believe that this research is congruent with the reflexive nature of PCT and that the reflexivity of the theory adds another dimension to utilising it as the research methodology, as well as the foundation for many of the therapeutic interventions employed (SHED Manual, Sections Two, Three, Four and Seven). Likewise, in the ongoing development of the SHED Project, the reflexivity of PCT continually challenges the worker/researcher to be self-critical and honest. At this level of application, the philosophy of reflexivity is what underpins the value of the ‘self-characterisation’ as it is utilized in this research.
Summary

In this chapter I have given some account of how and why PCT is relevant to working with men to bring about change. Men’s behaviour change programs, of which the SHED Project is one, are about enabling and enhancing the possibility of real change to occur in an abusive man’s behaviour, towards the safety and well-being of his partner and children. PCT has an underlying philosophy of respect for an individual’s personal construction of reality, as well as a basic understanding that change is possible. This latter philosophy is crucial when working with men who are violent because it provides hope for them that change can occur, given the right circumstances, and despite strong resistance against it. As discussed elsewhere, it is essential for workers in a men’s behaviour change program not to hold out false hope to women in abusive situations, whilst at the same time offering men a chance to change their abusive behaviour. In the following chapter, I will look at the SHED model of practice for men’s behaviour change, and how this is reflected in the SHED Manual.
CHAPTER FIVE: THE SHED MODEL OF PRACTICE

Introduction

In this chapter, I review the various components of the SHED Project and apply a critical analysis to the practices described. This chapter continues themes introduced from the literature referred to in the Chapter Three, as well as linking with data coming from the individual men and their partners.

As discussed in Chapter One, the SHED Project is located in an eclectic mix of philosophies, practice models, theories and traditions: Pro-feminist (Fawcett, Featherstone, Hearn and Toft, 1996; Pease, 1997; Bagshaw, Chung, Couch, Lilburn, and Wadham, 2000); Abuse Intervention Projects, such as Duluth (Pence and Paymar, 1993), Hamilton, New Zealand (Busch and Robertson, 1993), and Armadale, Western Australia (Gardner, 1995); Men’s behaviour change programs (Edleson and Tolman, 1992; Russell, 1995; Jukes, 1999; McMaster and Wells, 2003); Inviting men’s responsibility (Jenkins, 1990); Groupwork (Viney, 1996; McDermott, 2002); Psychodrama (Williams, 1989); and Personal Construct Theory (Kelly, 1955/1991; Cummins, 2003, In press; Fransella, 2003; Horley, 2003). The influence of these means a number of things to the reality of the SHED Project and I will indicate these with references, in the course of this chapter.

The grounded philosophy of the SHED Project, which informs its intervention strategies, has a number of working principles, which I frame as follows: men who are violent to women and children need to accept responsibility for that behaviour and be committed to changing it and the attitudes that support it; abusive beliefs support the violent behaviour of men and need to be challenged; men’s violence often serves a function, and is frequently used by a man to control his partner and children to get what he wants or to meet his perceived needs; men are not born abusive and violent; men’s violence to women is learned behaviour and can be unlearned; men can choose alternative, non-violent, behaviour, they are ‘response-able’; groups are generally a more effective, challenging and supportive vehicle than ‘one to one’ counselling in
enabling men to change their violent attitudes and behaviour; and men’s violence will stop when men in general are committed to stand against it.\footnote{The working philosophy is encapsulated in the ‘Agreement Sheet’ of the men’s ongoing group (SHED Manual, Section Three). It was created when I asked the participants, one night in mid-1997 what they agreed the group was about. I wrote their answers on the white board and copied it later. The agreement sheets are used in each group meeting as a reminder of ‘why we are here’ and are often referred to by the participants, by way of identifying something meaningful to them at the time}

The aim of the SHED Project is ‘to provide a community-based program which addresses men’s violence and abuse in Central Gippsland\footnote{Taken from the SHED Project 1999 summary sheet.}. This aim is similar to that of the Lothian Domestic Violence Probation Project (LDVPP) and the CHANGE Project, both conducted in Scotland. They state:

\begin{quote}
The overall aims of the projects are broadly similar: to deliver a criminal justice based re-education programme for men who have been violent to their partners; to encourage inter-agency practice on domestic violence; to raise generally the profile of the issue of domestic violence. In addition, CHANGE aims to offer training and consultancy to other professionals working in this area. (Dobash et al., 1996: i)
\end{quote}

Key elements of the SHED Project are reflected in the above quotation and form a central part of this chapter. The group education programs for men, the emphasis on a collaborative inter-agency intervention, as well as on community education are all core components of the SHED Project that I will describe in this chapter. Those same elements comprise the key sections in the SHED Manual.

The following practice-oriented objectives of the SHED Project emanate from its philosophy. First, to increase an abusive man’s sense of responsibility for his violent behaviour, demonstrating that he has ‘response-ability’ and that he is able to choose a non-violent response (Jenkins, 1990; Jukes, 1999). Second, to raise the man’s awareness as to the implications of his violence for the affected women and children (Edleson and Tolman, 1992; Hamner and Itzin, 2000). Third, to educate the man
about how his violence is usually intentional and functional in allowing him to maintain control and power in the relationship (Pence and Paymar, 1993; Paymar, 2000). Fourth, to develop practical alternatives to violent behaviour in the form of non-violent responses (Russell, 1995; McMaster and Wells, 2003). Fifth, to enable the man to gain insight into how his violent behaviour is learned and promoted through the patriarchal structures, beliefs and mores of society (Edelson and Tolman, 1992; Russell, 1995; Gelles 1997; Northern Metropolitan Health Service, 1997; Jukes, 1999).

These objectives relate more to the actual intervention process with men who attend the project and to the groups they attend. However, they do not reflect the full range of strategies and vision encompassed in the project’s philosophy and aim. Hence, in 1999 the objectives of the SHED Project were re-formulated as follows:

- To provide an assessment and screening service for men referred for their violence and abuse to women and children, or in the community;
- To facilitate groups for men to learn non-violent attitudes and behaviour;
- To maintain an effective inter-agency collaboration that specifically addresses family violence issues;
- To provide community education in the area of men’s inter-personal violence;
- To maintain a competent, ongoing, best practice service that recognises the well-being of the workers involved;
- To develop skills in male and female workers to appropriately respond to men’s violence, abuse and aggression;
- To provide consultancy to workers and agencies about men’s abuse and violence issues, prevention and intervention strategies.33

33 These objectives are as stated in the SHED Project 1999 summary sheet.
This last point also connects with the quotation from Dobash et al. (1996: i) above, in which training and consultancy for other professionals are also identified as important.

What is evident from these objectives is the complexity of the work involved at multilevels of interaction; for example, with individuals, with families, with groups, with communities, with workers, with agencies, with media and also in the variety of content and processes involved. The educational material, the topics covered, the issues addressed, the protocols agreed to and the strategies, methods and tools utilised, are all designed and integrated to create a more effective intervention strategy against men’s violence towards women. In this regard, the demands of the project are appropriately met by a social worker (rather than a psychologist), because of the multiskills and reflexibility required.

The most helpful social workers in this area of work are identified by clients as those who ‘understood family violence problems to be simultaneously social/structural and personal in origin, and therefore offered help in both dimensions’ (Gordon, 1989: 298 cited in Milner, 1996: 125). I would add here that this dichotomy of social–personal, is something that is reflected in a number of ways in the SHED Project and in the intervention strategies used. This is illustrated in various sections of the SHED Manual: the individual assessments (Section Two), the ongoing group (Section Three), the feedback from individual partner victims(Sections Two, Three and Four) the structured men’s responsibility program (Section Four) and community education (Section Five).

The SHED Project is historically located in the tradition of men’s behaviour change programs whose umbrella body was the Victorian Network for the Prevention of Male Family Violence (V-Net), which had a name change to No To Violence (NTV) and in 1997 became a national body. Prior to 1994, when the SHED Project began, the nearest men’s behaviour change program was 90 km away on the outskirts of Melbourne and there was no other similar program for at least 300 km east to the NSW border and beyond. In 1994, V-Net produced a self-help book for men entitled
*Mirrors, Windows and Doors*, (Frances, 1994b)\(^{34}\) and the following year they produced a ‘minimum standards of practice’ and ‘best practice’ manual for running men’s groups (Younger, 1995).

More recently, NTV has collaborated with Swinburne University in the development of a Graduate Certificate in the facilitation of men’s behaviour change programs. The first cohort of graduates completed the course in 2003. NTV continues to play a significant role in policy development at the State and Federal levels for best practice responses by men’s behaviour change programs.

Before proceeding to look at the assessment process, I will make a brief comment about the organisational location of the SHED Project and the importance of the SHED reference group, both in the project’s foundation and in its ongoing viability. Part of a best practice response by the SHED Project, since its inception, has been the part played by the reference group. The reference group’s first task was to articulate the aim, objectives, a philosophy, the name and the principle components for the project, as well as a working definition of men’s violence\(^{35}\). It was originally referred to as the critical reference group and was comprised of a worker with a long involvement in supporting abused women and children, a family violence project officer working at the Family Research Action Centre, a senior community corrections officer and myself as the SHED Project coordinator.\(^{36}\)

\(^{34}\) In 1997, a reprint of *Mirrors Windows and Doors* was facilitated by a funding grant that I, on behalf of the SHED Project, obtained from Hazelwood Power, a local electricity generating company. This helped to enable copies of *Mirrors, Windows and Doors* to be more widely available at low cost to men engaged in changing their abusive behaviour. Such local and relevant resources for men are essential.

\(^{35}\) The framework I had developed for working with abusive men’s behaviour change, as part of a Master of Social Work in 1993, became the foundation for many of the key components in the SHED Project.

\(^{36}\) This employment commenced in March 1994 and was initially for 5 hours per week, and this increased to 20 hours a week by the end of that year.
The reference group is currently comprised of the manager of the regional women’s domestic violence support service, a senior community corrections officer, a psychologist who works at Relationships Australia and who has also co-facilitated the men’s responsibility program, the Victoria Police regional family violence adviser and the SHED Project coordinator.

The reference group is crucial to the effective operation of the SHED Project. Because the coordinator is a ‘sole worker’, the importance of the reference group cannot be overstated. It meets monthly at community corrections (CORE) in Morwell to discuss all aspects of the project. The functions of the group are to provide feedback, accountability, support, challenge, critique and to be a sounding board for the project coordinator. It is instrumental in both the policy and practice directions of the project. Without the reference group, I would not have survived as a lone worker. The reference group provides a real sense of professional back-up, emotional support, a practical and available sounding board, and the knowledge that I am not alone but part of an integrated team approach. The commitment and personalities of the members makes this possible and highlights the need to have on the reference group individuals who want to be there, and not just be there as representatives of their agencies.

Key agencies in a collaborative and integrated approach to family violence prevention are represented in the membership of the reference group and at the same time it is kept small enough to be workable and practical. The relationship between the reference group and Latrobe Community Health Service as the auspicing agency is important. As the project coordinator, I was employed by that organisation and accountable to its management, and my immediate line manager was on the SHED reference group. Hence, there is a creative tension between the roles of the reference group and the Latrobe Community Health Service management. At the same time, the specialisation and difficulty of the work means that the expertise of the reference group members is crucial to the effective running of the project, and to its credit the community health service has respected that. In addition, the diverse and informed membership of the SHED reference group ensures that there is transparency of service, and that the safety and well-being of women is kept the priority.
Individual assessment

In the past ten years, more than 700 men have been assessed by the SHED Project. However, this research is dealing only with six of those assessed in the years 1994–2001, which number approximately 500 men in total. On the issue of accessibility and how it effects referrals, although the SHED Project is based at Moe, it is available to men from all over Gippsland. Some men travel over an hour each way to attend. Approximately half of those assessed have attended at least one group.

Groups present a cultural alternative to men’s patriarchal beliefs and offer an environment in which they might begin to take responsibility and change their abusive or violent behaviour. Men come from a variety of referral points. These include: the Department of Human Services (Child Protection), Community Corrections (CORE), Gippsland Centre Against Sexual Assault, Gippsland Psychiatric Services, local General Practitioners, Central Gippsland Alcohol and Drug Service, social workers, police and self-referrals.37

About one quarter of the men come referred by CORE for assessment as part of a Pre-Sentence Report for the Magistrate’s Court. This is part of a protocol established between the Moe Magistrate’s Court, CORE and the SHED Project in 1995. This protocol enables men to take responsibility for beginning to learn non-abusive and non-violent attitudes and behaviour. Therefore, they are not mandated by the court to attend the SHED Project unless, and until, they have been assessed as suitable by the coordinator on a range of criteria38. These criteria include a man’s readiness to accept

37 The referral pattern and how it has changed definitely reflects both community education and better inter-agency collaboration. For example, in the first 2 years of the project, child protection workers made virtually no referrals and then they became the third highest referrer after ‘self referrals’ and Community Corrections. There is an important related issue here and that is the one of ‘mandated’ or ‘voluntary’ referrals which has been the focus of recent national debate and policy explorations at both the federal and Victorian state level. An informative expose of the key issues can be found in Macrae (1998).

38 There has been debate for some years about mandated and non-mandated attendance at men’s behaviour change programs (Keys Young 1999:158-163; Strategic Partners 2003b:98).
responsibility for his violence, to get beyond denying, blaming others, or excusing his behaviour. The man also needs to show some indication that he is ready to participate in the behaviour change group process. Once the man is assessed as suitable, his community corrections worker makes a report to the court, and attendance at the SHED Project is put as a condition of the court order. Breaches are reported.

Theoretically, no man can say, whilst sitting in a group, ‘I am only here because the court sent me’ and avoid taking responsibility or play the victim role. There is a balance between an educational approach that stresses men’s ‘response-ability’ and the need for family violence to be treated by the courts (and others) as a criminal matter.

From my perspective in the SHED it is better that an abusive man can begin to recognise his responsibility for his behaviour, during an assessment process, and choose to do something about changing himself, rather than being mandated. In our experience in the SHED Project, most violent men do want to change their behaviour. However, for many, that step to change is usually very difficult and goes against a lifetime of conditioning. It is true to say that almost no abusive man wants to attend the SHED Project initially. For many men, it is impossibly hard and made harder still by those in our society who collude with them in justifying their abuse. Yet, it is the wives and children of these men who continue to suffer violence and abuse if they do not choose to change their behaviour.

In the SHED Manual (Section Two), I outline the assessment process. Assessment takes the form of feedback from the individual man, from his partner (and sometimes from his children if they want to), from referrers, and once the man has begun attending the intake group, from the co-facilitators. There is also self-evaluation by the person doing the assessments, and because the stakes involved in the man’s attendance are normally very high, there is usually a degree of pressure.

I believe that a key issue regarding assessments is the under-resourcing of men’s behaviour change programs, which leads to heavy pressure on the existing workers to see more clients, resulting in them often having little time to write up adequate case notes or to debrief when necessary. This incremental increase in pressure within an already stressful area of work (men’s violence against women and children) can lead
to the possibility of vicarious traumatisation if allowed to accumulate, which might result in the worker experiencing ‘burn-out’.

Such a scenario requires the worker to continually self-evaluate their capacities, not just in terms of taking conservative judgements regarding situations of risk, but also in terms of how they are sensibly dealing with the narratives of trauma they are hearing both in the assessment sessions but also in the groups, and to which they have to respond appropriately and effectively, in a way that may enable a man to engage in changing. My own experience of doing this work for 8 years is that vicarious traumatisation is a very real occupational hazard and one that I continually use strategies to avoid. These are outlined in the SHED Manual, (Section One) as is the men’s ongoing program (Section Three) which I will address next.

**The Men’s Ongoing Group**

There is an evaluation process operating on various axes in the Men’s Ongoing Group. For example, participants are hearing each other’s stories and evaluating their own situation against what they hear, employing ‘constructive revision’ on the basis of their anticipations (as in the experience cycle). Initially the participants are evaluating what they hear and how they feel on the basis of whether they judge it to be useful to themselves, whether it is worth the pain to attend. In contrast, the co-facilitators continually evaluate and assess the process to check that it is not collusive in re-inforcing men’s abusive attitudes rather than challenging them (SHED Manual, Sections Three and Four).

In the debriefing after the group program, the co-facilitators jointly assess the process of the evening, any ongoing issues, particularly in regards to safety of partners, and the content of what was shared and responded to by the participants. Useful themes are identified and noted for picking up again the following week. Each week at the start of the group session, the men are asked what they found useful, if anything, in the previous week’s session, and how it helped them stay non-abusive and non-violent. They are also invited to recount situations in which they have become controlling, abusive, aggressive or violent during the preceeding week.
New participants are welcomed and included in the group process from the beginning. Their ‘induction’ takes the form of them sitting at the table, being given an agreement sheet and being offered a cup of tea or coffee. They then have an opportunity to listen to the other men’s reports and stories about how their week had been, and to respond if they want to.

In a real sense, it is the men’s ongoing program that is the hub of the SHED Project. It is to this group that the abusive man first comes after his assessment. The main considerations of this group are to engage the man whilst at the same time not collude with him in abusive attitudes. The participants have to feel at the same time challenged to be ‘response-able’ and choose to change their abusive behaviour, as well as supported and encouraged in their endeavour. Section One in the SHED Manual outlines some of the logistical considerations, such as an accessible yet discreet venue. The use of some basic equipment is also essential.

When the SHED Project was in its infancy, the first two ‘group’ meetings of the men’s ongoing group consisted of myself and one man, on the third week there were three men and myself, and on the fourth week we had dropped back to myself and two men. After that, the numbers in the group gradually grew until, within 6 months, there were enough men seriously committed to behaviour change to engage in a structured program. I believe that it was important to keep running the men’s ongoing group, even though there did not seem to be the interest at the time. By doing so, the group is able to become established and create a culture of its own. These, and other issues related to the setting up of men’s behaviour change program groups, are also addressed in the SHED Manual, Section One.

In addition, the SHED Project model of intervention where a man is assessed and then has the option of joining a group within a week (without lengthy waiting lists that create loss of motivation) requires that such a group is available. Because the men’s ongoing group leads into the men’s responsibility program which lasts for 3 months, every time it appeared to be getting too large to be effective, participants would move
to the next group and the numbers would drop again.\textsuperscript{39} I will now look at the third component of the SHED Project, the men’s responsibility program (SHED Manual, Section Four).

The men’s responsibility program

The men’s responsibility program is described at length in Section Four of the SHED Manual; however, in this section I will reflect on the development of the program and how it is related to other components of the SHED Project. During the 8 years, the men’s responsibility program changed a number of times in response to various processes of evaluation. It changed both in its content as well as in process, including that its original length of 12 weeks became 16 weeks. This was in response to various inputs. Some of the participants requested longer programs (a number returned to do a repeat of the 12 weeks) and the best practice manual stipulates a minimum of 12 weeks (Younger, 1995). At the same time, the co-facilitators felt that the curriculum could not be covered in 12 weeks.

After some time, however, the men’s responsibility program reverted from 16 weeks to 12 weeks as a result of funding difficulties, combined with research suggesting that shorter 12 week programs are arguably as effective as longer programs in stopping men’s violence against women (Edelson and Tolman, 1992)\textsuperscript{40}. Another reason for reverting back to a 12 week structured program is that the SHED Project reference group decided that part of the intervention model restructure should include making attendance at the men’s ongoing group for at least 3 weeks a precondition for entry into the 12 week closed men’s responsibility program, thus maintaining the length of required attendance for completion.

\textsuperscript{39} The largest number that attended a men’s ongoing group was 22 men and that was too big.

\textsuperscript{40} Whilst Gondolf (2002a) asserts that longer men’s behaviour change programs are more effective Edelson and Tolman, (1992) as well as Dobash, Dobash, Cavanagh and Lewis, (1996) present evidence to suggest that it is not yet clear whether longer programs are better. In addition Keys Young (1999:115) presents findings that indicate that sixty per cent of Australian men’s behaviour change programs are 15 weeks or less in length.
The reason for this is to ensure that participants in the men’s responsibility program are already inculturated into the men’s behaviour change group’s ways, philosophy and reason for existing, as well as familiar with its general processes and practices, including where to meet, times, cost, parking, availability of refreshments, and most importantly, what to expect. On this latter point, an environment that is non-judgemental and safe, as well as honest, is essential, as is a professional standard of practice from the facilitators without using their ‘expert’ position as an abusive tool to control or intimidate, thus replicating the process of a man who abuses and controls in the home (SHED Manual, Section One).

The adaptation and modification of the content and process of the 12 week program on the basis of evaluation, is ongoing. It is also very demanding as well as being exciting, and at times frustrating. This process of change was clearly illustrated in 1998 when I was asked to contribute to a book called Developing Adult Learners (Taylor et al., 2000). I wrote a section entitled ‘Developing Group Alternatives for Reconstructing Personal Behaviours’, in which I describe part of one of the sessions of the 12 week men’s responsibility program (Laming, 2000b). After the usual stages of editing and drafting, the piece was submitted in mid 1999. By the time it was published in the USA in early 2000, we were no longer using exactly that technique in the 12 week program, but had moved on once again in the continual praxis, reflecting and refining our practice on the basis of what we had learnt.

The final session of the men’s responsibility program is an evaluation process in which each participant gives feedback to every other participant on a range of questions. The process is designed to enable the men to reflect about the changes that have been made, what they have learnt and what more they need to do in the future (SHED Manual, Section Four).

As I have mentioned above in the section on assessments, funding difficulties play a key role in many aspects of the SHED Project interventions. For example, in regard to the SHED intake process, there is often insufficient time available for the worker to meet the demand for prompt assessments in addition to keeping appropriate case notes and statistical data about participants (McMaster and Wells, 2003: 242). Such data are invaluable, not only in gaining a deeper insight into the broader picture of family
violence in the region, but also as a tool for community education sessions. It is not an optional extra, but rather part of a balanced and integrated response to men’s violence. In the same way, timely assessments that lead to a man being challenged at the appropriate psychological moment for him are essential if he is to engage in a men’s behaviour change group.

**Community education**

In Section Five of the SHED Manual, I examine how community education fits into the SHED model of men’s behaviour change and I describe a number of factors relating to areas of community education. For a comprehensive list of community education presentations, workshops and training given as part of the SHED Project between 1994 and 2001, see Appendix H. During the 8 years of coordinating the SHED Project, I have spoken to many different groups about the SHED Project and its various components, its philosophy, its limitations and about how to refer someone appropriately, so as to give the best chance of an effective intervention. I have produced hundreds of copies of the SHED Project referral form, the agreement sheet and a four page ‘student pack’[^41] for workers, students and professionals interested in knowing more about SHED as a response to men’s violence against women.

This component of the SHED Project also comes under pressure in the context of funding constraints. In my experience, this is all the more so because those who sanction the funding are keener to fund the clinical aspects of the program than to include a preventative component. Perhaps this is because it is less problematic to provide statistical evidence about the numbers of men attending groups than to quantify the benefits of community education initiatives. Whatever the reason might be, community education is often treated as an optional extra in men’s behaviour change programs and, yet, it is clear from the research that it needs to be part of any integrated approach to addressing violence against women (Strategic Partners, 2003).

[^41]: This student pack includes the referral form, the agreement sheet, the SHED brochure, and a page with a detailed summary of the three group programs, times, place, cost, contact and who the facilitators are.
So far in this chapter, I have shown that the various components of the SHED Project are inter-linked in an integrated whole. For example, the referrals for assessment are greatly enhanced by community education, perhaps more so in rural areas where word of mouth has strong currency. Another example of the interlinking is the degree to which the training of workers from other agencies results in a more consistent integrated approach to men’s violence, and that results in a greater degree of safety for women and children.

**An integrated inter-agency intervention**

From the beginning of the SHED Project, the importance of a collaborative and integrated approach to men’s violence has been stressed by the reference group and myself (SHED Manual, Section Six). This is reflected in the organisation of the project. It is recognised that working with violent men to bring about changes in their behaviour without that intervention being part of an holistic inter-agency response is of limited effectiveness. As long as agencies and workers operate in isolation from one another, and do not consult, share information and establish mutually agreed upon protocols, then both the perpetrators of the violence and the victims receive a diminished and less effective service. This reflection is not only from my personal experience over the 8 years, but is also evident in the literature (Pence and Paymar, 1986; Gardner, 1995; Busch and Robertson, 1993).

Gradually, during the period since the SHED Project commenced, the need for a more structured inter-agency intervention strategy has been recognised. The articulation of this need has now become a predicable part of any government policy pronouncement about family violence intervention strategies, both at the State and Federal levels. This represents a welcome recognition of the efficacy of a more collaborative and systematic approach to the alleviation of family violence that was not previously present. I would add that because funding for this work is scarce and reliant on showing ‘outcomes’ and ‘throughput’ of men in the behaviour change programs, the embedding of an integrated, inter-agency approach in policy is important for ongoing work. In addition, it means that men’s behaviour change program funding is tied to a transparent accountability mechanism to other agencies engaged in the collaborative
process, for example, the women’s support services, community corrections and children’s protective services.

From the commencement of the SHED Project in 1994, I gave priority to the development of a network of those working with family violence, in order to foster a collaborative approach to inter-agency intervention. Initially, it was known as the SHED Network Forum and met monthly at the regional alcohol and drug service. In 1996, it became known as the Gippsland Family Violence Network, with a part-time network coordinator based at the Gippsland Women’s Health Service. In 2002, it became a fully funded position with ongoing funding. During this 1994–2002 period, there has been a strong commitment among the network participants to establish a more consistent approach and, to a lesser extent, to develop inter-agency agreements or protocols that lead to greater accountability.

At a very basic level, the integrated inter-agency approach is evaluated by the quality of the referrals between agencies and the depth of their collaboration in addressing family violence issues. Because involvement in this integrated inter-agency approach was originally initiated by workers, from the beginning it has had a commitment and momentum that would not have been there if it had been decreed by management. Workers engaged in family violence issues have a felt sense of what is worthwhile, which worker it is worth referring to or not and where there are gaps in the system. There is ‘evaluation on the run’ (Wadsworth, 1991) among workers in the family violence prevention network in Gippsland, seeking to explore ways of gauging the effectiveness of collaborative intervention strategies.42

In addition, because the network developed its own ‘Key Stakeholder Group’ (Kristensen, 1999) with its own protocols, there became more formal evaluation

42 Recognition of the importance of having competent workers in this rural region, who use best practice principles to address family violence is one reason I moved into tertiary teaching.
mechanisms, such as key performance indicators, referral statistics and outcomes. The development of protocols means that agreed procedures are not left to the good will and commitment of those who develop them, but become part of the responsibility and accountability mechanisms agreed to by management as part of funding agreements.

Two key protocols that I developed for the SHED Project are with the Moe Magistrates’ Court and with the Department of Human Services’ Protective Services. As a result of the latter protocol, the child protection workers refer the man to SHED in cases where it has been assessed that the family is at risk as a result of his abuse or violence. In such cases, the usual referral form signed by the man that gives ‘authorisation for disclosure of information between agencies’ (SHED Manual, Section Two) is essential because it means that the SHED worker is able to have access to relevant information about the man and his history of abuse, and is also able to give feedback to the protective services worker about his progress towards non-violence.

A group of Key Stakeholders from the network met every month in 1996–1997 to operationalise the protocols, to provide accountability and to utilise opportunities for the development of more effective intervention strategies. The Key Stakeholder group consisted of representatives from all the key statutory bodies that play a part in responding to family violence; Registrar from the Magistrates Court, Officer in Charge at Moe Police Station, Manager of Protective Services in the Dept of Human Services, Manager of the regional Women’s Domestic Violence Service, Manager of Gippsland CASA, Gippsland Regional Hospital representative, Alcohol and Drug Service representative, and Coordinator of the SHED Project (Kristensen 1999).

As well as giving us a reference point, these seminars and the writings from HAIPP and AAIPP give us something with which we can compare our own position. It resulted in us having a greater practical sense of two key philosophical principles underpinning intervention projects. Namely, that men are responsible for their abuse and violence and must be held accountable, and that women and children have a right to safety and well-being. There needs to be a consistent response from all agencies and workers involved that reflects these two principles.
The Men’s Assault Program (MAP)

This program began as a result of more and more young men (aged 17–30 years) being referred by the court for assessment after their arrest for alcohol and drug related assaults in the community. As part of the process, these young men were assessed and then invited, if suitable, to attend the men’s ongoing group. The experience for most of them was very powerful. Sitting with a group of older, often very tough, men who would say things such as, ‘I wish I was your age again, and could have my time over, then I wouldn’t do the shit I have, and lose everything . . . you are very lucky because you have a chance to change before it is too late’ to them. After at least three sessions in the men’s ongoing group (SHED Manual, Section Three), the young man is eligible to join the open 10 week men’s assault program.

Summary

The tension that exists on a day-to-day basis for many social workers is also present in the work of the SHED Project. The challenge of how to balance working with an individual and his or her needs and at the same time to look at the wider picture and see the need for community change and education. This essential balance highlights the tension between spending more time running groups or assessing individuals, whilst also engaging in community education and policy development.

There is a need for social workers involved in men’s behaviour change to engage in policy debates and issues such as the efficacy of group work with men rather than working with couples and individuals in a counselling sessions or about whether such programs are abused as soft options in sentencing. Whether men who are ‘mandated’ should be part of a program with non-mandated men, or whether they ought to have their own program is another policy debate. In the following chapter, I examine the strengths and weaknesses of the SHED Project and offer critique of its components.
CHAPTER SIX: CRITICAL ISSUES AND THE SHED MANUAL

Introduction

In this concluding chapter, I sum up the journey of this research, chart the territory covered and the key issues raised. If the first chapter of this exegesis can be likened to a map of the journey ahead, then this chapter is a log of how the journey developed and the SHED Manual is like a handbook for anyone wanting to undertake a similar journey, to avoid making the same mistakes and learn from what has been tried and found useful in enabling men to be challenged about abusive behaviour, and taught non-violent alternatives.

In terms of the Experience Cycle, with its five stages, mentioned in Chapter One – Anticipation, Investment, Encounter, Confirmation/Disconfirmation and Constructive Revision – this chapter represents the latter stage. To that extent, not only does Chapter Six represent a conclusion to this research journey, but also a constructive revision on the basis of which future such undertakings may be anticipated and prepared for. In other words, this stage of constructive revision itself becomes the basis for the ‘anticipation’ stage of the next experience cycle. Therefore, this research is not so much another contribution to the body of knowledge, what Kelly refers to as ‘accumulated fragmentalism’ (1955/1991), but rather another stage in an ongoing process of ‘constructive alternativism’.

In this chapter, I also critically reflect on the 10 year journey of practice research grounded in the SHED Project. It concerns new learnings in relation to what new knowledge has been learned about men’s behaviour change in the process of this research, and gauging how useful that knowledge is in working towards the ongoing safety and well-being of women and children. In addition, this reflection includes the balancing of the following:

- worker–researcher;
- policy–practice;
• individual responsibility–community accountability;

• despair–hope;

• empathising–challenging of abusive men.

These new learnings or insights are articulated in the SHED Manual and this chapter concludes with a section linking the exegesis with the manual.

I have divided this chapter into the following sections: assessment as an instrument of change; mandated versus voluntary groups; protocol between SHED, Magistrates’ Court and CORE; open groups as a venue for honesty among men; structured groups as a journey towards respectful relations with women; attitudinal change through community involvement; collaboration and accountability as foundations for effective practice; linking men’s violence to women with other forms of abuse; prevention in contrast to reaction; and developments as well as replications.

**Assessment as an instrument of change**

Before having access to an assessment process for SHED, a prospective participant has to make contact with the worker, and yet there is often strong resistance to referral. One of the issues for men who are being ‘volunteered’ to attend by someone, is what the ‘word on the street’ is about a given program. It is far less likely that a man will choose to attend if the street credibility of the program is not there.

Men are traditionally far more difficult to engage in group programs than women. In addition, the fear of stigma from attending a program such as SHED is very strong. Hence, if a man or his partner know, or know of, someone who has benefited from participating in SHED, it is far more likely that the man will make contact. If his first impressions are positive, he will actually present for the initial interview. It should be noted, however, that ‘positive impressions’ for most men includes that they are treated honestly and fairly (SHED Manual, Section Two) and that they are not prejudged or patronized, or ‘bull-shitted’, as they would say. Street credibility of a program is often dependent on a sense of this type of fairness, along with competence.
Men appreciate ‘straight talk’ and honesty, even if it makes them uncomfortable, because most of them are insightful enough to already know what they are being confronted with, even though they will probably deny it to some degree. The macho culture dictates that real men do not need to relate and many of the participants were brought up with this understanding and socialized accordingly as boys.

An example of this is that for Henry to ask for help, to admit he needs it and to ask for it from someone such as a social worker, was clearly very difficult. His participation in the men's responsibility program was typified by obfuscation and avoidance strategies, as well as denying that he was violent or abusive. One minute Henry wants help in changing and the next he is rationalising his behaviour, justifying abuse and blaming Cathy. As a result, I was surprised when Henry persisted for the full 12 weeks. However, he clearly needs to do more work in behaviour change, as later reports from Cathy about his behaviour, clearly indicate.

Many participants in SHED, such as Henry, have the belief that their behaviour is not abusive, even though they may be very controlling. The complaint by many women that their contribution to the family is undervalued and minimised and that they are not given shared decision-making opportunities, is reflected in the SHED data. Ashcroft suggests the term ‘domestic control’ to describe ‘domestic distortion, domestic domination, domestic dodging and domestic neglect’ (2000: 8). The use of these terms might help to educate men and boys about the subtleties of inequality played out in the home.

**Assessing bullies**

In the context of assessing bullies, Randall (2002: 57) refers to two models of assessment, one of information gathering and one that is therapeutic. Whilst both models make use of standardised tests:

*The biggest single difference between the two models of assessment in the usage of such tests is that the therapeutic model makes use of the tests’ results to facilitate the client’s understanding through decision and explanation.* (Randall 2002: 59)
At the same time, a clinician using the information gathering model to collect data makes an interpretation and offers a recommendation, and will be careful not to ‘contaminate’ the data and thereby introduce a ‘clinical hermeneutics error’ (Harkness and Lilienfeld, 1997: 350). This error refers to when the person doing the assessing identifies unwittingly with the perspective of one being assessed (Randall, 2002: 59). In the case of a perpetrator of violence, this error of interpretation is seen to have possibly serious ramifications, for example, that the evidence for court proceedings becomes contaminated by the additional data presented that in the course of the assessment the man has already begun to change. A danger, of course, is that the change is only short term.

However, in the assessment for a men’s behaviour change program, the possibility that the assessment itself might bring change in the abusive man is itself important. As we have seen, there is a notion that the process of being asked questions might lead a man who is abusive to reconstrue his behaviour and possibly see it from another perspective. The value of the new perspective is that the man might not continue to anticipate his abusive behaviour as leading to an elaboration of his construct system (Kelly, 2003: 11)\(^43\) and will, therefore, undertake a constructive revision. He anticipates that the behaviour will not be constructive and helpful in terms of the meaning he makes of it in the light of the rest of his life.

Randall makes the same point that ‘inevitably the clinician’s experience is that clients respond to feedback from assessments, even information-gathering assessments, by making changes’ (Randall, 2002: 56). Similarly, Kelly considers clients to be co-researchers, who collaborate in a process of ‘psychotherapeutic experimentation’ (1955/1991: 1125), as distinct from being considered merely the subjects of the research. This point is central to the use of PCT in this research and to its relevance in a men’s behaviour change program.

There is some evidence that men use different types of violence quite deliberately, sometimes to reinforce a message they want to convey, sometimes to signal that they

\(^{43}\) See the Choice Corollary in Appendix E
are capable of far worse. I believe that the notion that abusive men are not able to control themselves in their violent behaviour is almost always a fallacy. Men also decide how violent they will be on the basis of how to keep others from knowing that they are doing it. For example, a man might not hit his wife in the face, but rather somewhere else that no one can see (Frude, 1994:166). For such men, the possibility that they will voluntarily attend the SHED Project for an assessment is slim. Hence, it is vital that there is an option of mandating men to attend a program such as SHED for assessment, according to a protocol similar to the one established with the Magistrates’ Court. In this way an abusive man can be required, ‘mandated’, by the Magistrate to attend the SHED Project for an assessment. In the assessment process the SHED worker has an opportunity to get the man to overcome his resistance and denial, and to begin to see that he is ‘response-able’ and is able to choose to learn how to change. If the abusive man remains adamant in his denial and does not take any responsibility for his abusive or violent behaviour, then he is assessed as unsuitable for the SHED intake group, (SHED Manual, Section Three), and attendance is not included in his sentencing options.

**Mandated versus voluntary programs**

There is a debate concerning mandated or voluntary men’s behaviour change programs (Wilson, 1990; Keys Young, 1999; National Crime Prevention, 1999; Office of Women’s Policy, 2000; 2001) and it can be framed in the following way. Those concerned that in the past men’s violence against women was not been treated seriously by the community and by the Law, want a criminal justice response that mandates abusive men to attend a men’s behaviour change program (Dobash and Dobash, 1999; Keys Young, 1999). The idea is, that doing so will send a powerful message to potential offenders that abuse and violence will not be tolerated. It also gives a clear legal response for an offence, and one that includes an element of rehabilitation, as well as punishment. A parallel example is that of a person (usually male) who has been charged and convicted for drink driving. He is required to undergo a group education program before he is eligible to legally drive again.

In contrast, the advocates of voluntary men’s behaviour change programs point to the need for a community response that addresses the large majority of men who have
been violent, but who have not come to the notice of the police or Magistrates’ Court. They hold that a well-run men’s behaviour change program potentially has the capacity to enable men to change in a way that mandated programs cannot, simply because the man is not forced to attend and as a result, does not come with the same ‘attitude’ or resistance (Younger, 1995).

Such a program could usefully be construed as a means of prevention or early intervention, rather than a complete change or ‘cure’. My own view in this regard is that it depends on many factors whether a man is ‘cured’ and the extent to which he might modify his behaviour, become less violent and learn strategies for compromise and negotiation, and the extent to which his children will see that and learn, and hence this might be construed as early intervention.

Concerning the terms ‘mandated’ and ‘voluntary’, it is worth noting that their meaning is not always clear in practice. In the SHED Project, it is difficult to recall even one man out of the 500 who came for assessment voluntarily. Most of the 500 men are described as ‘self-referred’. However, that usually means that their partner, family member or friend pressured them or ‘volunteered’ them to attend. Most men initially attend the SHED Project with some degree of reluctance, resistance and perhaps resentment.

The term ‘wife mandated’ is sometimes used for men being ‘volunteered’. However, this has overtones of a man being coerced or nagged into doing something that he does not want to do and that he is not really taking responsibility for his behaviour. In my opinion, the key advantages of having voluntary programs are that a greater number of men can access them, and that they have the opportunity to take responsibility for their behaviour change process. In this way, there is an opportunity for abusive men to be challenged about those parts of their controlling behaviour that are not illegal, for example, emotional or psychological abuse. At the same time, mandated programs are also important.

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44 Generally, I do not believe that the language of sickness is helpful when referring to men’s abusive behaviour, since it tends to pathologise the behaviour which is chosen, and hence excuse responsibility for it.
Protocol between SHED, Magistrates’ Court and CORE

This notion of men’s responsibility for their own change is central to the debate around mandated or voluntary programs. However, whilst ‘mandated’ usually refers to a man being given a court order to attend a men’s behaviour change program as the result of a conviction, the SHED Project argues that such an order is not helpful in encouraging a man to change his behaviour. As a result, a three way protocol was established in 1995 between the Moe Magistrates’ Court, the Office of Community Corrections (CORE) and the SHED Project. In this protocol, a man convicted of assault in the home or breaching an intervention order would be sent for a SHED assessment as part of a pre-sentence hearing, in much the same way as he might be sent for a forensic alcohol and drug assessment, or a psychiatric assessment, before sentencing.

In the case of SHED, the referral for assessment is made through CORE and feedback is given to their designated worker as to whether the man had been assessed as suitable for the SHED program or not. Suitability criteria require him to accept responsibility for the abusive or violent behaviour he has committed. In addition, the man has to be ready to engage in a group program, even if reluctantly. In this way, the notion is put to the ‘mandated’ man that he now has a chance to change those parts of his behaviour that are abusive and that he has to take responsibility for that change.

If he is in agreement with this proposition made on the basis of the assessment procedure (SHED Manual, Section Two), then attendance at SHED becomes part of the sentencing regime stipulated in his court order. In contrast, the man denies any wrong doing and refuses to take responsibility for his violence or abuse, his referral is not accepted and the Court is informed through CORE that attendance at SHED is not part of sentencing options for this man. For the SHED Project, what we regard as important is the process of how the men are mandated and how that might impact on their readiness or resistance to behaviour change, both in the short-term and in the long-term.

This protocol, established early in the SHED Project, is crucial in ensuring that men referred for assessment by the Moe Magistrates’ Court have to take at least some responsibility for their behaviour, even if they are unwilling to take full responsibility.
As a result of this protocol, the men who attend the groups are a mixture of ‘voluntary’ and ‘mandated’, and very often the men themselves do not know who is who. I believe that this mixture plays an important part in a group process that enables some men to change their behaviour. It presents the opportunity for men to sit with each other and listen to each other’s stories, and hurt, and to hear the pain, and at the same time support and challenge each other to change the abusive behaviour.

It is apparent to me that the personal narratives of men speak loudly around the table, and at times it is terrible to hear, very moving, and very painful. At other times, a man might avoid ‘coming clean’ and being honest in the group about what he has done. He might try and do this by leaving out bits of this story or by blaming his wife or children or by excusing or minimising his abuse, and will be challenged by other participants or by the co-facilitators. Often the man’s account will be used as an example to develop a general theme around that particular pattern of controlling behaviour. In this way, the pedagogical process of the group is anchored in the men’s narratives and experiences, and as such has a felt relevance for them.

Keys Young (1999) reports that there is some ambivalence towards mandated programs, amongst those who facilitate voluntary men’s behaviour change programs. However, as a facilitator, I can state very clearly that the SHED Project is neither ambivalent nor opposed to court-mandated programs. Court-mandated programs have been found to be more effective than voluntary programs (Dobash et al., 2000). However, because most incidents of violence against women are never reported to the police (Gelles, 1997: 159), it seems to me that it is worthwhile to keep open the option of a men’s behaviour change program that caters for both mandated and non-mandated programs. My view is that this is a sensible response to the debate about mandated or non-mandated programs, based on this SHED Project research and experience.

**Collaboration and transparency as foundations for effective practice**

An integrated approach to family violence requires a change of attitude by workers and police (SHED Manual). At times, police members are stressed by situations that
they encounter and, at times, variously experience anxiety, threat or hostility. In PCT terms, anxiety is the experience of having to face situations which are outside one’s experience, and are therefore not part of the person’s construct system (Kelly, 1955/1991). In other words, it is an unknown.

A police member attending a family violence incident may experience some of the above anxiety, not because of the trauma and strength of feeling which s/he is witnessing, but because of a new ambiguity about their role:

*Anxiety is therefore another ‘negative emotion’ which is likely to result from the ambiguity of police officer roles, at least until officers have developed a subsystem of ‘professional’ constructs which allows them to impose some structure on their work experiences. (Winter, 2003a: 125)*

An ambiguity that arises out of an expectation that they change their traditional role in regard to ‘domestics’ and be more proactive in their response to both parties, or as one local police member expressed it, he feared that he was being expected to become a ‘social worker’!

And yet, I believe that the importance of a change of attitude by police in their role as the first point of contact cannot be overstated. For the victim to receive a consistent message from the police, no matter what their gender, that they are not responsible for the man’s abuse and for the perpetrator to get a consistent message that they are responsible for what they do, is crucially important to an effective integrated, inter-agency intervention (Keys Young, 1999: 196; Pence and Shepard, 1999; Research and Education Unit on Gendered Violence School of Social Work and Social Policy University of South Australia, 2003).

At the same time, if the police officer is able to encompass some of the experiences of those they deal with, if they can be empathetic, they will be more effective. Because certain ways of construing might be seen as contributing to a police officer’s ability to better deal with stressful situations, it might be worthwhile to include assessment of their construct system into their selection process. As part of a wider attempt at fostering an integrated and collaborative approach to family violence, police training
programs could be initiated to increase police members’ ability to see the world through the eyes of other people (Winter, 2003a: 138).

Regarding criminal justice responses to men’s violence against intimate partners, the rate of arrests is very low (McGregor and Hopkins, 1991; Holder, 1999; Dobash et al., 2000). I believe that the State should take responsibility for the arrest and punishment of the perpetrator of domestic abuse, rather than the victim having to (Clark et al., 1996: 93), especially because many women would feel themselves powerless to take such action. Yet, the other side of this argument is that such pre-emptive action by authorities would further disempower women, by taking the choice out of their hands.

Mandatory arrest policies in the face of clear evidence of physical or sexual abuse are now the norm in most jurisdictions (Dobash et al., 2000). In the new Victoria Police Code of Practice For the Investigation of Family Violence, police are now required to arrest the offender when there is sufficient evidence. ‘The decision to arrest is the responsibility of the police, not the victim.’ (Victoria Police, 2004: 029)

McGregor and Hopkins state that the pro-arrest policy has a deterrent effect on perpetrators and, therefore, prevents further violence, something that they link with the shame of being arrested (1991: 127). The question is, ‘for how long?’ According to Sherman and Berk, perpetrators who were arrested for violence were far less likely to come to the attention of the police in the 6 months after the arrest (1984). Dobash et al. make the point that the deterrent effect of arrest works better for some men than for others (2000).

Hatty (1988a) notes that in practice, a pro-arrest policy is often sabotaged by the police. Similarly, Holder (1999) found that police used their own discretion not to bring charges and, again, Keys Young (2000) in their evaluation found that ‘police are not following a pro-arrest policy as specified in the protocols’ (2000: 44). Pease, following Keys Young, makes the point that ‘police have been accused by women of being unsympathetic, having a rude or abrupt manner and not properly investigating incidents’ (2002: 161). He goes on to say that this corroborates research by Hatty (1988b) ‘which found that police had a strong identification with the perpetrators of violence’ (2002: 161).
Denborough makes the point based on the accounts of women, that men who have been incarcerated for violence against their partners, often on their release, attempt to increase their dominance and control (1996). Criminalisation does not address cultural and social changes needed (Tifft, 1993: 133) and it does not take into account the ideology that informs the law (Hatty, 1988a). However, it is an important public statement by the community that men’s violence is a serious issue and will be responded to accordingly (Pease, 2002: 162).

**Prevention–reaction to men’s abuse**

This dichotomy of prevention–reaction to men’s violence underlies much of the SHED structure and is therefore reflected in the manual. My own original motivation to begin the SHED Project, as I have stated in Chapter One, came from a felt sense of the need to prevent men’s violence and abuse; preventing men from abusing, rather than not doing anything and then picking up the pieces after they have been abusive. Many of the men who attend SHED have been witnesses to, or victims of, abuse as children. In that sense, I am still picking up the pieces of past abuse by working for men’s behaviour change. Working with these men impacts heavily on me as a worker, in many ways.

**The researcher/practitioner, reflexive issues**

The effects of the research on myself both as researcher and practitioner were many. I found that in the elicitation of the participants’ personal constructs, both through the self-characterisation and through triadic elicitation, I gained a deep insight into what meant most to the participant and, hence, what might enable him to change his abusive behaviour and attitudes. This required an openness, or as Kelly would say, an ‘invitational’ or ‘incredulous’ approach45 which did not threaten or silence the man, but instead gave him the courage to name the behaviours, which needed naming in order for him to change and to move on. I was deeply affected by the naming of these behaviours by the participants, both in the quantity and poignancy of the material. I

45 See the glossary for an explanation of these terms, invitational and incredulous.
felt humbled, repulsed, determined, compassionate, angry and excited at the possibility of change.

In addition, I was often challenged by the men’s stories and asked myself what was the difference between them and me. Facilitating the groups was a continual reminder of how insidious and subtle abusive against women is and how I have been abusive in my own life. I sometimes thought of the phrase, ‘There but for the grace of God go I’ when I was reminded of my own capacity to be abusive, and how I needed to keep vigilant about my own patriarchal attitudes.

In continually hearing the stories of the men both individually in assessments and in the group sessions, I was struck with a sense of humility at the rawness, the hurt and the pain of the men. Sometimes I felt hypocritical about presuming to sit and facilitate the group, because I felt very close to them. There are dangers of collusion, as well as despair, in feeling close to the men and yet what kept me going was the clear realization that the group would probably not continue if I was not prepared to facilitate. Indeed, at one stage when I needed to take a break from the work, no-one was found to fill my position despite extensive advertising. Yet the immediate stakes are very high regarding the safety and wellbeing of the men’s partners and children, as well as the long term cost of the effects on the children themselves and its impact on how they learn to relate.

One of the findings of this research is the realization that on the one hand the facilitator needs to be trained and competent in assessment and group facilitation, and on the other s/he needs to be ready to face their own humanity and to be honest with themselves and those they work with. Working in a men’s behaviour change program, such as the SHED Project, I believe naturally leads one to be hypercritical of oneself in the face of the pain-filled honesty one encounters in the group. This inclination to be overcritical of oneself partly results from not wanting to be hypocritical, and at the

46 I am particularly referring to male facilitators here, since abusive men need to be challenged by other men, co-facilitation notwithstanding (SHED Manual, Section One).
same time recognizing that I am not much different to these men who are struggling to change (Winter, 2003b) as I have indicated above.

My own experience has shown me the need to be more open and compassionate to abusive men, without condoning or colluding. My experience also leads me to value the meaning men put on the various parts of their life, particularly on their relationships, and to try and listen intuitively, to pick up the story between the lines, rather than project my view onto them. This reinforces the need to use the ‘credulous approach’ (Kelly, 1955/1991).

In general, there has been limited emphasis on rehabilitation for men who have been abusive, and this lack has been reflected in government policy and paucity of funding for men’s behaviour change programs. The SHED Project has impacted on government policy development and formulation of best practice for men’s behaviour change programs, and how they are part of an overall strategy to address family violence. In particular, the recognition and encouragement of an inter-agency intervention, focusing on collaboration and protocols that focus on accountability and responsibility of responses to family violence incidents (SHED Manual, Section Six).

Winter talks about the extreme difficulty for a personal constructivist practitioner engaged in an assessment to maintain their credulity, when faced with accounts of abuse and violence. ‘Even if he or she does manage to pass beyond any initial revulsion and begins to adopt a credulous attitude, an increasing degree of threat may be experienced’ (2003b: 15) as more and more of the client’s construction of the world and relationships becomes clear. I strongly agree with this, that it is one of the hardest things to sit with an abusive man, or group of men, and remain ‘credulous’ whilst at the same time attempting to facilitate a process that challenges them to change their attitudes and behaviour.

**Policy development**

There is concern that men’s behaviour change programs will be seen as the only response to men’s violence, at the expense of ‘criminal justice interventions and broader cultural change’ (Pease 2002:160). As one who has been involved with a men’s behaviour change program for the past ten years, I have not seen evidence of
this happening. Indeed, the resourcing of the SHED Project is now back to the same level it was in 1994, despite Government rhetoric about the need for such programs, and despite the project’s endeavours to maintain best practice principles that include accountability to women’s services, and community education. As a result, it seems to me that there is still a significant lack of resources in addressing men’s violence against women through men’s behaviour change programs. I also believe that it is not a case of using one or the other responses to men’s violence, but rather, as I have indicated above, the use of a number of strategies, including men’s behaviour change as part of an holistic response (SHED Manual, Section Six).

Developments and replications of the SHED model of intervention

The following programs represent replications of various forms, of the SHED approach: the COOL, (Control of One’s Life) Project for high school students was originally based on the curriculum of the SHED men’s responsibility program. After piloting and evaluation by the Department of Education, it ran in approximately twenty secondary colleges, until funding ceased; the WAVES, (Women Against Violence through Education and Support) group was established in 1995 for partners of the men attending SHED, and is currently still running; the GRAPPLE men’s behaviour change program in Bairnsdale, began as a result of committed workers in that area, taking the SHED model and adapting it to their circumstances, and over time relaying back to SHED new learnings and useful tools; the Young Indigenous Men’s SHED Program (YIMS) is currently becoming established in the Latrobe Valley; a series of workshops called Managing Aggression, for workers and teachers in the region; a pilot group program for adult male survivors of childhood sexual abuse in Gippsland; and the SHED Network Forum that became the Gippsland Family Violence Network.

The structure of the SHED Manual

From the above discussions emerge important themes that are reflected in the SHED Manual. The structure of the manual is as important as its content and the process of delivery for a men’s behaviour change program is just as important as what is
delivered (content). The medium, in a very real sense, is the message for men who sit in a group grappling to learn how to express themselves clearly and honestly, how to listen and how to change controlling behaviour founded on an underlying belief in male privilege. Men sitting in such a group need the alternative ways of thinking, attitudes and behaviours, modelled in the sessions, so they can practise themselves.

Although remaining positive about the SHED Manual, I will now briefly state some of its limitations.

- As a written document, it is necessarily ‘head-level’ and does not convey well the need for an intuitive approach that responds to the dynamics and emotional space in the group. Such an intuitive approach is essential to the effective challenging of abusive beliefs and supporting efforts to remain non-violent.

- The SHED Manual is necessarily my construction, based on my personal constructs of this work, albeit influenced by my colleagues and co-facilitators, and the collected practice wisdom of many other practitioners and theorists. To that extent, it is a personal document that will be used as and, when it is useful, by and for others.

- Because it is idiosyncratic, it may not suit the style of other workers.

- At times the complexity of PCT is hard to understand and apply usefully. In such situations it is difficult, but important, not to allow the process to overshadow or intimidate the client, rather than facilitate them into finding constructive alternatives in their lives.

**Conclusion**

On the basis of assessing the useful application of personal construct techniques with abusive men to enable them to change their behaviour, I will once again have a constructive revision of the SHED Manual and continue to re(de)fine it in terms of the next experience cycle, and what I anticipate on the basis of this experience. In this way the experimentation of using PCT techniques in working with abusive men
becomes yet another stage in the ongoing process of constructive revision that anticipates better ways of challenging men’s violence against women.

This project and exegesis has reflected on the application and usefulness of personal construct theory in working towards behaviour change with abusive men. It has demonstrated over a number of years the contribution this application of theory can make to addressing men’s violence against women. The SHED Manual presents a model of an integrated approach to challenging men’s violence in an ongoing way, both at the individual and structural levels. This approach is both complex and challenging as is shown in the reflexive nature of the project. Whilst there are no easy solutions, there are indicators and ‘signposts’ for best practice in a collaborative integrated response that addresses men’s behaviour change within the priority of women and children’s safety.
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LIST OF APPENDICES

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APPENDIX K: Book Chapter in P. Cummins, (ed) (In press)
APPENDIX A: Profiles of the Participants

Matt (36) is a social science student. He immigrated to Australia three years previously. His upbringing included physical violence from his father and manipulation by his mother. Matt’s cultural beliefs about a man’s right to complete control over his family are very strong. Matt is married to Sam, an Australian woman who is a graduate of the welfare studies course, and who has encouraged him to pursue a career as a social worker. They have a one year old son. Matt attended the Shed Project after participating in a seminar I facilitated with students about men's violence to women and children. He attended 10/12 sessions of the men's responsibility program.

Lou (37) has been in a relationship with Noreen for eleven years and has been married to her for 6 of them. He has two sons in primary school and an eighteen year old step-daughter Molly. Lou is physically very big and strong. He works as a fitter and turner on an off-shore oil rig for two week long twelve hour shifts, (two on -two off). He says the work is very hard and the hours long, and that he is ‘past it’. His illiteracy has prevented him from getting a 'white hat job' supervising. Lou's long term intimidation, and threatening behaviour and put-downs escalated to physical violence against his teenage step-daughter and he called the police. No charges were laid but he came to the Shed Project. Lou has been suicidal during this period, and has been taking anti-depressants.

Bart (36) has been married to his childhood sweetheart for 17 years and has two daughters (Cilla and Mandy) in high school. His wife Teena works in the paper mill and earns twice Bart's salary. He works in a local sawmill as a bench operator and also does relief milking on the weekends for a nearby dairy farmer. He has been emotionally and verbally abusive for at least 15 years. Much of the time Bart portrays himself as the victim, especially regarding a current affair Teena is having with another woman.

Hank (34) is in a de facto relationship with Donna and has a two year old son. He initially attended the second cohort for one session but could not accept the challenges
he received from the group about his behaviour. He only returned to the Shed Project as the result of a protective investigation by child protection. He subsequently went to court and was directed to attend once again for assessment. Hank has a history of controlling and manipulative, and at times, violent behaviour. Donna has been admitted for psychiatric treatment on a number of occasions following his violence and abuse. Hank enjoys being eccentric. Hank has been a lifeline counsellor, is a referee for soccer and an umpire for cricket, as well as working in community radio.

Brad (45) is Maori, married to Danielle, and has been married three times, (the second was de facto). In all three marriages he has been violent, both physically and in other ways. He works as an interstate truckie. His capacity to inflict injury and cause fear increases when he is drunk. According to his teenage son his past violence has also been at times when he has been taking 'speed', to enable him to drive longer. Brad's father died when he was eighteen months old. Both Brad and his wife have seriously contemplated suicide. Whilst completing the program he moved up to the Gold Coast.

Henry (42) is a plumber, divorced, with four grown children. He re-married two years previously to Cathy who is fifteen years younger, and they have a baby son. Henry often uses alcohol as an excuse for his physical violence and intimidation towards his wife. Issues about his grown children and how they relate to his new wife are common grounds for friction. For him everything seems black or white.
### APPENDIX B: Summary of Research Cohorts

Below is a combined table of the three cohorts (men’s responsibility programs) with the number of research participants and non-participants in each and how they rated on the six criteria.

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APPENDIX C: Research Methodology Summary

1. First Self-Characterisation (at start of mrp)

2. Elicitation of Constructs

3. Choosing Elements

4. Rating Elements

5. Triadic elicitation and rating

6. Supplied constructs and rating

7. Computer data processing

8. Grid Analysis, discussion and participation

9. Second self-characterisation (half way through mrp)

10. Fixed Role Therapy

11. Third self – characterisation (on completion of mrp)

12. Elicitation of Constructs

13. Choosing Elements

14. Rating Elements

15. Triadic elicitation and rating

16. Supplied constructs and rating

17. Computer data processing

18. Grid Analysis discussion participant feedback
APPENDIX D: Community Education Presentations (1994-2001)

26/5/94 Seminar on men's violence, conducted for social welfare students at Monash University Gippsland. (approx 30 attended)
3/6/94 Men's Violence Workshop for psychologists, doctors, and therapists, at Tanjara, Westbury. approx 20 attendees.
18/7/94 ‘Working with domestically violent men’, part of a seminar to secondary teachers. (50 participants)
14/10/94 A talk on the Men's SHED (Self Help Ending Domestics) Project given at the AGM of ChAMP (Child Abuse Management Program). (20 attended)
7/11/94 'Male violence in the home and community attitudes', a talk given to the Churchill Rotary Club. (20 attended)
29/11/94 'Dealing with Male Violence' a workshop organized for workers in the Gippsland area. (25)
4/4/95 'Working with violent men' a talk given to H&CS child protection workers in Morwell. (16)
1/5/95 'The Men's SHED Project: A personal journey towards responsibility, mutual respect and non-violence for men', a talk given to Australian Psychological Society members in the Latrobe Valley. (11)
2/5/95 ABC Radio interview re the SHED Project
2/5/95 Gippsland Community Radio interview re Men's violence at home.
8/6/95 "Men's responsibility for their violence at home, and what is being done in the SHED Project" a talk to approx 50 men at a Men's Health Night at the Yarram Community Health Centre.
30/6/95 "The Men's SHED Project" a talk given to the Tanjil Valley CWA (30)
15/7/95 Talk given to venturer scouts on alcohol/other drugs and violent or abusive behaviour (18)
28/7/95 COOL Pilot Project (10 week duration) commenced at Kurnai College Churchill, (16 participants and 3 co-facilitators)
19/9/95 Anger and aggression and how we can control it. -session with secondary college boys at Presentation College Newborough (20)
12/10/95 "Mens violence and abuse and related issues in its control" -a talk given to Life-line volunteers. (12)

1996

25/2/96 “The Men’s SHED Project - a community response to safety at home”, a paper presented at the Fifth International Conference on Safe Communities. (30)
29/3/96 “The Men’s SHED Project as part of an integrated approach to addressing family violence” a talk given to SAAP youth workers working with homeless youth.in the Sale region. (10)
9/5/96 “Men’s violence and alcohol” a talk to LEAP group at Yallourn TAFE.(22)
3/6/96 “How the local A and D Service responds to issues of family violence” talk given to 5th year medical students at the dept of Rural Health. (8)
4/6/96 “The Men’s SHED Project as a response to family violence” a talk given to the Willow Grove CWA. (18)
6/6/96 “The COOL (Control of one’s life) Project” a train-the-trainer day at Traralgon, -joint facilitation. (15)
25/7/96 “Issues of violence, abuse, aggression and drugs for young people”, a talk to a LEAP group in Moe. (11)
23/8/96. “Ongoing issues for research into the values, attitudes, perceptions and beliefs of men attending the SHED Project’s Men’s Responsibility Program” A PhD Seminar presenting research in progress, to staff and postgraduate students in the School of Social Work at the University of Melbourne. (16)
18/9/96 “The Men’s SHED Project and community safety”, a talk to the Tanjil Valley Neighbourhood Watch monthly meeting. (9)
2/10/96 “An outline of the SHED Project and issues relating to men’s violence against women and children in the family” A seminar to Human Services child protection workers (approx. 40) at Traralgon.
8/10/96 “Issues for sentencing options, rehabilitation, the prevention of men’s violence, and community safety.” A submission to the VCCAV public consultation in sentencing, at Traralgon. (approx 25 present)
6/11/96 “Men’s violence: social and individual issues” a research in progress seminar to the mental health practice research unit at the School of Social Work, University of Melbourne. (20)
28/11/96 “Breaking the cycle of family violence -working with young men” a key note address to the V-Net forum/workshop for workers, at Melbourne. (30)
Dec. 1996 Interview and coverage of SHED group on Four Corners TV program

1997
Senate Select Committee hearing into violence in the media, invitation to participate and present (Hansard 1997:14).
11/2/97 Participation in a meeting with the SAAP regional network.
“Strategies for future planning and redevelopment of Gippsland Domestic Violence Services” and a presentation about the SHED Project’s philosophy of a collaborative approach. (35)
14/3/97 “Issues in dealing effectively with men’s anger leading to violence and abuse in a service for the disabled” a talk with staff at Gippsland Accomodation and Rehabilitation Support Service Inc. (8)
25/3/97 consultation with two workers from Juvenile Justice Dept. following their request for some advice about how to design and implement a program for young offenders.
30/4/97 “Working with violent men” presentation at a seminar for counsellors and prison officers at Fulham Jail. (approx 30 participants)
8/5/97 Joint -facilitator at a train-the-trainer program for ‘COOL’ (Control one’s own life) held in Leongatha and attended by teachers, juvenile justice workers, counsellors and chaplains from schools in Gippsland. (35)
12/5/97 Radio interview with Penny Johnson on ABCFM talking about the SHED Project and men’s stress, anger, and violence.
15/5/97 “Issues of anger, aggression and violence, and how they effect the health of men and those they live with” a presentation to a men’s health night at the Wellington Community Health Service in Sale. (Approx 60 men attended)
19/5/97 “The Men’s SHED Project, three years on”, a talk to the staff of Relationships Australia in Traralgon. (5)
20/5/97 “The SHED Project’s approach to issues of men’s violence.” a talk to students and staff at the Central Gippsland Institute of TAFE. (approx 50 attended)
21/5/97 “The SHED Project and a more collaborative integrated intervention to family violence.” a talk to students doing the welfare issues elective at Monash University Gippsland. (approx 30 participants).
24/7/97 “Male role models” presentation and facilitation of a session to primary school teachers in the Moe area as part of Turning the Tide, -Drug related student welfare in schools.(30)
28/7/97 Facilitation of a workshop on anger, abuse, violence and aggression, presented to clients and workers at GARRS, with a view to them replicating their own controlling abusive behaviours program, (cancelled due to lack of client interest). (14)
20/8/97 “Male role models” presentation and facilitation of a session to primary school teachers in the Traralgon area as part of Turning the Tide, -Drug related student welfare in schools.(35)
26/8/97 “Male role models” presentation and facilitation of a session to primary school teachers in the Traralgon area as part of Turning the Tide, -Drug related student welfare in schools.(40)
2/9/97 The Men’s SHED Project, how it relates to a police response to family violence, and its place in an integrated approach. The first of a series of semi-formal, short training sessions to Vic Police members at the Moe Police Station. Jointly facilitated with the co-ordinator the local women’s refuge who gave an equivalent presentation on her service and how it fits in a collaborative approach to addressing family violence. (7)
11/9/97 “Anger, aggression, low self-esteem, and alternatives to violence.” A workshop presentation to year 9 boys and girls at Presentation College, Newborough. (Two sessions with 25 students in each group).
16/9/97 The Men’s SHED Project, how it relates to a police response to family violence, and its place in an integrated approach. The second of a series of semi-formal, short training sessions to Vic Police members at the Moe Police Station. Jointly facilitated with the co-ordinator the local women’s refuge who gave an equivalent presentation on her service and how it fits in a collaborative approach to addressing family violence. (6)
16/9/97 “Male socialisation, aggression, bullying, low self-esteem and constructive alternatives.” A brief presentation to staff at Stockdale Rd Primary School. (20)
22/9/97 How to implement a more effective and collaborative family violence prevention strategy, -a combined presentation to Leon Gettler, journalist with the Age. Other contributors in the session represented the local refuge, the women’s group for victims (WAVES), and The Family Action Research Centre.
23/9/97 “The SHED Project, its aim, objectives, and main components, -and what is its place in a police response to family violence.” A brief
presentation to police station commanders as part of their periodic training sessions. (approx 20 attended).

9/10/97  “Anger management and self-esteem” Co-facilitation of a workshop to year 10 students at Traralgon Secondary College. Two sessions with 18 students in each.

10/10/97  “The Choices We Make” Commencement of a six week program to twelve year 10, year 11 and year 12 male and female students identified as bullies by other students and staff at Traralgon Secondary College. (10)

10/10/97  “Anger management” Commencement of a six week program requested by a group of year 9 boys identified by staff as being problem students, at Traralgon Secondary College. (8)

21/10/97  “A brief update on the Men’s SHED Project” A presentation to the new board of management for the Latrobe Community Health Service. (8)

3/12/97  “The SHED Project, a collaborative approach” -a presentation to psychiatric workers in the community support team and acute ward staff at Gippsland Psychiatric Services. Part of an initiative to address issues of family violence among psychiatric patients. (15)

9/12/97  “Men’s violence and the SHED Project’s approach to it” -a presentation to the WAVES group (Women Against Violence through Education and Support). (8)

10/12/97  “How the SHED Project is part of an integrated family violence strategy” -a presentation in Leongatha to workers in the South Gippsland area. (20)

1998

2/2/98  Radio interview about SHED Project on Gippsland Community Radio.

19/2/98  Participation in a research forum about effective programs for violent men, organised by VCCAV.

20/2/98  Interview for A Current Affair about the SHED Project.

12/3/98  Lecture to final year University of Melbourne social work students on the SHED Project as a model for group work with abusive men (approx 50 participants).

17/3/98  Consultation with Anglicare workers from Melbourne seeking effective intervention strategies with teenagers around issues of violence, bullying and drug abuse

26/3/98  Submission to the Model Domestic Violence Legislation Working Group regarding their discussion paper.

2/4/98  “The SHED Project-an opportunity for men to change violent and abusive behaviour”. A seminar given to approx 50 TAFE students at Yallourn.

16/4/98  A consultation with staff an Migrant Resource Centre in Morwell regarding collaborative intervention.

23/4/98  “Men’s violence in society and the SHED Project as a model to address it”. A lecture given to social welfare students at Monash University. The session was video taped before an audience of approximately 50 students, for use with distance education.

6/5/98  Two sessions on anger management and the prevention of violence and abuse, given as part of a health forum for year 11 students at Leongatha Secondary College. There were approximately 20 participants.

8/5/98  “The SHED Project as part of an integrated strategy that addresses men’s violence against known women and children”. A presentation as part of a Family Violence Prevention Forum entitled MAYDAY at Sale, and
organised jointly by the CWA and the Women’s Health Service. There were approximately 30 participants.
10/6/98 “SHED tools - constructive alternatives to harmful behaviour” presentation of a workshop at the National Forum on Men and Relationships, organised by the Attorney General’s Department, in Canberra.
12/6/98 “The SHED Project - an approach to working with perpetrators of family violence”. Informal seminar discussion with TAFE students in a counselling course.
25/6/98 Meeting with Gippsland Psychiatric Services about design and delivery of a training program for their staff to deal more effectively with issues of men’s abuse and violence.
7/7/98 “SHED tools to construct non-violent alternatives”. A presentation at the Eighth Australasian Personal Construct Psychology Conference, Brisbane.
27/7/98 “Fixed Role as a technique used in the SHED Project.” A presentation at a V-Net training session for those working in perpetrator programs. Approximately thirty workers participated.
29/7/98 Commenced four week supervisory co-facilitation of a men’s group at Creative House. The participants were men with a psychiatric illness and the focus of the group sessions was anger, frustration and violence. There were eight participants.
14/8/98 Presentation of draft ‘practice’ chapter on the SHED Project to an editorial meeting, for inclusion in the third edition of the textbook Issues for Australian Families.

1999
12/5/99 Presentation on existing protocols to the magistrates at the Moe Court along with CORE.
12/5/99 Initial training session to Gippsland Psychiatric nurses for pre- and post testing of in-patients for research into abuse. (6 participants)
14/5/99 Presentation to No To Violence executive about an integrated family violence approach, for a submission to Canberra. (8 participants)
19/5/99 Training seminar for child protection workers regarding the SHED Project and its part in an integrated response. (approx 35 participants)
19/5/99 Training session to volunteers for the Victorian Court Network. (15)
19/5/99 Training for psychiatric nurses in pre- and post testing for research (6)
20/5/99 Presentation of submission to Gippsland Anti-Violence Project management team at Fulham. (20 present)
26-28/5/99 Participation at the national forum into men’s perpetrator programs, in Canberra,
2/6/99 Training for psychiatric nurses in pre- and post testing for research (6)
3/6/99 Training presentation to GPS workers and others regarding group facilitation. (18)
17/6/99 Seminar to TAFE students about the role of the SHED Project. (30)
17/6/99 Co-facilitation of the MAPPS group for juvenile sex offenders. (5)
22/6/99 Managing Violence and Aggression Workshop, at Leongatha (22)
25/6/99 Workshops to students at Leongatha Secondary College (approx 25)
29/6/99 Managing Violence and Aggression Workshop, at Morwell (20)
30/6/99 Training of psychiatric nurses in pre- and post testing for research (6)
1/7/99 Co-facilitation of the MAPPS group for juvenile sex offenders. (5)
26/8/99 Male survivors of childhood sexual abuse ten-week group program commences, co-facilitation. (6)
3/9/99 Collaborative training session presentation with GRAPPLE workers in Bairnsdale (10)
26/9/99 Men Working with violent men, a training day for workers. (30)
29/9/99 Presentation to the Gippsland Leadership training program at Fulham Prison and Tafe (approximately 20 participants)
20/10/99 Informal presentation on the role of the SHED Project to the West Gippsland Psychologists group.
21/10/99 Multiple workshop presentations at the young mens day as part of the two day Men finding the way forward conference in Moe (approx 20 participants)
22/10/99 Multiple workshop presentations on the role of the SHED Project in preventing family violence, as part of the two day Men finding the way forward conference in Moe. (approx 8 participants)
26/10/99 Training seminar for Victims Assistance Program volunteers on how to deal with violent and aggressive situations.
17/11/99 Training of psychiatric nurses in pre- and post testing for research (6)
18/11/99 Presentation to principals of Latrobe Valley schools, on the work of the Moe Family Violence Key Stakeholder group (approx 40).
19/11/99 Managing Violence and Aggression Workshop, Bairnsdale (13)
24/11/99 Training of psychiatric nurses in pre- and post testing for research (3)
24/11/99 Men working with violent men -two hour workshop facilitation (12)
26/11/99 Managing Violence and Aggression Workshop, Morwell (15)

Year 2000
19/6/00 Leongatha Secondary College, 3 workshops on conflict resolution and anger management for year 11 girls and boys, (48)
28/7/00 Centrelink organised training in working with aggressive clients for volunteers from the community organisations (35)
3/8/00 LoyYang Power shift managers workshop on working with difficult situations (12)

Year 2001
15/02/01 Applications of PCT as used in Shed Project, presentation to regional alcohol and drug workers. (15)
14/03/01 Working group on Women’s Safety Strategy at the Office of Women’s Policy, dept of Premier and Cabinet. (20)
19/03/01 Seminar to Monash engineering students (3rd Year) on the affects of stress and aggression in the workplace. (6)
21/3/01 Presentation/workshop with Gippsland CASA workers about groupwork and its issues and benefits, as well as its difficulties. (7)
5/5/01 “Men and Relationships” a workshop facilitated as part of the Gippsland Psychology Conference ‘Healthy Families, Relationships and Lifestyles’ (12)
The assumptions of constructive alternativism are embedded in what Kelly called the Fundamental Postulate: ‘A person’s processes are psychologically channelized by the ways in which s/he anticipates events’ (Kelly 1970:9). This basic postulate has eleven corollaries which carry out the function of delineating the boundaries of Personal Construct Theory. (Kelly 1970) I will refer to them briefly here because of their centrality to PCT, and hence to this research. For example, if a man who is abusive can anticipate events in his life differently, then his way of thinking, construing, his attitudes and values in relation to those events can change and consequently his behaviour too, can change.

I will now give an outline of the eleven corollaries and an example with each one that illustrates how it is applicable to working with men who have been violent. The corollaries are as follows:

**The construction corollary:** ‘A person anticipates events by construing their replications’ (or repetitions), (Kelly 1970:11). For example, a man who is referred to the SHED Project because of his abuse to his family might arrive at the assessment interview very remorseful or feeling sorry for himself, another may arrive angry and denying blame, and a third might feel relieved that at last something is being done. They may all be anxious about the assessment, but they will anticipate it according to how they perceive or construe its replication. Similarly, if they construe their abusive behaviour as counter-productive.

**The individuality corollary:** ‘Persons differ from each other in their constructions of events’ (Kelly 1970:12). For example, the three men alluded to above, all constructed the assessment ‘event’ differently before it occurred, all anticipated differently what would happen, and hence all had different emotional reactions, and altered expectations. There will be countless factors which may contribute to a person’s constructions of events. For example, what they have heard from other people about being interviewed by a social worker, or what they have experienced previously, or it may be that the whole process is full of ‘unknowns’ for them and hence they conjure up all sorts of possibilities out of their anxiety or fear or paranoia. If they are abusing substances like alcohol or other drugs, this will further impinge on the way they
construct the event. In addition to the above process, each person’s construction of the event will differ according to what actually occurs, and what meaning they put on it.

**The Organisation corollary:** ‘Each person characteristically evolves, for her/his convenience in anticipating events, a construction system embracing ordinal relationships between constructs’ (Kelly 1970:12). For example, let us take the three men mentioned above. The first man who is remorseful may construe his behaviour in a negative way because it collides with his construing of a loving relationship between himself and his wife and children. He may have begun to realise that his son is imitating his abusive behaviour and his fact is at odds with his construction of a son to mother relationship. If he is feeling sorry for himself, it may be that he construes himself as a victim, (of circumstance, of his wife and children, of the government, of life in general,) and hence his ‘having to come’ to the assessment, fits in to a construction system in which he constructs himself in the victim role in many other circumstances in his life.

The second man is angry and into denial, and this may be because he has been forced to be accountable, or because he believes he has a right to treat his family abusively, or because he has been brought up with the construct that this is how a man ‘normally’ and ‘rightfully’ relates to a woman, and so why shouldn’t he be like that. This man may also be habitually angry with himself, the world, others, and so the way he constructs the assessment ‘event’ may be with anger, often using denial of his abuse to justify himself. Again, this may be a construction system that he has evolved because it fits conveniently with some of his other personal constructs.

The third man might just be relieved because his violent behaviour is at odds with how he construes himself, and how others construe him. It might also be at odds with his core values, and hence the discrepancy with be causing stress in his system of personal constructs. Hopefully this stress and tension in his world, will enable him to reconstruct and change his behaviour.

**The dichotomy corollary:** ‘A person’s construction system is composed of a finite number of dichotomous constructs’ (Kelly’1970:12). They are dichotomous because as Kelly put it; “...a construct is a ‘black and white’ affair, never a matter of shadings, or
of ‘grays’. ..yet I would insist that there is nothing categorical about a construct”.
(1970:12-13). Kelly is not absolutising rather he is relativising. What Kelly is doing
with the dichotomy corollary is showing how constructs are like the reference axes
from Cartesian analytical geometry. A person is able to project any event onto these
reference axes in an attempt to find meaning in it, or make sense from what is going
on.

Taking the examples of the three men above, for each of them their construct systems
are made up of a limited number of dichotomous constructs. Some of those
constructs may be divided into various categories, for example constructs about their
families, family background, work, self-perception, and so forth. Each man’s history,
family, relationships, work, school gives him the basis on which to build his personal
constructs. “A construct is the basic contrast between two groups. When it is imposed
it serves both to distinguish between its elements and to group them.”(Kelly 1970:13).
In this research, I will show, how the participants’ constructs illustrate this, that they
recognize and articulate the dichotomy between what they are or do, and what they
would rather be, and how to bridge the gap.

The choice corollary: ‘A person chooses for him/herself that alternative in a
dichotomous construct through which he/she anticipates the greater possibility for
extension and definition of his/her system’ (Kelly’1970:15). For example, the first man
who chooses remorse rather than being indignant, might do so because he sees that
choice to be more ‘constructive’ and less ‘destructive’ for his personal system. If he is
feeling sorry for himself, rather than taking responsibility, it may be that this is the
choice which has gained him rewards ever since he was a small child. Similarly, the
second man who is angry rather than calm, might choose that option because it fits
with the way he constructs his personal system of meaning, it fits with how he
construes life, so the assessment ‘event’ is used by him as yet another occasion that
defines his system. The third man who construes the assessment with relief, may be
anticipating that it will allow the possibility that his personal dilemma at the
discrepancy between what he does at home to his wife and kids and how he is
regarded in the community, will be resolved. Hence he chooses relief rather than
suffering for himself. In each example of the three men, their choices have much to do
with what they construe is good for them and what serves their convenience.
The range corollary: ‘A construct is convenient for the anticipation for a finite range of events only’ (Kelly, 1970:16) In other words a particular personal construct will only be applicable in a limited number of circumstances. Kelly expands on this:

A construct has its focus of convenience - a set of objects with which it works especially well. Over a somewhat larger range it may work only reasonably well; that is its range of convenience. But beyond that it fades into uselessness... (1970:17)

For example, a man’s construct might be: feeling sorry for himself-content, at home it may work well, but may not do that at all at work, or with friends. A man whose construct is: remorseful about his behaviour to his wife and kids-uncaring, would not be able to apply that particular construct at work for example. Its focus of convenience is the home. However if his construct is: remorseful-uncaring, then he might apply it to his cruelty to pets, or his bullying at work, because the construct now has a wider range of convenience. The man whose construct is: angry- respectful at home, will only be able to use it to anticipate a limited number of events at the home, because that is its range of convenience.

The experience corollary: ‘A person’s construction system varies as he/she successfully construes the replication of events’ (Kelly, 1970:17) For example, if the first man’s construing serves his purpose, then he varies his personal construction system accordingly. To put this another way, he will use what works best for him, according to how he perceives things, which may not be the way his wife, children, the courts, or community, or how the police see things. Again, Kelly puts it this way: “...the tendency is for personal constructs to shift when events are projected upon them.” (1970:17). Kelly goes on to refer to ‘the experience cycle’ (Kelly, 1970).

The modulation corollary: ‘The variation in a person’s construction system is limited by the permeability of the constructs within whose range of convenience the variants lie’ (Kelly, 1970:19). For example, the first man who feels sorry for himself, and construes himself regularly as a victim will find it most difficult to change or vary his construct system to allow any other possible construction to be admitted. To the extent that someone is so entrenched in a particular view that any other possibility is unthinkable, to that extent their personal construct system is limited. That inflexible
construct is said to be ‘impermeable’, not able to be perpetuated by a different way of seeing things.

**The fragmentation corollary:** ‘A person may successfully employ a variety of construction sub-systems which are inferentially incompatible with each other’ (Kelly, 1970:20) For example, it is not uncommon for an abusive man to claim he loves the wife and children whom he regularly abuses. He is not loving, caring or affectionate in how he relates, they do not feel loved but abused and scared, and yet he maintains a personal construction that has him both loving them and justifying his abuse.

**The commonality corollary:** ‘To the extent that one person employs a construction of experience which is similar to that employed by another, his/her psychological processes are similar to that employed by the other person’ (Kelly, 1970:20). For example, men who participate in the group often side with one another. This collusion is often based on a common construing of male - female relationships. These group participants habitually collude with one another to justify, excuse, blame others, and deny their own responsibility for their violent behaviour.

**The sociality corollary:** ‘To the extent that one person construes the construction processes of another, he/she may play a role in a social process involving the other person’ (Kelly, 1970:22). For example, in a men’s responsibility group, if one of the participants is able to understand another and indeed construes similarly, then he is well placed to help enable that man to change. He will be able to support as well as challenge the man in his endeavour to become non-violent and be response-able, in this way the group offers an opportunity to experience a different cultural perspective for the men. It offers a culture of non-violence, and respect, as well as a practical medium in which to learn how to switch ‘cultures’ and how to cement that change so that he does not slip back into old abusive habits.
### APPENDIX F: Example of Repertory Grid Forms Used (‘Bart’)

**Bart (M)**

**Date:** 17/9/97

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A. Self-characterisation</th>
<th>Ideal me</th>
<th>Me 6 months ago</th>
<th>Best mate</th>
<th>Someone in authority</th>
<th>Someone I admire</th>
<th>Father</th>
<th>Parent</th>
<th>Someone I like</th>
<th>Mother</th>
<th>Someone I dislike</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very insecure</td>
<td>1 5 1 3 3 6 2 2 5 5 3 1</td>
<td>happy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lacks trust</td>
<td>2 6 1 6 5 3 6 2 6 5 3 2</td>
<td>open-minded</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>would like to deal with issues</td>
<td>3 1 6 1 3 3 3 3 1 3 3 2</td>
<td>shuts down</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>resentful</td>
<td>1 6 1 6 3 4 3 4 5 4 2 1</td>
<td>has not been hurt</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lacks self confidence</td>
<td>1 6 1 4 6 4 4 3 5 6 4 3</td>
<td>motivated “in forward gear”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>feels inferior</td>
<td>1 4 1 5 6 5 4 3 6 4 2 4</td>
<td>comfortable with who they are</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>married</td>
<td>1 4 1 6 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1</td>
<td>separated</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>caring</td>
<td>5 1 6 4 1 9 1 3 1 2 3 5</td>
<td>self-centred</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>achieve</td>
<td>2 1 4 1 1 1 1 3 1 1 4 3</td>
<td>laid-back</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>insecure</td>
<td>1 5 1 4 3 3 1 5 4 3 1</td>
<td>nothing phases him</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>great guys – easy-going</td>
<td>6 2 6 3 4 1 1 3 3 1 2 4</td>
<td>‘a load of shit’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>care-free</td>
<td>5 1 3 5 4 3 3 3 3 3 3 5</td>
<td>involved with people’s lives</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>non-threatening</td>
<td>6 1 4 1 1 3 1 1 1 5 1 5</td>
<td>intimidating</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>respects</td>
<td>5 1 6 4 1 1 3 1 1 1 3 3</td>
<td>emotionally abusive</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>supportive</td>
<td>3 1 4 1 1 3 3 1 3 3 3 3</td>
<td>uses isolation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>honest</td>
<td>5 1 6 1 1 5 1 1 3 3 3 3</td>
<td>minimizes denies, blames</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fair</td>
<td>3 1 4 1 1 3 1 1 1 4 1 4</td>
<td>uses coercion and threats</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shades responsibility</td>
<td>2 1 4 1 1 2 3 1 1 1 7 1 7</td>
<td>uses male privilege</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### A. Self-characterisation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>father</th>
<th>research</th>
<th>partner</th>
<th>someone</th>
<th>mother</th>
<th>someone I dislike</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1: exactly like . . .</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2: very like . . .</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3: a bit like . . .</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trait</th>
<th>Scores</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>emotional</td>
<td>23154254435</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>confused</td>
<td>142353245545</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>has plans</td>
<td>425423233243</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>looking to the future</td>
<td>4152233352255</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>great guy</td>
<td>113121431126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>doesn't give up</td>
<td>315323132134</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trait</th>
<th>Scores</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>married</td>
<td>21214144113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>get on like brother</td>
<td>315232432135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>emotional person</td>
<td>142342534536</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shared common ground</td>
<td>426333542236</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>good relationships</td>
<td>614122432134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shared experience</td>
<td>424222522236</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trait</th>
<th>Scores</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>non-threatening</td>
<td>215221532235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>respects</td>
<td>315111332133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>supportive</td>
<td>113111322123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>honest</td>
<td>215111371124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fair</td>
<td>214111422125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shares responsibility</td>
<td>111111531113</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trait</th>
<th>Scores</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>workmate - boss</td>
<td>213212135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hateful</td>
<td>315232432135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dominating</td>
<td>142342534536</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wary stand-offish</td>
<td>426333542236</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>going through a stressful time</td>
<td>614122432134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>can't relate</td>
<td>424222522236</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trait</th>
<th>Scores</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>intimidating</td>
<td>215221532235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>emotionally abusive</td>
<td>315111332133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>uses isolation</td>
<td>113111322123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>minimizes, denies, blames</td>
<td>215111371124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>uses coercion and threats</td>
<td>214111422125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>uses male privilege</td>
<td>111111531113</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Plot of Coordinates for dimensions 1 and 2

1. easy going
2. understanding
3. best mate
4. someone in authority
5. admire
6. partner
7. father
8. researcher
9. dislike

Gap because of attitude (bad)
with daughter: dislike

At least 2 months

Not much change in

Menstrual
Plot of Coordinates for dimensions 1 and 2

hard-working, doing family things

like for today, for themselves & stuff everything else

Safecomm Paper (1996)

The Fifth International Conference on Safe Communities


Workshop: Violence and fear of violence in a Safe Community perspective.


Author and presenter: Chris Laming (project officer) Contact: The Men’s SHED Project, PO Box 63, MOE, Vic. 3825 Australia. Tel: (051)275555, Fax: (051)277002

* S.H.E.D. (Self-Help Ending Domestics)

The Men’s SHED Project - A Community response to safety at home.

Introduction
This paper is about family violence and about how one community seeks to address it. A background is given explaining the circumstances that make the SHED Project necessary. The name SHED was chosen as a shed is often the place men go when they are at home and they need to sit and think about life. SHED also stands for “Self-Help Ending Domestics” and refers to the fact that men must take responsibility for their own violent and abusive behaviour and change themselves.

The need for the SHED Project as a response to family violence in the area is apparent from a socio-cultural, economic and historical analysis of the region. The request for a men’s program came from workers assisting women in abusive and violent relationships. I was employed to set up a project that addressed men’s violence effectively according to the latest research. A critical reference group was formed to support me in the endeavour. A project philosophy, aim and objectives were agreed to. The main components of the SHED Project were gradually formulated in line with the objectives.

The SHED Project addresses men’s violence on a number of levels. At an individual level, challenging men and supporting women. At a family level drawing the connections between inter-generational learning and violent behaviour. At a societal level confronting sexist and patriarchal attitudes which propagate and encourage men’s violence through strategies of power and control. The project undergoes a continuous process of review, evaluation, and modification of intervention strategies in a cycle of praxis,(action-reflection-action).

Definitions:
For our purposes the following definition of men’s violence is used:

1
Men’s violence is any behaviour which leaves a woman living in fear, which is used by a man to control his victim, and which results in physical, sexual and/or psychological damage, forced social isolation or economic deprivation. (adapted from NCAW 1992:vii)

In this discussion domestic violence is used interchangably with family violence and they both refer to predominantly men’s violence against women. The term male violence is not used since it infers that violence is inherently connected to the maleness of a person, rather than learned behaviour.

Background
Gippsland is a largely rural area bordered in the south and east by the sea, in the north by mountains and in the west by the Melbourne Metropolitan Area. The population of the area is approx 244,000 and about 72,000 of those live in the Latrobe Valley. The dairy industry, mining, the power industry, logging, and paper mill are the main sources of employment in Gippsland.

The recent Commonwealth Department of Human Services and Health’s Regional Needs Analysis 1995 made the following statement:

..in the three year period to October 1993...16,000 people were retrenched in Gippsland. . . This statistic at 15.7% of people in the age group 18 to 65 is substantially higher than the statistic of 10.8% in the Melbourne region for the same period. . . A sense of insecurity prevails in the local community in the face of high levels of poverty and a bleak economic future. High levels of social dysfunction and distress are indicated by a range of factors including family breakdown (10.1% of the Latrobe Valley population live in sole parent families compared to the state level of 7.5%), suicide, crime, homelessness, domestic violence, substance abuse and psychiatric illness. (1995:33)

Again, in the same report the following statement:

The Region has an under supply of domestic violence services (particularly in South Gippsland) including women's refuges and domestic violence outreach workers. This is of particular concern given the high levels of stress in the Latrobe Valley and the fact that the Region has the highest number of reports of domestic violence of any country region. (1995:36)

The August 1995 police statistics for Q District Gippsland show that the number of domestic assaults are more than double the number of non-domestic assaults (44:20). This police statistic reflects the generally high level of violence in the district.

It is in this context that the Men's S.H.E.D. (Self-Help Ending Dominances) Pilot Project was established in March 1994 at the Community Health Centre in Moe, a town in the heart of the Latrobe Valley. It was the clear perception of a number of female workers involved with victims of family violence that there was a gap in the service provision. Many abused women were presenting for support and assistance repeatedly with no structured intervention strategy targeting the cause of their abuse, namely the behaviour of the men they live with.

Very often women escaped from one abusive relationship only to be abused again in the next and so on. It was also clear that violent and abusive men often move from
one violent relationship to another. The only change is that their abuse and violence usually escalates as they move on. Put simply the women and children are not safe and the violent men by and large are not contained.

Linked with high numbers of women reporting abuse was the perception by their counsellors that the legal system was not able to protect these clients. In fact there appears to be clear under-reporting of family violence incidents. One reason given for this is the lack of confidence by women in police ability to protect them. Police on the other hand frequently complain that an abused woman often freely allows her violent partner back in to the relationship and frustrated their attempts to bring him to justice. Police also claim that it is often difficult to prosecute in a court due to lack of the standard of proof required.

As a result, I was employed on very limited funding (5hrs/wk) through the family violence prevention fund of the Dept of Health and Community Services. My brief was to research and pilot an effective model of intervention for men who are violent and abusive at home. The emphasis was on establishing a model that stressed prevention of family violence as well as responding to the obvious need for men to be re-educated in non-violent behaviours, either voluntarily or by mandate through the justice system. Men began coming to the SHED Project with the expectation that it will enable them to change violent or abusive behaviour they have towards their partners.

In working with men who are violent with the women or children in their lives it is clear that their self-perception is central to an effective intervention strategy. Many men refuse to take responsibility for what they do, or they minimise or trivialise it. Their refusal to accept responsibility takes the form of denying their violent and abusive actions and attitudes, denying that they are responsible, denying (to themselves) that they have become a person who acts violently at times, and so on. In addition, men often blame someone else for their violent behaviour, or excuse it by saying that they were angry, or that they were drunk and didn’t know what they were doing.

Personal experience of reactive government policies that do not address the cause of family violence but only support women and children after the event, led me to look to a preventative approach. As part of a masters degree in social work at the University of Melbourne I researched various models of intervention. One model that stood out was the Duluth Abuse Intervention Pilot Project (DAIPP) in Minnesota.

Philosophy
The underlying value motivating the Men’s SHED Project is the safety and well-being of women and children. To put it another way, women and children have a fundamental right to be safe and well, and the corollary of that is that men have a duty to recognise, respect, foster and be responsible for upholding that basic right. (It is a matter of shame that many women regard themselves as being safer on the streets than in their own homes).

Individual men who are abusive or violent need concrete intervention strategies to change their behaviour and attitudes. At the same time our societal values, attitudes
and beliefs that condone and allow men’s violence and abuse, as well as power and control, must be challenged and changed. There needs to be community education to change these.

The Men’s S.H.E.D. (Self-Help Ending Domestics) Project is based on the simple philosophy:
- that every man is responsible for his own violent behaviour.
- that violence is learnt behaviour and can be unlearnt.
- that in order to unlearn violent and abusive attitudes and behaviour men sitting with other men in a group process is a more effective intervention than individual counselling.
- that individual men will continue to be violent as long as societal attitudes and values condone men’s power and control over women and the strategies used to prolong patriarchal structures.
- that men’s violence in the home will only be effectively countered when there is an integrated response by the agencies involved.

The Mens SHED Project stresses the importance of men owning their behaviour and changing what is abusive or violent or destructive of others. Part of this philosophy of personal responsibility is the realisation that until all men stand up against men's violence then some men will continue to be violent at home. Individual men are responsible for their violent behaviour. However all men contribute to the phenomena of men’s violence to the extent that they do not try to challenge it and change it to non-violence.

**Aim**
The aim of the Men’s SHED Project is to reduce the level of family violence in the Gippsland region.

**Objectives**
The objectives of the SHED Project are:
1. to increase community awareness of men’s violence in the home and how to respond
2. to support women and children in being safe and unthreatened
3. to challenge men to take responsibility for their abusive and violent behaviour
4. to teach men who are violent at home concrete non-violent alternatives
5. to change community attitudes that condone men’s violence against women and children
6. to challenge all men’s collusion that permits men’s violent in the home.
7. to establish a co-ordinated and integrated intervention strategy between agencies, especially the police, courts, women’s services, corrections, and men’s SHED project.
8. to nurture a consistent inter-agency policy on men’s violence in the home
9. to continually research, evaluate and improve the intervention model through praxis.

**Structure**
The Men's SHED Project consists of the following components:

1. *Changing Men*: a support group for men who are violent, abusive, aggressive at home. This is a weekly, two hour, open group which acts as an ongoing venue for
men who have participated in a structured 12 week men's responsibility program and is also somewhere for men to meet who are waiting for the next 12 week program to start.

**Performance indicators:** attendance, quality of participation and level of honesty in disclosure of violent, abusive behaviours and attitudes. Taking personal responsibility for, ownership of violent attitudes and behaviours, and change to non-violence.

2. The Men's Responsibility Program.
This is a structured psycho-educational program. It runs for 12 weeks, once a week for two hours, and is closed to new participants once it commences. This program looks at types of violence, power and control, strategies to remain non-violent, family background issues, male socialisation, anger control, self-esteem, the effects and ramifications of violent behaviour and cognitive restructuring.

**Performance indicators:** attendance, quality of participation and level of honesty in disclosure of violent, abusive behaviours and attitudes. Reduction in the level and amount of violence, aggression and abuse of all types by the participant towards his partner.

This component aims to address societal attitudes which condone and allow men’s power and control over women through violence and abuse. It includes addresses to groups, students, service clubs and staff in other agencies. It also includes giving seminars, and facilitating workshops.

**Performance indicators:** The number of media events held, articles written, seminars, presentations, workshops, talks given. Posters, brochures produced and distributed. Increased community awareness about the reality of family and what can be done.

4. An inter-agency network.
It is apparent that for an effective intervention to prevent and contain men's violence in the home it is essential to have the following:
- an integrated approach between agencies with shared information and monitoring
- a collaborative approach between the key agencies, police, courts, women's services, men's program, and corrections, that goes beyond ideology and narrow loyalties.
- formal protocols between agencies that are accountable and monitored
- a consistent policy that is sustained between the agencies involved in family violence.

**Performance Indicators:** meetings between agency representatives to work out practical, effective and accountable protocols. Formal establishment of those protocols, as well as structured lines of appeal to process discrepancies.

5. Individual assessment and counselling.
All those referred to the SHED Project are assessed in terms of the level, types, duration and lethality of their violence and abuse. In addition they are assessed for drug abuse issues as well as for psychiatric disorders and brain damage that might effect their ability to participate effectively in the intervention strategies.

**Performance indicator:** Number of men assessed, number of men, women and children counselled, number of counselling sessions held.

Integrating and prioritizing limited resources to these components is problematic, especially at the present level of 10 hours/week worker time. It is clear for example
that there is a gap in the intervention strategy. There is only very limited availability of the project worker for one-to-one counselling needed to support and re-inforce the group process towards change.

Issues
1. Children are often witnesses to abuse or violence and in turn are victimised. Many of the participants in the SHED Project report witnessing abuse as a child, and often also being victims of physical abuse (at least). Many men begin to realise that just as they learned abusive ways of behaviour as boys so too do their own children learn from them. There is often a felt sense of men becoming determined that their kids do not end up being abusive or violent like them, (and that their daughters do not become victims of abuse and violent behaviour).

2. The SHED Project is about men’s violence in Gippsland and as such is very localised. However the lessons learnt in the establishment of the project are more widely applicable:

1. inter-agency support and collaboration takes time but is essential for effective intervention
2. for men to change to non-violent and non-abusive behaviour, women need to be able to give feedback and critique the men’s program,
3. men who are referred to the project need to be able to hope that they can change and be given concrete strategies to control themselves and remain non-violent.
4. unless community education takes place side by side with the behaviour change groups then there will not be any appreciable change in societal attitudes.

3. The socio-historical-cultural-political-agricultural-rural-economic-industrial realities and how they impinge on men’s violence in the home. (eg the statistics in the section on background). The area traditionally has a ‘frontier mentality’ identified with mining. More that a century ago there were gold miners, and in the past fifty years coal mining has pre-dominated with the generation of electricity. A very strong male dominated culture has resulted.

4. The need for a community development model of working with men to change their violence at home. Once men have begun to address their own violent and abusive behaviour they can and should also support and encourage other men to make similar changes. The main issue here is to juggle keeping a very clear line with men concerning their own abusive behaviour, and at the same time putting it to them that they need to support others men also.

5. The education curriculum of the men’s responsibility program is based on the HAIIP program. The acid test of any men’s behaviour change program is whether their female partners and children are safer and freer from abuse at their hands.

6. There are ongoing funding dilemmas. The Dept of Health and Community Services (H&CS) insist that Office of Corrections clients not be served in programs they fund. However many clients of Corrections are also legitimate clients of H&CS (family and child services), and besides they are only seeking appropriate help and are not
concerned about which government money funds their assistance. This is an issue of
government policy that will continue to limit effective intervention strategies until
addressed.

7. Needing time to build up SHED Project credibility among referrers from agencies,
police, courts and client population. Clear protocols for referral need to be
established.

8. Limited availability and hours cuts down the possibility that intervention can take
place at the time when a man is ready to engage in a process of changing his violent
behaviour.

9. Men often feel hopeless and helpless, (victims who victimise?), and this is in stark
contrast to the way that they are often portrayed. Their state in no way excuses their
violent or abusive behaviour. It does however contribute to the knowledge needed to
engage in an effective intervention. It must be stated also that the way a man who is
violent feels does not change the damage he does nor diminish the fear he instils in his
partner.

10. Men’s violent behaviour often serves a function for him. It is useful and gets him
what he wants. It serves his convenience, and has done more and more since he
observed and learnt that it works.

11. Men most often have little sense of the effects and ramifications of their violent
behaviour on their partner and children. It often comes as a shock to them to realise
how they are regarded.

12. There is an ongoing debate regarding the need for a ‘mandated intervention’, (eg
mandatory arrest for family violence, or court-mandated attendance in SHED Project)

**Evaluation**
The real test of whether the SHED Project is a success is whether it does what it sets out to do, namely reduce men’s violence in the home. There is an ongoing evaluation and monitoring process based on feedback from partners and their workers about specific forms or violence and abuse. In addition funding bodies require ongoing evaluation according to designated performance indicators.

**Future**

Our aim is to establish the Gippsland Family Violence Intervention Project to promote and ensure effective collaboration between agencies. In particular between the police, women’s services (refuge and Women’s Place), the courts, the Men’s SHED Project and the Office of Corrections. This requires networking, collaboration, ongoing co-ordination, and the agreement of formal protocols between agencies.

With clearly defined areas of responsibility and accountability agencies will integrate their services more effectively and with a more holistic approach. A submission is currently before the Dept of Justice to fund this project. It has wide inter-sectorial support from the Latrobe Community Health Service, the Dept of Health and Community Services, the Office of Corrections, the Alcohol and Drug Service, the Family Research Action Centre, the Centre Against Sexual Assault and many others.

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APPENDIX H: Book Chapter in Weeks and Quinn (2000)

ISSUES FACING
AUSTRALIAN FAMILIES

HUMAN SERVICES RESPOND
THIRD EDITION

EDITED BY
WENDY WEEKS & MARJORIE QUINN

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The Men's SHED (Self-Help Ending Domestics) Project is based in the town of Moe, the Latrobe Valley, in south-eastern Victoria. It began at the community health centre in 1994 as a program for men to learn to stop their violence and abuse. The initiative to start the project came from women workers at the community health centre. The aim of the Men's SHED Project is to prevent the continuation of men's family violence in the Gippsland region. The term 'family violence' is used to mean any behaviour which leaves women and children living in fear, is used to control other people, and which results in physical, sexual and/or psychological damage (adapted from National Committee on Violence Against Women, 1992: vi). This chapter will examine the SHED Project and what it does in practice.

Location

The Men's SHED Project is located in the Gippsland region, an area which encompasses farming, forestry, mining, electricity power stations, and industry. Many of the men who attend the project are sons of ex-State Electricity Commission workers, or dairy farmers, or timber workers. This region supplies electricity, water and gas to the Melbourne metropolitan area, as well as much agricultural produce. There is a sense that 'the city' takes a lot from 'the country' and gives little in return. Indeed, among parts of the rural population there has been a growing disenchantment and resentment at reduced services, imposed shire amalgamations, and the closure of schools and hospitals, in the name of greater efficiency and 'economic rationalism'.

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Privatisation, especially of the electricity industry, and massive ‘downsizing’ has meant more than 10,000 local jobs lost in the past 15 years. The resultant exodus to find work elsewhere, the effect on local business, the inability of families to sell their homes, the extraordinarily low house prices, and other factors, have generally depleted morale and perceived self-worth. There seems to be a political culture of blame and counter-blame, while the style of governing the state is one of power and control (almost exclusively by men). No-one seems ready to take responsibility for a process that treats ordinary people in a dehumanising way (Rees & Rodley, 1995).

A situation has been created where many men in the region construe themselves as victims of ‘the system’. Many of those caught in this situation have become depressed, frustrated, angry, resentful, or apathetic and cynical, and this often contrasts sharply with their inherited ‘macho’ self-image. Alcohol and drug abuse, problem gambling, youth suicide and crime are all above the State average. In addition, both the towns of Moe and Morwell have long had very large public housing areas, a high proportion of single mothers and little supportive infrastructure. Victoria Police records indicate that ‘family incident’ reports in this region are far higher than for the rest of the State (Victoria Police, 1996).

Origin

The SHED Project had its origins in this disrupted social context. It began when women working at the Moe Community Health Centre and other local agencies identified men’s violence to their families as an issue needing urgent attention in the area. Their long experience working with women and children victims of family violence gave them a unique perspective on the extent and ramifications of the problem. Those same women workers became part of the SHED Project reference group. With minimal funding available, they initially employed a man as project coordinator for five hours per week to set up a project addressing the problem of men’s violence. Having just completed a Master of Social Work degree researching, among other things, a pro-feminist framework for working with violent and abusive men, I was ready to test the theory in practice. It was this combination of need, scarce resources, and research, which created the SHED Project.

The development and structuring of the project

The first task of the reference group was to articulate a name, an aim, objectives, a philosophy, and the principle components for the project, as well as a working definition of men’s violence. The reference group is presently composed of the coordinator of the local women’s refuge and the Women’s Place, a senior community corrections officer, a senior welfare worker from the Latrobe Community Health Service, and a psychologist who works at Relationships Australia and who also co-facilitates the Men’s Responsibility Program, and the SHED coordinator. At present all the members of the reference group, except myself, are women, and all are knowledgeable, active and experienced local practitioners.

The reference group is crucial to the effective operation of the SHED Project. As the coordinator is a ‘sole worker’, the importance of the reference group cannot
be overstated. It meets monthly at Community Corrections (CORE) in Morwell to
discuss all aspects of the project. The functions of the group are to provide
feedback, accountability, support, challenge, critique, and be a sounding board for
the project coordinator. It is instrumental in both the policy and practice directions
of the project. Key agencies in a collaborative and integrated approach to family
violence prevention are represented in the membership of the reference group, and
at the same time it is kept small enough to be workable and practical. The
relationship between the reference group and the auspicing agency is also important.

The auspicing agency is Latrobe Community Health Service, and hence the
project coordinator is employed by and accountable to that organisation's
management, and his immediate line manager is also part of the reference group. It
is fair to say that there is a creative tension between the roles of the reference group
and the Latrobe Community Health Service management.

Although the SHED Project is based at Moe it is available to men from all over
Gippsland. Some men travel over an hour each way to attend. To date over 390 men
have been assessed for potential group participation. Approximately half that
number have attended at least one group. Groups present a cultural alternative to
men's patriarchal beliefs, and offer an environment in which they might begin to
take responsibility and change their abusive or violent behaviour. Men come from a
variety of referral points. These include the Department of Human Services,
Community Corrections (CORE), Gippsland Centre Against Sexual Assault,
Gippsland Psychiatric Services, local general practitioners, Central Gippsland
Alcohol and Drug Service, social workers, police, and self-referrals.

About one-quarter of the men come are referred by CORE for assessment as
part of a Pre-Sentence Report for the Magistrate's Court. This is part of a protocol
established between the Moe Magistrate's Court, CORE and the SHED Project in
1995. This protocol enables men to take responsibility for beginning to learn non-
abusive and non-violent attitudes and behaviour. Hence they are not mandated by
the court to attend the SHED Project unless they have been assessed as suitable by
the coordinator on a range of criteria. These criteria include a man's readiness to
accept responsibility for his violence, to get beyond denying, blaming others or
excusing his behaviour, and to show some indication that he is ready to participate
in the group process.

Theoretically no man can say while 'sitting in a group 'I am only here because
the court sent me', and hence avoid taking responsibility or play the victim role.
There is a balance between an educational approach that stresses men's 'response-
ability', and the need for family violence to be treated by the courts (and others) as a
criminal matter. From the perspective of the SHED Project it does not make sense
for a man to be 'mandated' to attend an education program, when he can take
responsibility for that himself during an assessment process. In our experience most
violent men do want to change their behaviour. However, for many, that step to
change is difficult and goes against a lifetime of conditioning. It is true to say that
almost no abusive man wants to attend the SHED Project initially, and for many
men it is impossibly hard, and made harder still by those in our society who
collude with them in justifying their abuse.
In 1995 a support group was started at the Moe Community Health Centre for abused women, including partners of SHED men. That support group is called WAVES (Women’s Approach to Violence through Education and Support). It works in conjunction with SHED and there is an agreed protocol for effective collaboration between the two services: a protocol based on a need for a consistent approach with men who are violent or abusive, so that they accept that they are responsible for what they do, and with women and children, so that they know they have the right to safety and well-being, as well as, in reality, actually being safe.

The SHED Project initially struggled for funding and in-kind support. It came from the Latrobe Community Health Service, Central Gippsland Alcohol and Drug Service, the Family Research Action Centre, CORE, local power stations, and a minimum from the local shire. A two-year grant was eventually received from the Department of Justice. That was a ‘one off’ and has now finished. As with many small projects, its ongoing viability is threatened by funding problems and lack of tenure. Valuable time and energy is spent on submissions for funding that often prove fruitless.

**Why ‘SHED’?**

Why call the project ‘SHED’? For many men their backyard shed is somewhere special. It may be the one place where they feel at home, can take time out, and regain confidence in their skills. It can be a place of peace, harmony, constructive activity, thinking about life and about their relationship with their family. For many it is a haven, somewhere away from the other areas of their life which may be temporarily or permanently out of control. Problematically it may also be used as a place to escape to, and avoid responsibility. We hope the SHED Project will not take on that aspect of the shed symbol.

The SHED Project is constructed as a place where men can come:

*Time and space for men to face who they are, what they have become, and how they behave towards the women and children in their lives, and a chance to change what is not good (SHED brochure).*

Integral to this concept is that men themselves have to take responsibility for going to the shed/SHED. In fact, sometimes their partners would prefer them not to go. Sometimes they would like men to deal with the situation right ‘here and now’. For others, men going off to their shed is a form of taking ‘time out’ and hence is welcomed. However, the way a man spends time in the SHED is crucial. The key question for his partner is whether the way he spends time in the SHED will help him to become non-abusive and non-violent or not.

**Background tradition**

The SHED Project is historically located in the tradition of men’s behaviour change programs, whose umbrella body is the Victorian Network for the Prevention of Male Family Violence (V-Net). Prior to 1994 the nearest men’s perpetrator program was
90 kilometres away on the outskirts of Melbourne, and there was no other similar program for at least 300 kilometres east to the New South Wales border and beyond. In 1994 V-Net produced a self-help book for men entitled *Mirrors*, *Windows and Doors* (Frances ed.) 1994), and in 1995 they produced a 'minimum standards of practice' and 'best practice' manual for running men's groups (Younger, 1995).

The SHED Project is philosophically located in a combination of traditions:

- pro-feminist (Russell, 1995; Fawcett, Featherstone, Hearn & Toft, 1996; Pease, 1997); Duluth (Pence & Paymar, 1993);
- inviting men's responsibility (Jenkins, 1990);
- groupwork and psychodrama (Williams, 1989);
- constructive alternativism (Kelly, 1991); and
- abuse intervention projects, as in Hamilton, New Zealand (Busch & Robertson, 1993) and Armadale, Western Australia (Gardner, 1995).

Put simply, the philosophy of the SHED Project is that:

- Men who are violent to women and children need to accept responsibility for that behaviour and be committed to changing both it and the attitudes that support it.
- Abusive beliefs support the violent behaviour of men and need to be challenged.
- Men's violence often serves a function. It is frequently used by a man to control his partner and children to get what he wants.
- Men are not born abusive and violent.
- Men's violence is learned behaviour and can be unlearned.
- Men can choose alternative, non-violent, behaviour; they are 'response-able'.
- Groups are generally a more effective, challenging and supportive vehicle than 'one-to-one' counselling in enabling men to change their violent attitudes and behaviour.
- Men's violence will stop when men in general are committed to stand against it.

**Objectives**

The following objectives of the SHED Project emanate from its philosophy:

1. To increase the man's sense of responsibility for his violent behaviour, and to demonstrate to men that they have 'response-ability'—that they are able to choose a non-violent response.
2. To raise the man's awareness of the implications of his violence and abuse for the affected women and children.
3. To educate the man about how his violence is intentional and functional in allowing him to maintain control and power.
4. To develop practical alternatives to violent behaviour in the form of non-violent responses.

5. To enable the man to gain insight into how his violent behaviour is learned and promoted through the patriarchal structures, beliefs and mores of society.

**Components**

The six main components of the Men’s SHED Project seek to address its objectives in a balanced, holistic and effective way:

- individual assessment (a look in the mirror, and a chance to choose non-violence);
- ‘Changing Men’—an ongoing, semi-structured support/challenge group for men;
- the Men’s Responsibility Program: a structured, educational, 12-week program;
- community education concerning men’s violent and abusive attitudes and behaviour;
- an integrated, collaborative, inter-agency intervention with agreed protocols;
- the Stop Men’s Assault Program for men who have been violent in the community (not family-specific).

**Components in detail**

First, individual assessment. All those referred to the SHED Project are assessed in terms of the level, type, and duration of their violence and abuse, and their degree of lethality. In addition they are assessed for drug abuse issues, psychiatric disorders, brain damage that might affect their ability to participate effectively in the intervention strategies, and a range of other criteria.

Second, ‘Changing Men’: an ongoing, semi-structured, support/challenge group for men who are violent, abusive, aggressive at home. This is a weekly, two-hour, open group which meets from 5.30 to 7.30pm on Thursdays at the Moe Community Health Centre. These details represent the best chance of accessibility in terms of time and place, given the rural context and minimal resources. This open group is semi-structured and is based on an informal process of group learning. It is centred around a frank sharing of the men’s experiences, and disclosure by them of their abuse and violence in order to begin to take responsibility. The group is facilitated by two male professionals and acts both as an intake into the next structured 12-week men’s responsibility program, and as an ongoing venue for men who have participated in that program. For many men this weekly group becomes pivotal in their lives while they struggle to unlearn violent, abusive and controlling attitudes and behaviour which they have grown into. Most of the men come with very low self-esteem. The average attendance for this group is eight.

Third, the Men’s Responsibility Program. This is a structured educational program. It runs for 12 weeks, once a week for two hours, and is closed to new participants once it commences. This program looks at types of violence, issues of
power and control, strategies to remain non-violent, family background issues, male socialisation, anger control, self-esteem, alcohol and other drug abuse, and the effects of and ramifications for victims of violent behaviour.

This program has female and male co-facilitation. It is broadly based on a combination of the Duluth Project (Pence & Paymar, 1993), Confronting Abusive Beliefs (Russell, 1995), and constructive alternativism (Kelly, 1991). The structured process has a weekly curriculum. The focus is on experiential learning, centred around action methods, role plays, brain storms, and other strategies targeting abusive beliefs and behaviour. The ideal group size has been found to be between six and eight men.

Fourth, community education concerning men's violent and abusive attitudes and behaviour. This component aims to address societal attitudes which condone and allow men's power and control over women through violence and abuse. It includes presentations and training to groups, students, police, general practitioners, teachers, service clubs such as Rotary and the Country Women's Association, and for staff in other agencies. It includes giving seminars, and facilitating workshops.

One initiative which emanated from the men in one of the groups was the COOL (Control of One's Life) Project. In 1995 the (SHED) project coordinator was asked to facilitate and help design and pilot a program for high school students. The aim was to create a preventive strategy that included in its content recognition of emotions, self-esteem, anger management, types of violence, racism, sexual harassment, and alcohol and drug abuse issues. It is now running in 30 secondary colleges and a primary school version has also commenced. In 1997 a Senate Select Committee mentioned the COOL Project specifically, and went on to say:

_The Senate Committee urges governments at all levels to continue support for such programs both in the community and in schools since they offer people who show aggressive tendencies opportunities to learn non-violent ways of coping. To the community such programs offer some hope of reducing instances of violence occurring_ (Senate Select Committee on Community Standards, 1997: 43).

However, despite such recommendations, the COOL Project has had little financial support, is being run from within the Department of Education budget, and has a tenuous future.

Fifth, the Stop Men's Assault Program. This is a 10-week structured program for men whose violence and assault is in the community. The participants are generally younger (17–30-year-olds), are likely to abuse alcohol or illicit drugs, usually have a criminal record, and have most often been victims of abuse themselves as children. The group process is similar to Men's Responsibility Program, though the content varies.

Sixth, an integrated, collaborative, inter-agency intervention. It is apparent that for an effective intervention to prevent and contain men's family violence the following is essential:
• an integrated approach between agencies, with shared information and monitoring;

• a collaborative approach between the key agencies, police, courts, women's services, men's program, and corrections, that goes beyond ideology and narrow loyalties;

• formal protocols between agencies that are accountable and monitored;

• a consistent policy that is sustained between the agencies involved in family violence. This inter-agency component is modelled on the Hamilton Abuse Intervention Project (Busch & Robertson, 1993) and the Armadale Domestic Violence Intervention Project (Gardner, 1995). Both these projects stress the importance of structured, accountable intervention strategies between police, the women's refuge, the courts, the men's program, community corrections, and other relevant agencies. In addition both these projects evidence the need for inter-sectorial intervention that is supported by government policy and funding. It has been this inter-agency intervention component which has been most effective in changing the climate of violence in the region.

Limitations and parameters

SHED is an acronym for ‘Self-Help Ending Domestics’. This is, in part, a misnomer. The SHED Project is clearly not a ‘self-help’ project, except in the sense that it is the men themselves who have responsibility for changing their abusive beliefs and behaviour. Participation by itself, though, is not enough. An abusive man must choose to be non-violent. The project officer/facilitator/educator does not have a magic wand and the only one who can change a man is himself.

However, it is clear that most abusive or violent men cannot, or will not, make that change on their own. They need both challenge and support, as well as practical strategies to change. They need to build an awareness that they are in fact choosing violence, that they are responsible for that choice, and that they can choose non-violent alternatives. To do this it is important that they get an insight into the effects of their violence on the women and children in their lives, and that they learn the importance of healthy role models.

The intensity of the work, the probability of vicarious traumatisation, the frequency of staff transfers (for example police, magistrates, women's workers, Department of Human Services workers), all make the work problematic. Worker stress and burnout is a real issue and is addressed at reference group meetings. Co-facilitation of the groups is essential, not just for an effective group process but also for worker survival. In the same way, debriefing is an essential part of the group facilitator's functioning, and must be structured into the whole process. Lack of priority and time given to develop and maintain best practice in an integrated approach can jeopardise an effective intervention strategy. Compulsory competitive tendering also affects the readiness of workers from a variety of agencies to disclose frankly their practice wisdom and resources, for fear they might disclose information of value to a competitor. This is offset by the increasing requirement of
agencies to demonstrate in their funding submissions a commitment to inter-agency collaboration.

Evaluation
There is ongoing evaluation through partner feedback, participant feedback, debriefing, and agency feedback. Systematic, meaningful evaluation of men's programs can be problematic, but is both possible and essential (Dobash & Dobash, 1996; Frances, 1997). The men participating are often very positive, but the key question is what do their partners and children feed back? Some men stop their physical violence but become even more psychologically controlling in other ways. Evaluation can also be hampered where partners have split up and there remains no possibility of partner feedback. A participatory action research model, such as evidenced recently in Frances (1997), seems most appropriate for evaluation of the SHED Project, and is currently being planned.

Conclusion
This is a relatively small, new, rural program. It was established to secure the ongoing safety and well-being of women and children in the region, by stopping men's violence. Whether or not it has succeeded in the long term remains to be seen, but for some families it seems the SHED Project has had a positive impact in the short term.

This impact has been possible through the various components outlined in this chapter. In the assessment stage men have had a chance to answer some blunt questions from another man. In doing so they have also been invited to look in a 'mirror', and, regarding the picture they see in front of them, to comment on what they would want to change in their attitudes and behaviour. In the groups, the men attending are given the opportunity to recognise their 'response-ability', and to begin to make non-violent choices. The group process is one of experiential learning based on the men's stories, and focusing on practical strategies to change violent attitudes and behaviour.

It remains to be seen whether the attempt at an integrated approach to family violence intervention survives in the future. Clearly it requires firm and continuing support from management, as well as commitment at grassroots level that is based on some positive outcomes. If this part of the project survives it could have major ramifications for the prevention of future family violence. Clearly the key stakeholders' emphasis on a consistent approach to perpetrators and regarding their responsibility for their violence—and to victims and regarding their right to safety and well-being—will have a positive impact in the future. However, this will only occur if the relevant agencies maintain a consistent, collaborative response to family violence incidents. Finally, the effort put into community education is important, and the need to change community attitudes which condone abusive beliefs and behaviour is clear.
the experience in the tradition of storytelling, with an eye for compelling detail. Keep the model fable short—no more than five minutes—as I have found students will generally duplicate its length. Engage the students in a discussion of possible morals and write on the board or chart paper the one that best reflects your own belief. Indicate how you have followed this moral throughout your life. Compare and contrast your own belief to commonly held assumptions in society.

As you direct students to select their own fable, or true life story, ask them to choose one that is vivid in their memories and one that they feel safe sharing with a partner. I ask two or three partners to share a story that he or she heard with the whole group, after gaining permission from the original teller. At the very least, I ask each student in turn to share the moral of his or her fable.

Contributor's Commentary

A memory that is still emotionally charged is quite alive in conscious (and unconscious) thought. By tapping into that memory with a live audience and using sensory details in relating the incident, one can focus even more clearly on the way that meaning was constructed at that time. Working with a neutral partner will facilitate the analytic effort of meaning-making. Furthermore, the last step allows the individual to reflect on the unique character of his or her own analysis.

I have found that this is a very stimulating and lively activity. It encourages authentic voice in the writing process and is a good icebreaker for the entire class. This activity allows students to begin assessing raw experience in terms of abstractions, such as the morals or generalities they formed based on these experiences.

Developing Group Alternatives for Reconstructing Personal Behaviors

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Chris Laming is a social worker with the Latrobe Community Health Service in rural, southeastern Australia, where he coordinates the Men's SHED Project. (It is called the SHED Project because in Australia the shed in the backyard symbolizes the place men feel most at home, where they go to think about life, to mess around with mates, fix things, construct, reflect, change, and so on. We also use SHED as an acronym for Self-Help Ending Domestic, that is, domestic violence.)
Developmental Intentions

I. Toward knowing as a dialogical process.
   1. Perceiving and constructing one’s reality by observing and participating.
II. Toward a dialogical relationship to oneself.
   2. Engaging the disequilibrium when one’s ideas and beliefs are challenged.
III. Toward being a continuous learner.
   1. Reflecting on one’s own and others’ experiences as a guide to future behavior.
IV. Toward self-agency and self-authorship.
   2. Accepting responsibility for choices one has made and will make.
V. Toward connection with others.
   3. Engaging the affective dimension when confronting differences.

Context

I use this activity as part of the Men’s Responsibility Program—a group process promoting attitudinal and behavioral change to stop family violence. This is a structured twelve-week program, which follows an ongoing intake group. Group sizes vary from six to twelve men, the majority of whom are volunteers. The rest are attending as part of a court order. Initially, resistance to learning, and to change, is high. This exercise takes place in the seventh week, though the process is applicable to a variety of situations. The program has a male and female co-facilitator and we jointly facilitate the group process. It generally takes about two hours.

Description of Activity

Purpose. To demonstrate how personal behaviors form an interrelated pattern, how behaviors can be conceptualized in a continuum, how we can create constructive alternatives to behaviors, and how we are responsible for making choices in behaviors.

Format-steps-process.

1. Before participants enter the meeting room, we (the cofacilitators) project an overhead image of a model of the behaviors to be discussed. The participants are invited to look at it while settling down and waiting for all to take their seats. Copies of the selected model are also distributed. *Example:* With the Men’s Responsibility Program (MRP), we project a conceptualized model of abusive and violent behaviors and how they are interrelated.
2. After a few minutes, we switch off the overhead and introduce the session by linking it to previous sessions. Example: The MRP group had previously brainstormed types of violent and abusive behavior; they cited examples that were as personal as possible. These personal examples, listed on a whiteboard, now become the focus for this session in a more structured framework.

3. We briefly get the participants to repeat the brainstorm from the previous session, describing and naming the various types of behavior and how they interlink; this is to foster recall and to synthesize the brainstorming effort. Example: The MRP group is encouraged to recognize how emotional abuse, threats, intimidation, and physical assault are all interlinked, controlling behaviors.

4. We next invite the participants to view a video that depicts behaviors relevant to the discussion, asking them to keep in mind the model that was projected overhead when they entered the room. We let them know that we will pause the video after a while for questions and discussion. Example: We show a video that depicts men behaving abusively in a number of vignettes.

5. We stop the video to discuss what we have been viewing, and encourage each participant to contribute his own recollections, insights, judgments, criticisms, reactions, and feelings about what was in the video. We also encourage them to use the photocopied sheets of the behavioral model as a reference point for the discussion. Example: Although there is an inclination to keep the discussion at a less-threatening, intellectual level, most of the men experience, and share, emotional reactions.

6. At the end of the video, we bring the group back to the model of behaviors, and it becomes more focus of discussion through questions and the relating of their own experiences. We encourage them to be as self-revealing as possible. Example: This is often a point where the participants start to make real connections and get an “aha” experience of suddenly having an insight into the ramifications of violent behavior on those affected.

7. We then turn to the whiteboard brainstorm and encourage participants to draw connections between the items they identified previously and the new ideas they have formed from viewing the video alongside the model of behaviors. Example: This is usually a very sobering time during which the men make many connections between their own types of abuse experiences and what they have seen graphically portrayed on the screen.

8. To further ground these connections, we ask the participants to stand in a line across the room, tallest at one end and shortest at the other. Next we ask them to reorganize themselves in another continuum with one man to represent a behavior listed on their whiteboard brainstorm to stand at one end, and another man representing the opposite end of that behavioral continuum to stand...
at the other. (The group has to decide the continuum of behaviors.) The men are asked to identify and name the behaviors each will represent. (We point out to the group that they are not being asked in this exercise to personally identify with the behaviors, but only to participate as part of learning. Usually there is no lack of volunteers.) Example: The man representing the most violent behavior listed on their whiteboard brainstorm is asked to stand at one end, and another man representing the least violent behavior to stand at the other. (The men themselves have to decide the continuum of most violent behavior to least violent.) The men are asked to name and describe behaviors and identify where they belong on the continuum.

9. The group is then asked to identify and organize in a continuum the remainder of the listed behaviors and their opposites, with a man representing each. They are encouraged to discuss, debate, and challenge the placing of behaviors on the continuum, as well as the factors that might contribute to that placing. (Here we include a discussion about the effects of different types of behavior on others, including witnesses to the behavior.) Example: The MRP group ends up with a line of men, each of whom has “identified” with a particular behavior (not necessarily as his own, but for purposes of categorization). The grouping as a whole represents a continuum of violent behaviors, from most to least, as perceived by the group members after considerable analysis and discussion of the effects of that behavior on all who are party to it.

10. As a final step the group is asked: “What is someone like who does this behavior?” (write answers on left side of whiteboard). When they have given their answer they are further asked: “How would you describe someone who is different from that?” (write answers on opposite side of whiteboard). Example: The MRP group is asked these questions and also asked which they would prefer to be. (This is a platform from which further exercises emanate. For example, questions such as, “Why would you prefer to be _____? Why is that important to you?” And so on, followed by, “And what is someone like who is not like that?”)

Processing Tips

Cofacilitation, preferably female-male, is essential. The value of the process depends on the facilitators’ ability to elicit the experiences of the participants and utilize the framework of the model to help them better conceptualize their behavior.

Contributor’s Commentary

This exercise is multifaceted and has the potential to be utilized with groups of high school or college students, teachers, social workers, and many others. It can
focus on any activity that people engage in that they may need to recognize, observe, and challenge. Its possible applications and replications are limited only by our imagination.

This exercise reflects a dynamic, evolving process, a sort of journey to discover and develop one’s personal truth in relationships. It is not an easy journey because along the way one’s values, attitudes, beliefs, views, and ideas are challenged and questioned. Hence, the process is also threatening to individuals and relies on the group trust to make it happen. This requires risk taking and readiness to hear from others in the group things about oneself that might not be palatable.

However, this very process of naming difficult things in front of one’s peers, and hearing hard things in the group, enables the possibility of personal growth toward truth on many levels. Personally “owning” one’s behavior in a group context frees one to change in a way that public denial of that behavior does not allow. Doing so publicly also “educates” the listeners in ways that can lead to change; in this way a participant experiences being part of something larger. In sum, this group process engenders a transforming growth in collective awareness—a community education.

The Indescribable Moment

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Developmental Intentions

I. Toward knowing as a dialogical process.
   1. Inquiring into and responding openly to others’ ideas.
   10. Tapping into and drawing on tacit knowledge.
II. Toward a dialogical relationship to oneself.
   3. Exploring life’s experiences through some framework(s) of analysis.
IV. Toward self-agency and self-authorship.
   7. “Naming and claiming” what one has experienced and knows.
V. Toward connection with others.
   5. Recognizing that collective awareness and thinking transform the sum of their parts.
Rural Social Workers Action Group (RSWAG)

A Special Interest Group of the Victorian Branch of the Australian Association of Social Workers Ltd.
AASW National Website: www.aasw.asn.au
ABN 93 008 576 010

RSWAG
6th National Conference
Mildura 2003
Thursday 10th and Friday 11th July 2003

‘Excellent Conversation, Rich Culture:
A Celebration of Rural Social Work’

Conference Proceedings
Chris Laming and Mike Fontana

MEN'S BEHAVIOUR CHANGE PROGRAMS IN A REGIONAL AND RURAL CONTEXT

Abstract:
Men’s Behaviour Change Programs (MBCP) were previously referred to as ‘anger management programs’, even though the focus and content is different. These MBCPs are increasingly recognised as an essential part of any effective response to family violence. (Office of Women’s Policy, 2001:7) This paper seeks to trace the development and ‘modus operandi’ of two such rural men’s behaviour change programs in Gippsland, one in Moe (SHED) and one in Bairnsdale, (GRAPPLE).

In rural areas such a response has its own peculiar difficulties, as well as advantages, however we believe that there are some basic principles, which hold true for both metro areas as well as rural. These principles would include the priority of victim safety, the need for transparency of process, and accountability of the MBCP to women’s services, the need for minimum standards of practice and the need for a group process to enable change.

Groups are an integral part of MBCP and provide men with an opportunity to be confronted and challenged to change abusive attitudes and behaviour, and yet provide support in the process. Groups also act as a milieu or environment for the beginnings of a community development process in which men, who experience the benefit of change for their family, are enthusiastic about encouraging other men to do the same; that is, they become a referral source.

Introduction

1. History.
Until 1994 there was no Men’s Behaviour Change Program (MBCP) in Gippsland. The only response to family violence (FV), was a reactive one, picking up the pieces after the event, as well as intermittent campaigns for community education. The SHED Project began at the Latrobe Community Health Service in response to an expressed need from women working with victims of abuse. This was at a time of great upheaval in the Latrobe Valley with job loss, and community stress endemic, (Laming, 1996). The Bairnsdale MBCP, GRAPPLE, began in 1997, after a number of years of attempting to get the required resources together. GRAPPLE ran for more than five years when the meager funding ran dry in late 2002.

2. Establishment and Integration.
Both the literature and the shared experience of FV workers strongly advise that the MBCP be established and integrated well, within the existing FV response in a community (OWP, 2001:8; Gardner 1995; Pence and Paymar 1993; Busch and Robertson, 1993; Domestic Violence Prevention Unit, 1999; Laming, 2000a). If it is not done well then the MBCP can compound the family violence, as has also been the shared experience. No To Violence (NTV) the state peak body for MBCPs, have a minimum standards and best practice manual for MBCPs (Younger, 1995) Membership of NTV and conforming to the guidelines is now tied in with funding of programs. Combined with this it is essential to have inter-agency accountability and collaboration, ideally articulated through written protocols or memorandums of understanding (Laming, 2000a). The basic principle is that men and women need to get a consistent message about men’s violence in the family, from wherever they go for assistance. (Kristensen, 1999) In addition, this consistency of understanding and process enables clearer lines of referral.
3. Transparency
With inter-agency collaboration the chance of transparency of process is much greater. SHED established a reference group, which consists of the coordinator of the regional women’s DV services, a senior corrections officer, the manager of Relationships Australia who also co-facilitates on the groups, and the welfare team leader from the local community health service. As a result there is accountability and transparency of process in the MBCP, and pathways for referral and case management streamlined through the agreement of protocols between agencies.

4. Safety of the Victim has Priority.
Because of the jeopardy and risky situations of many women and children, their safety is the priority in this process. The whole point of a MBCP is to increase their safety and well-being, even though this cannot be guaranteed, (OWP, 2001; Laming, 1998). For the program to have credibility it needs to ensure their own sense of safety, and sometimes independence. Similarly the MBCP has a role in assisting the wife/partner to develop her understanding of the range and extent of abusive behaviours she is experiencing. MBCP workers can use the assessment tools to build the woman’s understanding of the implications of her partner’s violent behaviour.

5. Links to the Justice System (Courts, Corrections and MBCP)
It is essential that men’s violence be seen for what it is, a criminal offence. At the same time sentencing options need to be utilized to ensure that there is the best possibility of re-habilitation. This entails some degree of educating those in the justice system, as well as other professionals to be more aware of the various options. There has been an effort to educate magistrates in this regard. In the past there has clearly been a discrepancy between how different magistrates sentence, despite the fact that the legislation provides very clear parameters for sentencing.

Those who are charged with being violent in the family, and their lawyers, usually have very clear preferences about who they prefer to appear before, according to the word on the street. Nevertheless it is in the whole community’s interest that offenders and victims are dealt with consistently. In this way those seeking justice might begin to develop more confidence that the courts will deliver it. Clearly a woman who is the victim of family violence will be very reluctant to apply for an intervention order if the message she is getting from a range of professionals seeking to assist her is not consistent. If, for example, the family violence support worker tells her that she has every right to the protection of an intervention order, and yet the clerk of courts, on hearing her story, tries to convince her otherwise, this is bound to undermine her confidence. Add to this the very real possibility that the law may not be able to protect her from further assault, means that the women will attempt to ‘ride out the storm’ with the very real possibility that he will not only continue to abuse her but, that the violence will escalate.

Similarly for the man, it is essential that he be given consistent advice along the lines that he is responsible for what abusive behaviour he is using, no matter what she is doing or saying. He also needs to be given practical information about whom he can contact to do something about changing his abusive behaviour.

One way of promoting a consistent message is for the key players: the courts, the community corrections and the MBCP to establish protocols of referral and to stick to them (Kristensen, 1999). This also helps to alleviate the problem of solicitors seeking to use the MBCP as a way to get their client a more lenient sentence. If appropriate protocols are in place then the offender can be sent by the court to the MBCP for an assessment as part of a pre-sentence report, just as many offenders are sent for a psychological test or an alcohol or drug assessment. (Laming, 2000a) At the time of the MBCP assessment the offender can be challenged about various types of abuse he may use and be given the opportunity to take responsibility for his violent behaviour, and the option of continuing treatment by joining a Men’s Behaviour Change group in order to unlearn.
his abuse. If he chooses not to accept this option, then he is assessed as unsuitable for the MBCP and this is communicated to Community Corrections who present that information to the court in their report. It is imperative for the man to take responsibility for his change. If he is sent by the court, or mandated then he is less likely to be motivated to change, even though he may have some insight that he needs to.

6. Components of the Men’s Behaviour Change Program:
How the MBCP is structured is important. In a sense it is just one piece in the jigsaw of intervention, and without the other pieces it is fairly ineffective. When the expression ‘holistic approach’ is applied to family violence intervention, this is what it means. Not only having a women’s support service, or refuge, not only a MBCP, not only a responsive criminal justice system that treats family violence as a crime, not only an educated police force who respond to family violence incidents consistently, but also an informed service sector which works together and collaborates effectively to support the victim and hold the offender responsible. If there is a holistic response, which reflects an integrated, collaborative inter-agency intervention, as well as cultural and structural change, then the jigsaw is complete and the picture clear.

Without an inter-agency approach men’s violence will not be contained or prevented. The MBCP must work in conjunction with the women’s services and be transparent and accountable to them. (OWP, 2001)

The MBCP has a number of key components, the initial assessment, which ideally includes feedback from the victim, the intake group, a structured group program, community education and an inter-agency reference group.

   a) The men attending the MBCP fall into two categories, those referred by other workers, or ‘self-referred’, and those referrals that come through the protocol with the courts and corrections. The latter are often referred to as ‘mandated’. However, as we have seen above, it is very important how that is set up. The referral forms are one page in length and request basic information that includes the client’s authorization for release of personal information between agencies. This signed authorization is essential for both the legally sharing of information on a need-to-know basis, but also acts as a way for the man to see that he cannot get away with ‘playing workers off’, and not taking responsibility.

   b) Assessment: the tools used for the assessment are an abusive behaviour checklist, a number of ‘continuums’ which present in a graphical form the choice between abusive behaviour and respectful behaviour, getting the men to ‘look in the mirror’ which means getting them to reflect on what comes out of the above sections of their assessment and to say whether there is anything in the picture they paint of themselves (the image in the mirror), that they recognize they need to change. Part of the assessment is also a character sketch in which the man characterizes himself according to some simple instructions, and then answers the question put to him, “how would you describe someone who is different to that?” about the things that he identifies as key characteristics. These assessment tools largely emanate from Personal Construct Theory (Houston, 1998).

   c) Partner input is an essential part of the assessment process, in which the man’s version of his behaviour towards his partner and children is verified or not. It is crucial that the partner input be carried out in such a way that she is not further jeopardized. (Frances, 1997)

   d) Intake group: If the man recognizes from the assessment that he needs to do something about his abusive or violent behaviour, then the next step is for him to join the intake group which meets weekly (on Thursdays evenings at the CHS). The group is loosely
structured, co-facilitated and lasts about two hours. Over the years the intake group participants and facilitators have developed an ‘agreement sheet’ which is a list of the basic principles that guide the group, and which are used by the men to stay on track. Often the groups commence with the men identifying which of the items on the agreement sheet mean most to them this week, and why.

e) The Men’s Responsibility Program (MRP): The number of sessions is twelve, and the is a set curriculum, and ran on Tuesday evenings. Some of the techniques used in the MRP are:
1. ‘7 flies on the wall’ This is adapted from the ‘Control Log’ of the Duluth Project and really is about looking at a particular incident of abusive behaviour and analyse it from seven different angles. (What would a fly on the wall see?)
2. ‘Tuning the radio’: This is about building awareness of our abusive wavelength and tuning out of it and onto a role which is identified as respectful and constructive for all concerned. This is adapted from the fixed role technique. (Laming, 2000b)
3. ‘Walking the track’: The metaphor of walking is useful because it is about the journey together (in the group), it is about the track being sometimes easy, sometimes hard, it is also about the unfamiliar aspects of the journey, not knowing where, when, how,…exposure to the elements and so on. ‘Walking the track’ is also about helping each other along the way,…sometimes I help you and sometimes you help me, and when I stumble on the track I have companions who help me to get on the right track again.
4. ‘The veranda over the toolshed’. This refers to physical fitness and being overweight, as well as to how a man deals with his sexuality in a healthy way. …so the connection is made between being fit and healthy, sexuality, and remain non-abusive.
5. ‘Kangaroo short in the top paddock or just playing possum’: Sometimes men who act abusively or violently, try to use a disability as a legitimate reason for being abusive…the claim is that they are not responsible, even in a limited way.
6. FV is like a eucalyptus tree that poisons everything under it: A theme in the programme is that men are not born violent or abusive, rather that it is learnt behaviour which they anticipate will get them the result that they are looking for. Another aspect of this is that when a man initially attends the MBCP, it is important to somehow convey to him that awful though his behaviour is, it is not the whole of him, that there is more to him than the abuse and violence. The problem is that the abuse and violence that he uses poisons everything else in his life, …his relationship with his wife, the affection with his children, this work, his health, the use of substances, his sense of self-esteem. So, much like a eucalyptus tree, which poisons everything under its umbrella (allelomancy), so does an abusive man.
7. Action methods: Scenarios are taken from the men’s narratives in the group. Psychodrama is used in various ways to give them an insight into such things as what commonly is part of the lead up to their violence, what are the various parts of their lives that are affected by what they do, the choices they are making and what might have been the situation if they had chosen to be non-violent. (Laming, 2000b)

NB theses various techniques listed above are inter-connected and lead in to one another.

8. What does it mean to be a rural program?
As with everything in life there are two sides to running a MBCP in a rural area. Because the communities are often small, there are usually many connections and relationships between workers. In the referral process these closer community connections mean that most often the
workers know each other and are hence able to better gauge a sense of the urgency and any other issues involved. One of the disadvantages is that it is not as easy for a victim to remain incognito. It is also difficult often to recruit trained and competent workers to run a MBCP in rural areas.

9. **A community development model?** To the extent that men who attend GRAPPLE or SHED influence other men to change then it is a community development model. To the extent that there is a component of worker education where one worker influences and educates another to change, and where one agency influences another to change, and where one family influences another to change, or one policeman influences another to change his attitude, or where there is early intervention among children, then it has elements of a community development model.

10. **The demographics of the client group** are varied. Approximately half are unemployed, (though professional men also access the MBCP), about one third have an alcohol or drug issue, about forty percent are separated from their partners, about sixty percent were victims of abuse as children, some live on farms, most have children, about ten percent have had or currently have a mental illness, most are working class.

11. **Availability of resources**: As we have already mentioned workers who are competent and trained in this field are scarce in rural areas, (which makes a community development model even more crucial)...men who have attended the program and made progress towards non-violence can usefully and legitimately be involved in community education. Funding is an ongoing problem, with the various government departments agreeing that MBCP are essential to an holistic approach, (Keys Young, 1999) and yet not being able to agree on who picks up the bill.

12. **Philosophy**: The basic beliefs and ‘givens’ behind the MBCP (Laming, 1996) are that:
   a. Learnt behaviour can be unlearnt...which tends to be a sign of hope for most men who have long perceived themselves as born abusive.
   b. Response-ability means that men can learn that they have a choice about how they behave and they are able to choose to respond in a non-violent way
   c. Hope: there is always hope of change, ....it is about making the right choices...learning what the ramifications of violent actions are....and choosing to do otherwise....anticipating and choosing the alternative which leads to greater harmony and respect, and not to fear, anxiety and despair.
   d. Narratives are important: it is the stories of the men, women, and children, which are important. For the MBCP worker it is important to try and understand the narratives with the same meaning that the men have.
   e. Prevention is much better than reaction: An underlying philosophy in the MBCP is that it is far better to change a situation of potential violence to one of safety, than to have to pick up the pieces after the event. That having been said, most of the men attending the MBCP have already been violent and there is a strong motivation in bringing about behaviour change, because if it does not occur the man will be violent again, either to the same woman or to a new partner. Part of the belief in prevention has been the commitment to community education about family violence, and particularly about the possibility of men changing their behaviour. (The MBCP curriculum was also adapted for working with children in secondary colleges in a group program to encourage early intervention in the main correlating factors for family violence, bullying, power and control, sexual harassment, alcohol and drug abuse, family background, sexism/racism/agism, communication blocks, expressing anger violently).
   f. Consistent message from agencies: One of the key findings we had from the network of agencies involved in family violence prevention in Gippsland was that consistency
of approach is crucial. In other words, that the woman victim receive the same supportive message from the court registrar as from the DV worker, or police, or MBCP worker. Similarly, that the abusive man receives consistently the message that he is responsible for what he does, and that he needs to change.

Conclusion
Our experience in running two MBCPs in Gippsland (approx. 180km apart) with approx 850 men attending in the past 10 years, is that there is a great longing in the community to do something to change the pain and suffering. Men and women are both, most often, really searching for a solution to the problem of family violence. Men are often despairing of ever changing their behaviour, and women have grown weary of the cycle of abuse and ugliness, which has usually remained hidden and unheard.

It seems to us that as workers we have both the privilege and the responsibility to enable women and children to feel safer in their own homes than on the street, and to enable men to see that not only do they need to change, but also that they can, and to show them specific ways of doing just that. This has to be done respectfully and compassionately. It also has to be done in such a way that the message is clear that family violence is wrong and violence is a crime, and at the same time that the man is supported in the necessary change process.

Finally, whilst there is the need to give men who attend the MBCP some hope that they can change, it is equally important not to give women who are in abusive relationships, false hope that might further endanger them and their children.

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SHEDDING VIOLENT EXPRESSIONS OF ANGER CONSTRUCTIVELY

Chris J. Laming

INTRODUCTION

Many men who are abusive or violent construe anger as the cause of their behaviour, and in so doing use it as an excuse. The notion of 'anger management', rather than changing behaviour, is promoted by the legal and medical professions, and in the magistrates' courts. Hence anger is often blamed for abuse or violence, the behaviour is pathologised, and the violent person is regarded as 'sick' (which, by the way, could not really be his fault because 'he was so angry that he did not know what he was doing'). This approach of 'anger management' is not helpful in enabling an abusive man to recognise and accept his responsibility for his behaviour, and to develop his ability to choose constructive alternatives that do not harm others. Blaming anger for the abuse also increases the possibility that women who have been abused will become more threatened at the evident 'cop-out'. It is this denial of responsibility that increases the likelihood that the man will be abusive or violent again 'down the track'.

SETTING

This chapter describes how one Australian program in rural Victoria, uses personal construct theory in an attempt to enable men who have been violent or abusive, to change, so that women, children, and others might be safer. The program is called the Men's SHED (Self Help Ending Domestics) Project, is known as 'Shed', and is based at a community health centre. The Shed started in 1994 at the request of local social workers supporting women and children in abusive relationships, looking for
a constructive intervention for men to change their behaviour (Laming, 2000a). The men who attend the Shed are identified, by themselves, or by others as being abusive or violent, as well as often being angry. As a result, ‘Shed’ is referred to as a ‘Men’s Behaviour Change Program’ rather than as an ‘Anger Management Program’, and its core intervention strategy is educational groups for men (Laming, 1998). This chapter is about the Shed behaviour change groups.

STRUCTURE

There are two group programs in Shed. First, there is a semi-structured, ongoing group which meets weekly and is open to new participants, and to men who want to return after some time for a ‘refresher’ course. The second group is a closed 12-week program, called the Men’s Responsibility Program, the members of which are drawn from the weekly ongoing group. Both the groups are co-facilitated by a social worker and psychologist. The co-facilitator’s role is to ensure that “there is a general climate of validation of construing within the group” (Viney, 1996, p. 159) as well as challenging abusive beliefs (Russell, 1995). The participants gather for the groups in the evening at a community health centre, where it is relatively anonymous. Some of the men have travelled up to 100km to get to the group. Some are there as part of a court order, although most are there (reluctantly) of their own free will, with varying degrees of pressure from others. Before proceeding, it is worth looking briefly at the two distinct groups: the Men’s Ongoing Group (MOG) and the Men’s Responsibility Program (MRP).

MEN’S ONGOING GROUP

During the initial assessment session the man is normally invited to attend the open Men’s Ongoing Group as soon as possible. There is no waiting period for this group, and most men are able to attend within a few days, some even attending on the same day as their initial assessment. For a man who has been abusive or violent at home, it is important for him to be able to access a man’s behaviour change program promptly because there is a limited ‘window of opportunity’ in which most men are ready to accept that they need to change (James, Seddon & Brown, 2002; Laming, 2000a). There is still some degree of remorse and regret for their abusive actions, the memories of which are still fresh in their minds. For their family’s safety it is important that such men have access to programs that might enable them to change. Many men who attend Shed find themselves outside their range of experience, in a situation that they have never been confronted with before. In this time of transition, they may well experience anxiety, threat, hostility or guilt, and this can help to prepare them to change (Fransella, 2003, p. 222).

The group setting is fairly informal, lasting two hours with a break at half-time. The meetings begin with a reminder of what the group is about, referring often to the ‘agreement sheet’ (see below), to reinforce key points. Certain group
understandings/expectations are also stressed. For example, that what is shared is
confidential (‘what’s said here stays here’) except in the case of a man making threats;
that the group is not about judging others or being judged but rather about supporting
one another in a change process and challenging collusion which minimises the
seriousness of men’s abuse.

Following the preamble, the men begin to ‘check in’ with accounts of how their week
has been, what they learnt from the previous session, and whether it has helped them
remain non-violent. In the case of a man attending for the first time, this can be a
daunting experience, and many men have related in the group that ‘coming through
the door tonight was the hardest thing I have ever done’. Many men attending this
intake group also express surprise that they are ‘not the only ones’, that there are
other men in similar situations to them. During this semi-structured ongoing group,
a number of Personal Construct Theory exercises, strategies and ‘tools’ are used to
enable the participants to see the possibility of constructive alternatives to violent or
abusive behaviour, and to make those changes. These ‘Shed tools’ will be looked at
later in the chapter.

When men move on from this open group, the Men’s Ongoing Group, into the struc-
tured, closed, 12-week Men’s Responsibility Program, the numbers in the former drop.
Over the years there has been an ebb and flow in the size of the ongoing group, and
generally the participants tend to prefer smaller numbers (6–10 members) rather than
larger (14–18 members). The largest group has had 22 members, which necessarily
meant that the ‘check-ins’ were short and contained. For some men, such a truncated
process is frustrating, given what is at stake for them as well as for their families,
while for other participants it might offer the chance to avoid adequate disclosure of
their abusive behaviour, and the opportunity for honest feedback from others.

MEN’S RESPONSIBILITY PROGRAM

This 12-week program has run three times a year, with the participants in the men’s
ongoing group eligible to apply. Attendance for at least three sessions of the men’s
ongoing group is a prerequisite for entry into this group program that has a structured
curriculum. The Men’s Responsibility Program also runs once a week for two hours,
and is closed to new participants once it commences. This program looks at types of
violence, issues of power and control, strategies to remain non-violent, family back-
ground issues, male socialisation, anger control, self-esteem, alcohol and other drug
abuse, and the effects and ramifications for victims of violent behaviour. The numbers
for the Men’s Responsibility Program have varied, though 6–8 participants seems to
be the preferred range, with the men in larger groups generally dropping out during
the 12 weeks, until that number is reached. The Men’s Responsibility Program is
cospecialised by a male and a female, according to ‘best practice’ principles (Younger,
1995, pp. 4/7), while the Men’s Ongoing Group is cospecialised by two males.
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RATIONALE

Groups are arguably the most effective way for a person to develop more constructive alternatives to dysfunctional behaviour (Kelly, [1955] 1991; Dunnett, 1988; Williams, 1989; Winter, 1992; Viney, 1996). In the Shed the co-facilitators experience the group process as giving men a chance to experience and learn constructive alternatives to their abusive and violent behaviour and this perception is supported from other sources (Jenkins, 1990; Younger, 1995; Russell, 1995; Houston, 1998; Laming, 1998; Winter, 2003a; Winter, 2003b; Cummins, 2003):

For many of the men, their involvement in the group is the first time they have ever talked about their abusive/violent behaviour, the first time they have heard other men talk of their own abusive/violent behaviour, also as we often say, being challenged by their peers (other men) is far more powerful than being challenged by the facilitators ... another important feature of the group is that it creates a non-judgemental and confidential (but not collusive) environment.

(Davies, Personal Communication, 2001)

On the one hand, the group provides a place of support, and on the other, a place of challenge. It is keeping the balance between these two poles that is the art of facilitating such a group. In order to facilitate the process better, the ‘agreement sheet’ is used, in which the underlying philosophy of the Shed program is stated in simple language.

Shed Philosophy – Agreement Sheet

The philosophy of the group revolves around a number of key concepts or constructs which have been agreed upon by the participants over the years and added to. This is known as the ‘agreement sheet’ by the Shed men and includes the following:

1. Men are not born violent.
2. Men’s abuse or violence is learnt and can be unlearnt.
3. Each of us is responsible for our attitudes and behaviour and for its effects on others.
4. Respect means treating the other person the way I would like to be treated.
5. Our abuse or violence is often used to get us what we want.
6. Men often use denial, excusing, minimising or blaming to justify their abusive behaviour.
7. Our abuse or violence often scares or terrifies our partner and children.
8. We have a choice to behave violently or non-violently.
9. There is more to us than our violent behaviour.
10. Anger is often used by men as an excuse to be abusive or violent.
11. Alcohol and other drugs do not cause violent behaviour, they do limit our control and so when we choose to abuse alcohol, we choose the possibility that we may be violent.
At the start of the group the above philosophy is distributed in the form of an agreement sheet which the participants refer to during the course of the session. The participants use the "agreement sheet" to remind each other about why they are in the group, and as a way to get back on track. As they usually put it, to 'cut the crap, and stop the bullshit, and get fair dinkum' or, 'just call a spade a bloody shovel'. For example, the participants will challenge a man who is minimising or justifying his abusive behaviour or is construing himself as the victim and attempting to elicit sympathy for 'poor me', rather than taking responsibility for his abusive behaviour.

RESPONSE-ABILITY

The concept of 'response-ability' is central. In the Shed project it is used in the sense of the 'ability' to respond or to choose...if you like. It is how we express Kelly's 'Constructive Alternativeism';

we have alternatives available to us with which we try to make sense of (or construe) each other, ourselves and the world swirling around us...no one need paint himself into a corner...no one needs to be completely hemmed in by circumstances...no one needs to be a victim of his biography.

(Kelly, [1955] 1991)

Hence 'response-ability' as we use it in the Shed Project means that I do have a choice about how I construe my relationship and how I respond to my partner. I do not have to paint myself into a macho corner that defines a 'real man' as one, whose main repertoire in resolving conflicts is to use his anger as a way to intimidate and get what he wants. I do not have to continue to be the victim of an abusive childhood in which, for example, I learned that male to female violence is 'normal' for a man to use to get what he wants. At the same time it is apparent that the Shed men's readiness to accept 'response-ability' is closely linked to the implications of change for them; this idea is echoed elsewhere (Cavanagh & Lewis, 1996, p. 109).

PARTICIPANTS

The men who attend the groups have generally grown up in rural Australia, and about half of them are unemployed. Those who do work are coal miners, electricity industry workers, timber workers, dairy farmers, tradesmen, and an occasional professional. Many of the men's lives are dysfunctional at this time, with issues of alcohol and drug abuse, depression, family break-up, unemployment or illness being common. About a quarter of the men have a criminal history, and Protective Services are often involved to ensure the safety of children in a family violence situation. Their intervention, especially if it involves removing the children from the home for safety reasons, usually results in significant resentment by those men involved. This is reflected in their use of such terms as 'Rottweilers' for social workers who are responsible for this intervention for children's safety.
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REFERRALS

Many of the men have been referred to the Shed Project by these same social workers from ‘Child Protection’. Other referrers include the Magistrates’ Court, the alcohol and drug service, family doctors, police, and community agencies, or support programs for women. ‘Self-referral’ often happens when men realise how much is at stake, and what they could lose by their continuing abusive or violent behaviour. It is probably true to say that at first no man wants to be in the group and that there are various levels of resistance, reticence, and hostility. Kelly’s concept of hostility (2003, p. 18) is particularly relevant here. In talking about hostility, Bannister notes that it is important to facilitate change ‘not by assaulting each other’s central beliefs but by helping each other to construct alternatives, beginning with areas of peripheral contradiction. Thus we may gradually replace a central belief without the need for hostility’ (1970, p. 31). In order to enable a referred person to take up the challenge of changing abusive beliefs, it is crucial to support him in that change, and one of the ways of doing that is to relativise his abusive behaviour. In other words, reminding the man that his abusive behaviour is only a part of who he is, not the whole of him, and that there is more to him than the abuse. In this regard, it is often useful for the man to be reminded of how major areas of dysfunction in his life, at present, are probably a direct consequence of his abusive behaviour.

In this way, the man is challenged to change his abusive behaviour because it is poisoning the rest of his life, for example, affecting this relationship with his children who are scared of him, his wife, who trusts him less and less, his health because he is unable to sleep well, and so on. Since many referred men present for the first assessment with a very negative self-image which often leaves no room to see positives about themselves, it is important to situate their behaviour in a relative context which allows for change, at the same time not to minimise the seriousness of what they are doing. Again, Bannister uses an apt metaphor for this:

which compares the problem of life to the problem of rebuilding a ship while at sea. If we have to rebuild the ship while sailing it we obviously do not begin by stripping the keel. We use the strategy of removing one plank at a time and rapidly replacing it so that, given good fortune, we may eventually sail in an entirely new ship. (1970, p. 31).

Many men who are referred feel that their ‘ship’ is already sinking, and that the things that they hold most dearly are under imminent threat. Hence, part of the referral and assessment process is to recognise and address that low self-esteem, in order that the man might be more effective in changing his abusive behaviour.

LOW SELF-ESTEEM

The men’s self-esteem is usually rock bottom, in stark contrast to the crass arrogance many portray. In the Shed they seem able to meet and construe things in a similar way, and to realise that ‘I am not the only one like this’. In so doing, they are able
Shedding Expressions of Anger Constructively

to build commonality, on safe and familiar ground where they feel at home, and
are hence more open to be challenged about their abuse, and encouraged to change.
They learn to listen and understand and regard one another in a way which permits
alternative construction of how others see their reality (sociality) (see Chapter 1). To
put it another way, in the Shed groups the men are given an opportunity to practise
seeing the world through the eyes of others, 'sit in another person's space' and to
learn problem solving and negotiation skills.

It is worth noting that for men attending the Shed their constructs around macho/machismo behaviour that help drive their abuse or violence are usually very
strong, and yet are often juxtaposed with a very poignant sense of their own per-
ceived inferiority. Consistent with the findings of Russell (1995), men who attend
the Shed "often see themselves at the centre of the universe, and display a sense of
'superiority' to and 'detachment' from their partner/family" (Davies, Personal Com-
unication, 2001). This is also related to the issue of 'men's convenience', in which
they use tactics of power and control to get what they want (Pence and Paymar, 1993;
Russell, 1995). To the extent that a man's low self-esteem might lead him to feel
sorry for himself and not take responsibility for his behaviour, on the one hand, or
be lacking in any real sense that he can change, on the other, it is important to both
challenge and support him to see himself differently. Putting it another way, to help
him to see alternative ways of looking at himself and his relationships, and to see that
the way he behaves with others is a choice, which he is able to change if he chooses.
Kelly ([1955] 1991) calls this 'Constructive Alternativism'.

MACHO BEHAVIOUR

I once received an email from a colleague in Edinburgh who runs behaviour change
groups for men on probation, using Personal Construct Theory (Macrae & Andrew,
2000). He mentioned how a visiting worker from Nicaragua stood up in a workshop
and said, "Machismo is Eucalyptus...it towers over everything so that nothing can
grow beside it, it sucks out the nutrients and its roots are deep. We need to pull it
out by the roots." As someone who lives in the land of 'the gum tree' (Eucalyptus), I
find this metaphor very apt, and would add that the Eucalyptus also drips a substance
from its leaves that suppresses any other nearby growth. Being 'macho' is like that
because it poisons any other life around it and stifles the relationship. At the same
time my co-facilitator noted that a Eucalyptus easily blows over because the roots are
shallow! And so the metaphor continues.

In contrast to the 'macho' image, the experience in the groups is that generally the
men who attend are hard on themselves. For example, they often see themselves as
failures, and at the same time, paradoxically, often cling tenaciously to the belief that
they were justified in their abuse. They are usually angry, resentful, suspicious and
hostile. "Hostility is defined as the continued effort to extort validational evidence
in favour of a type of social prediction which has already proved itself a failure"
(Kelly, 2003, p. 18). It is precisely this continual seeking to convince others (and
themselves?) that they have a right to be abusive, despite all types of evidence to the
contrary that is defined as 'hostility' by Kelly.

In these apparently contradictory constructs there is also strong evidence of frag-
mentation (Kelly, [1955] 1991) in their construction system. On the one hand, a man
might be struggling with the way he sees himself and his life, his relationships and
what he sees as 'failure', and on the other he insists on controlling his family and
using bullying tactics to get what he wants. It is almost as if he is able to feel like
his life is not so 'out of control' precisely by controlling others, by whatever means.
On the surface he is 'in control' and pretending all is well, while underneath he is
hurting, scared, and struggling. The image that comes to mind, and one which we
use often in the groups, is of a well-built man treading water, with one arm above his
head waving, smiling, and 'in control', while under the water his legs are frantically
kicking to stay afloat, and the other arm cradles a teddy-bear!

ASSESSMENT

In the initial assessment process the man is asked blunt questions by the Shed facil-
itator, about his behaviour, designed to get him to 'look in the mirror' and perhaps
begin to construe his abusive behaviour in a different way. A favourite question asked
by one of the co-facilitators during assessment is:

How would you respond if a complete stranger walked in off the
street and started treating your wife/partner the way you do?

The general response to this question is: "I'd rip his f**king throat out".

FOLLOW-UP QUESTION: "Why would you do that?"
RESPONSE: "Because what he is doing is wrong!"
FOLLOW-UP QUESTION: "So what makes you different? What gives you the
right to...?"

In response to this last question, many of the men break down crying (Davies, Personal
Communication, 2001).

As part of the assessment process the man is asked to write a self-characterisation
(Kelly, 1991, p. 239), or character sketch, as a way to begin getting the man to express
what are the things in his life which have most meaning, and to see how his abusive
behaviour makes sense for him, in relation to the rest of his life (Houston, 1998,
p. 30). One way to do is to ask the man: "How do you want to be remembered as
a father/husband by your kids/wife?" and "What do you have to do to achieve this"
Again, this is inviting the man to see his abuse/violence from a different perspective
(Davies, Personal Communication, 2001).
The very hearing of the questions about specific abusive behaviours enables a man to reflect on his relationship in a new way, and in addition, it is usually the first time that another man has put these sorts of questions to him, rather than colluding with his excuses. The aim is to listen credulously (Kelly, 1991, p. 174); subsuming his constructs in order to engage the man in a process of loosening some of his abusive beliefs, attitudes, values, in order to tighten onto non-abusive and respectful ways of relating. 'This is consistent with best practice in any clinical intervention – it is crucial to understand whatever meaning the client gives to his own behaviour' (James et al., 2002, p. 3). Assessing the meaning a man gives to his abusive behaviour is important in understanding how it fits with his view of the world and his relationships, and how he might engage in change, not just in theory but in actual practice (Houston, 1998, p. 28).

During the Shed assessment the man is presented with an abusive behaviour checklist and invited to take it home and rate himself on a five-point scale. In addition, he is given a sheet with destructive behaviours down the left-hand side and constructive alternatives drawn from the literature (Pence & Paymar, 1993; Russell, 1995), down the right-hand side and invited to gauge and mark where he might be on a continuum from one to the other. Wherever possible, the man's partner is also invited to be part of the process and fill in similar ratings about the man, but independently, and in such a way that her safety and well-being are protected.

Before coming to the first ongoing weekly group the men often anticipate something completely different to what happens. The experience of coming itself usually loosens their personal constructions about being alone, and they have a strong sense that others are in the same boat. Many group participants report that they have found it helpful to be able both to hear other men's stories and also to be able to tell their own story without being criticised or judged and condemned.

**EXPERIENCE CYCLE**

There are various possible phases in a man's coming to the Shed group. At first, many are reticent, resistant and embarrassed at coming, and they often anticipate the worst because they have not had previous experience of a men's group. They usually arrive with this anticipation, being very nervous and anxious. Indeed, many men have already made up their minds that coming to Shed will be a waste of time, but that they will go through the hoops to keep 'her' (or the magistrate!) happy. When a man does actually make it to the group and begins to engage with the other participants in a facilitated process, it can be a challenging process and one which he is likely to react to with more or less hostility, depending on how much his abusive attitudes and behaviour are part of his core construing. Some men remain hostile and refuse to engage.
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Participants in Shed are asked to 'look in the mirror', honestly regard their behaviour, identify what 'abuses' others, and to see things from their (abused) perspective. Kelly refers to this in his Sociality corollary which states: "To the extent that one person construes the construction processes of another, he may play a role in a social process involving the other person" (1991, p. 66). Being in a facilitated group process with other men in a similar situation allows a man the opportunity to begin making another meaning out of what is happening and what he is doing, and hopefully he will begin to opt for alternative ways of behaving that are no longer destructive of others, or of himself. If this is what starts to happen, then the man will reassess his original anticipation of the group, since it has been disconfirmed, and this will lead him to a constructive revision of the group and its usefulness to him, and perhaps to his continuing to attend. A parallel process is that the man will hopefully start an Experience Cycle (Kelly, 1970, p. 26) on the basis of the new alternatives and choices he will encounter within the group about how he can behave in his relationship. This is accelerated to the extent that he has, with him in the group, others who are on a similar journey, intent on non-violence. In this the facilitator's role is to help them 'keep their eye on the ball', and not to get collusive, distracted or complacent, or to allow participants to think that they have got it already fixed.

A CONSISTENT MESSAGE

A consistent message is essential when trying to address and prevent the continuation of men's violence and abuse at home. Men need to hear that they are responsible for their own actions and attitudes and, conversely, women who are victimised need to consistently hear that they do have a right to safety and well-being and that they are not to blame for the abuse. This consistency is ideally reflected in the response of whomever the person comes into contact with: friends, family, the magistrates, court officials, the police, doctors, social workers and solicitors, to mention a few, and it represents a superordinate construct or over-riding principle of the SHED program.

The superordinate construct here is one which we as society deem overriding many other personal preferences, and it is that: "each of us has a right to be safe and to be treated with respect, and hence each of us has a duty to protect that same right of others, especially in regard to those generally less able to physically protect themselves, the young, the old, the sick, and often women".

THE INVITATIONAL APPROACH

An 'invitational approach' is used in the Shed groups and modelled by the facilitators and the more experienced participants as a way to encourage the men to gradually trust the group as a possible venue to explore alternative constructions:

[Kelly] proposed an invitational mood, in which the speaker takes responsibility for attributing qualities to events, and invites the listener to consider an interpretation of
the event without precluding alternative interpretations. Casting a proposition in an
initiational mood suggests that the subject remains open to a range of possibilities.
(McWilliams, 2003, p. 79)

Group members are encouraged to start to ‘take on board’ other men’s stories and
suggestions, and then go away and reflect on them as homework. For the group
participants, homework is an important component of the program where significant
learning can occur, profound changes can take place and constructive alternatives can
be discovered (Davies, Personal Communication, 2001).

In the group the credulous approach (Winter, 2003b, p. 15) allows for the myriad
different stories to be taken at face value and to be treated with respect (which is
different from colluding with the abusive behaviour). In this way the narrow construing
which epitomises the men’s stereotyping of behaviour is challenged and an alternative
construction is explored. By inviting the group participants to tell their story and its
meaning for them, and by them feeling listened to ‘credulously’, with an open mind,
and not judged, there arises the possibility of them learning to see that it is alright to
feel scared, to feel ‘out of control’ and not coping, and that they are not alone in that
‘space’, that there are others with them who are struggling with the same experience.

It is from such a scenario that ‘Jack’, who came to the group initially belligerent
and in denial about the effects of his abuse on his wife and children, learned to see
himself differently. In his case the ‘ahta’ experience occurred when he was relating
to the other members of the group how he was beaten by his father as a child of 7,
how he felt, and how the memory of that event, the look on his father’s face, the tone
of his voice, the words he used, suddenly reminded him of a recent episode of his
own violence to his son, and how his behaviour mirrored that of his father to him. He
had never made that connection before, and it was mainly because he was listened
to with a credulous attitude (Kelly, 1991, p. 121) by the other group members who
attempted to see the world through his eyes, that he was able to loosen his narrow
construing about his behaviour as justified (because his son had been naughty), and
reconstruct it as abusive and destructive. By being listened to with respect, not judged
and stereotyped, ‘Jack’ was able to open his mind to the possibility of changing the
way he regarded his own behaviour, and his personal constructions around relating.

SHED TOOLS

There are a variety of Personal Construct Theory techniques that can be used in a
behaviour change group for men who have used violence or abuse against women and
children. The participants are asked to do a ‘self-characterisation’ for homework and
the content is used to elicit constructs that become the basis of ongoing interaction
in the group. A checklist of ‘destructive-constructive alternatives’ have already been
supplied as part of the assessment, these represent alternative poles of constructs
which the individuals in the group are invited to explore with a view to elaborating
their personal constructions to include possible responses other than abuse or violence
when they become angry.

Part of this process is a self-assessment sheet in which the participants are asked to
mark on a continuum where they believe they are situated. For example, a continuum
which has ‘intimidating’ at one end and ‘non-threatening’ at the other might be used
to enable a man to see that he is in fact quite intimidating to others at times, while not
being absolutely intimidating all of the time (Laming & Fontana, 2003).

Laddering is also used in the groups, though less frequently, and with due caution
regarding the person’s readiness to both undertake the exercise and to ‘take on board’
what it might reveal to him (Viney, 1996). Another PCT technique used in the Shed
groups is a simplified version of Kelly’s Fixed Role Therapy (1991, p. 244) which
we call ‘Take a hike, Harry’.

As an example of this, let us take ‘Jack’ again. As a result of telling his story in the
group and making the connection between what he felt as a small child when his own
father was abusive, and what his own child might feel like now as a result of his own
abuse, he is asked to name three behaviours of his that he would like to change. The
following behaviours were identified, as were alternative, non-abusive behaviours
that he would like to replace them with, and these were written on the white board.

ABUSIVE BEHAVIOURS

Scaring his children by threats.
Verbal abuse to his family.
Using ‘put-downs’ to attack his wife.

NON-ABUSIVE ALTERNATIVES

Talking to them with affection.
Communicating with respect.
Recognising her contributions and
building her self-esteem.

Next, ‘Jack’ is asked whether the three alternative behaviours are ‘doable’ or whether
they are too idealistic. Group discussion ensues in order to fine tune the alternatives
and to suggest practical examples of how they can be demonstrated in the way the
‘Jack’ means them. It is important that ‘Jack’ agrees and identifies with non-violent
alternatives and their practical application. Next ‘Jack’ is invited to briefly role-play
these alternatives in the group, followed by further suggestions from the participants.
When ‘Jack’ is satisfied with the alternative ‘persona’, he is invited to give him a
name, let’s say he chooses ‘Bill’. Now ‘Jack’ is to instructed to go out of the room,
send the abusive ‘Jack’ on a holiday for three weeks, and then come back into the
group as ‘Bill’, and remain as ‘Bill’ for the next three weeks, keeping a small card
with him to remind himself of the three ‘non-abusive alternatives’ that now represent
behaviours which personify the new ‘Bill’. He is told not to disclose to anyone outside
the group that this is what he is doing, but rather to play the role of ‘Bill’ as best he
can, reminding himself of the behaviours during the day, and observing the reactions
of others to the new ‘Bill’.
Shedding Expressions of Anger Constructively

When 'Bill' returns to the group the following week and reports on how his children are already less scared of him as a result of him taking time to play with them, and not yelling at them, it reinforces in the group the notion that change is possible. Difficulties are addressed, other practical ways of expressing the non-abusive alternatives, are explored, and ways that have been tried, and not worked, are discarded. At the end of the three-week period 'Bill' is asked whether he wants 'Jack' to return, the answer is always in the negative! 'Jack' chooses to remain the new 'Bill' and to continue to reconstruct his behaviour non-abusively. This is the exercise we call 'Take a hike, Harry', though in this case it is take a hike 'Jack'.

The ABC Technique (Tschudi, 1977; Cummins, 2003) and the Experience Cycle (Kelly, 1970), are also both used frequently in the groups to enable participants to elaborate the meanings they make of what they are doing. These techniques are often instrumental in freeing them from tight construing which has hemmed them in and cornered them so that they feel trapped and unable to change.

EMOTIONAL ILLITERACY

There is a high degree of emotional illiteracy on the part of many men attending the SHED groups. They are often unable to name the feelings they have in a given situation. They have usually been brought up to regard such feelings, and the articulation of them, as something that is not what a 'real man' does. 'Real men' are self-contained and stand on their own feet, and don't have emotions, and hence do not grow up learning the words for them because they never have permission to communicate like that. 'Only girls talk about what they feel. What are ya anyway, a girl? A Sheila?'
Apart from the ludicrous nature of this comment, it reinforces the lower status allotted to 'girls' by the patriarchal construction of society that benefits males.

The expectations, then, for a boy growing up in an environment where such is the prevailing attitude, are that he does not express emotions, he certainly does not express anything that detracts from the image of a 'real man', and that he does not try to communicate at this level with anyone. As a result, many boys and men become locked into an identity which does not allow for the expression of what they really feel, and dictates how they 'must' be. Someone referred to this expectation as 'mustabation'!

HUMOUR

Often humour is used in the role-plays, as a way of making fun of the ludicrous justifications some men give for their abuse, and getting them to laugh at themselves, in order to then arrive at a constructive revision. This playful attitude is important at times in helping to loosen tight construing and is juxtaposed with the seriousness of the issues and the high stakes involved. Indeed, play and humour are important
elements of the therapeutic process especially when using something like ‘Take a hike, Harry’ (Fixed Role Therapy) (Epping & Nazario, 1987, p. 284). Humour is used in the group to both relativise some of the positions taken, and also to counter some of the over-seriousness. When used appropriately in the group, humour can enable the alteration of constructs which otherwise seem impermeable and ‘set in concrete’. Often a man who is attending the group has a whole construction system which supports, not only his use of abuse, but also the notion that it is in fact he who is the victim and that he is justified in whatever action he takes, on the grounds that, for example, ‘she did the dirty on me’, or ‘she pressed my buttons’, or ‘she pulled my strings’, or ‘she deliberately winds me up’.

When a man is tightly construing himself as the victim, and endeavouring to elicit a sympathetic and supportive response in the group, the use of humour can allow for an immediate loosening of his construction to include the possibility of seeing it differently. Not ‘laughing at’ him, but ‘laughing with’ him. This clearly needs to be carefully judged by the facilitator so as to be constructive in its outcome rather than destructive, both for the individual and for the group as a whole.

Humour can also allow the deflation of what a person has created as a constellatory, all-embracing construct, ‘bigger than Ben Hur’ and literally larger than life, into something which is relative to other constructs in his life. In this way ‘the problem’ as he construes it, can be relativised and reconstructed.

Australian humour is often dry and self-deprecating and there is a need for vigilance by the co-facilitators to ensure that the humour and jokes are enabling of change for the group and can be sustained by the individual men, given their fragility and vulnerability at times. The key is that the group operates within a milieu of respect (that is, treating another the way I would like to be treated), safety, support, honesty, and confidentiality (‘what is said here stays here’). It is obviously important that the participants do not feel judged, put-down, or criticised by others. Indeed, it is common for men attending the group to be very self-critical and to construe themselves, in their words, as ‘arseholes’. Humour often helps them listen better to things that are difficult to hear.

METAPHORS AND SIMILES

As is evident from the above, not only is humour a useful tool to use in a behaviour change group, but so are simile and metaphor. Metaphors alluded to in the Shed groups include ‘the journey’, in which we all struggle and stumble at times, and have a chance to help each other to travel further; ‘climbing the mountain’ in which, as we climb, sometimes lose our footing and roll down a ways before picking ourselves up and continuing the climb again; resting when we need to, and getting another
Shedding Expressions of Anger Constructively

perspective on our lives from the view up there; worth the effort; 'the shed' as a place
where men feel at home, where they can think about life, their relationships and do
a bit of calm reflecting on their behaviour; 'the paddock' in which there is a fence
down the centre with her half and his half and a gate joining the two, and the choice of
respecting the other's space or not (Clark, 2001); 'the shock- absorbers' where there
is no more give and take in the relationship, and no more benefit of the doubt given,
it is like a vehicle in which the shock absorbers are worn right down and whenever
there is a rough patch on the journey together, metal jars on metal, and makes for a
rather uncomfortable ride!

The metaphor of the 'clockwork soldier' is used in response to a man who says 'she
winds me up' and, similarly, a man who says 'she pushes my buttons' is asked: 'Are
you a "tamagochi"?!' (a Japanese toy). Another relevant metaphor in this neck of
the woods is 'the greenhouse effect' which is used to refer to a man who scares or
intimidates, or physically abuses his family so that what he causes at home is likened
to a dairy herd who are stirred up (by yelling or hitting) prior to milking and the result
is that the milking-shed is splattered with cow shit, giving a 'greenhouse effect'!
'The boiler' is often used in the groups to illustrate the build up in pressure that a
man might experience if he does not find healthy, constructive ways of expressing his
frustration, resentment, anger, since every boiler has a limit to the amount of pressure
it can sustain. Boilers also need periodic 'shut-downs' to allow for scouring so that
they remain safe and do not explode, like the man who 'goes bush' or takes 'time-out'
because he chooses to keep his emotions in check, or 'let off steam'.

In terms of the techniques used in the Shed, several metaphors are used to describe
them. 'The mirror' is used as a symbol for the man undergoing an assessment for
abusive or violent behaviour, where he is encouraged to disclose the reality of his life
and to 'look in the mirror' and state what it is that he sees there that he would wish to
change regarding the way he relates to his wife and children. 'The jigsaw puzzle' is
used to help the man sift through the bits of jigsaw puzzle which put together to make
up the picture of his life as he perceives it. This metaphor is used as a way to help him
identify distortions, or 'bits that do not fit the picture'. 'Hemming out' is the opposite
of being 'hemmed in' or trapped. 'In prison' is the metaphor used to illustrate the
feeling of being trapped, caught, stuck, not knowing how to get out. Connected with
this is 'the handcuffs' where the participants 'handcuff' themselves to each other in
pairs by making string handcuffs, from which they are encouraged to try and extricate
themselves without succumbing to frustration and feelings of helplessness... there is
a way out of every bind or fix, it is just a matter of finding it.

A powerful simile is that of the pointing finger. One finger of the blamer's hand is
pointing at the person being blamed and three fingers are pointed back at themselves!
Often in the group we use this depiction to remind the participants that blaming usually
says far more about the blamer than about the one being blamed.
COLLUSION

Together with such tight construing about his justification for being abusive, the man will also have a related construct about his righteousness, and hence he construes his emotion as righteous anger, which any reasonable person would feel. By the way, this ‘poor me’ construing has probably taken years to elaborate, on the basis of ever greater anticipations of what works for him, and what does not. A man using such construing has more than likely grown up in a family in which the same dynamic was perhaps used by one or more of his parents, and he has adopted the same behaviour, manipulative but effective, in so far as it bolsters up his construction that it is he who is hard done by. Such a man will most likely also cultivate as friends, ‘mates’ who do not challenge this construction, but indeed collude with it, both because it is what their ‘mate’ wants to hear, but also because it connects the superordinate societal constructs around patriarchy and being macho.

Our experience in running the groups is that generally it is ‘the battlers’ of this world who are more honest, and it is often men who work in professions who have most to gain (and lose) by maintaining a position of moral indignation at the proposition that they are the ones who are really responsible for their abuse. A whole series of abusive beliefs or constructs are often employed to reinforce such a position and in order for the behaviour to change, these must be challenged (Russell, 1995).

SUMMARY

Over the past 10 years the Shed Project has assessed over 750 men, and this probably represents close to half that number being ‘advised’ to attend, or being given an informal referral. There is a high drop-out rate as men progress through the program. For example, of every 100 men who are referred from various sources, we have anecdotal evidence that indicates only half (50 men) make an appointment and present for an assessment. Of those 50 men, who are assessed, only about 25 choose to attend the open intake (Men’s Ongoing) group. Of those 25 men, only 12 will opt to do the 12-week closed Men’s Responsibility Program. Some of these 12 will return periodically to the Men’s Ongoing Group, or do another 12-week Men’s Responsibility Program when they recognise, or are reminded, that they are slipping back into old abusive habits, and need a ‘refresher’ course.

The reasons for the drop-out rate do not rest entirely with the men referred. Other reasons could include inappropriate referrals, in which men are referred to the program because it is the only ‘men’s program’, even though what they require is a group for separated men, or a group for men who have been sexually assaulted in childhood, or a parenting program, rather than a men’s behaviour change program like Shed.
Other reasons for the drop-out rate might be that the man has been incarcerated, that he has moved interstate, or that the travelling time in this rural area precluded further attendance. It is also true that the methods and structure of the group process do not suit all men, and hence they drop out, despite a willingness to change.

It is not easy for men to deal with changes they are challenged to make to their ways of relating to the world, and especially in relationships. Meaning-making (Leitner et al., 2000) based on abusive forms of behaviour witnessed and learnt when young, easily become part of a person’s construct system and are hard to change. The drop-out rate given above is one indication of the difficulty involved in confronting and changing men’s abusive beliefs and behaviour, and at the same time there is hope gained from the growing realisation of the importance of men taking responsibility for what they do, and in the existence of programs that enable men to look at their behaviours, and to change any ‘destructive’ to ‘constructive’.

In terms of the ‘drop-out rate’ from the time of referral to attendance at the structured 12-week program, there is some evidence to suggest that change already begins to occur from the time of assessment onwards. That is, in the very asking of questions, alternative behaviours are proposed as possible, and rationalised, destructive behaviour that has been absolutised, is relativised. Construing is loosened and non-abusive alternative constructions of behaviour become possible. A man who comes to the assessment full of denial about his violence, when questioned, may begin to see that the way he behaves is indeed, abusive, and that if he stops ‘pointing the finger’, he can see that he is making choices about how he relates, and that he can change those, that he is ‘response-able’.

Similarly, men attending the ongoing group, who do not progress to the Men’s Responsibility Program, may make all sorts of changes towards relating not abusively, even though they have not taken the next step. In this way, we can see that the ‘drop-out rate’ is not as clear as would appear, and that the real test of the efficacy of Shed is whether a man ceases to act abusively, whether as a result of assessment, the Men’s Ongoing Group, or attending the structured Men’s Responsibility Program. It is the men’s partners and children who are the best judges of whether change for their good has occurred, and it is important to include their feedback in any evaluation process.

In conclusion, the Shed groups use a variety of Personal Construct Theory techniques such as self-characterisations, construct elicitation, laddering, ABC technique, experience cycle and fixed role therapy. Men who attend the groups are listened to in a non-judgemental way and are invited to explore alternatives to their violent and abusive behaviour. Anger is relativised as one of a number of emotions that we all can learn to express non-abusively and non-destructively, for others and for ourselves.
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