A domestic violence program’s turn towards philosophical, theoretical and discursive integration: A response to how domestic violence is gendered through language

By Tania Rose Whitelaw

This thesis is presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Psychology (Honours), Murdoch University, 2013
I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary educational institution.

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ABSTRACT

The acts, accounts of and explanations for domestic violence are frequently misrepresented by professionals. The Interactional and Discursive View of Violence and Resistance framework and Response-Based therapy have contributed to understanding how this is accomplished through particular language practices. Research has shown that language is used strategically, not only by men who choose to use violence, but also by professionals to conceal violence, mitigate perpetrator’s responsibility, conceal victim’s resistance and blame and pathologise women (Coates and Wade, 2007). This current study used narrative analysis to examine how Relationships Australia’s men’s domestic violence group programs have changed language practices; in response to developing an increased knowledge and awareness of how domestic violence is misrepresented through language. It was found that program staff responded by reviewing and changing language practices in a deliberate effort to represent domestic violence accurately and align language with a feminist post-structural theoretical ideology across three sites in the program; program policy, practice and reporting. These data suggest that both social and structural organisational factors present difficulties in aligning theory, policy and practice.
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INTRODUCTION

How we talk about domestic violence matters. It matters in regards to the language or discourse we use to represent, explain and address domestic violence across social, public, professional and political contexts. It is highly consequential in terms of how language is strategically used to reposition responsibility for violence away from the perpetrator and place it upon the victim (Coates & Wade, 2007).

Allan Wade’s “Response Based Framework” and “Interactional and Discursive View of Violence and Resistance” which is based on a human rights ethic, emphasises how domestic violence is gendered through language; that is men’s violence is frequently accounted for and explained in public and professional talk and text, by using psychological constructs (loss of control due to drug abuse or stress) as causal attributions for violence. This shifts responsibility from the man and refers to violence as a mutual issue of the couple, unintentional or provoked by the woman (Coates & Wade, 2004, p. 511). Interestingly, the very same psychological and causal constructs are used publicly and professionally to blame women for their own victimisation by inferring that pathological, psychological deficiencies in the woman (lack of boundaries, poor self esteem) caused the man to abuse her (Coates & Wade, 2007). This strategic use of language is political resource, used by perpetrators, professionals in the sector and the public, to obscure and misrepresent violence through inaccurate descriptions of acts of violence and responses of the victim. Therefore the accounts, recounts and representation of domestic violence is performed in such a way, through discourse, that it de-contextualises and de-genders
men’s violence by “gendering the blame” and making women responsible for men’s violence (Berns, 2001, p. 262; Coates, Todd & Wade, 2003; Coates & Wade, 2007).

Domestic violence is a profound social problem. How domestic violence is discursively represented within professional contexts, via the multiple interagency relationships that collaborate to increase the safety of women and children, is of paramount importance in addressing domestic violence (Laing, 2001). There are existing complexities and tensions arising from competing and shared professional understandings of domestic violence that are evident in terms of appropriate and accurate language use in addressing domestic violence within collaborative interagency responses (Coates & Wade, 2007). This will be discussed further in reference to Australian statistics and state definitions of domestic violence, highlighting the language use practices in the domestic violence sector, the theoretical heritage influencing language and practices, as well as the influence of current discursive research on language use in the context of professional responses to domestic violence (Wade, 1997; Todd & Wade, 2003; Coates & Wade, 2004, 2007).

Defining domestic violence

Domestic violence takes many forms, including physical, financial, emotional, verbal, spiritual, social and sexual abuse, as well as the use of threats, intimidation and isolation as forms of control (Humphreys, 2007). The Best Practice Model (2000) states “domestic violence is considered to be behaviour which results in physical, sexual and/or psychological damage, forced social isolation, economic
deprivation, or behaviour which causes the victim to live in fear” (Domestic Violence Prevention Unit, 2000, p. 1).

Domestic violence remains an increasingly prominent and unabated social problem in Australia (Humphreys, 2007). In the 2009 government initiative, Time for Action: The National Council’s Plan for Australia to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children, 2009-2021, domestic violence was described as the predominant form of violence currently perpetrated against Australian women (NCRVWC, 2009). Statistics identify that one in five Australian women will experience sexual violence, one in three, physical violence and one in four children will witness the abuse of their mother (NCRVWC, 2009). Domestic violence rates are even higher in indigenous communities, as evidenced in Western Australian police reports, indicating that aboriginal women are at 45 times more risk of experiencing domestic violence than non-aboriginal women (Mulroney, 2003). A 1998 study by the Australian Institute of Criminology found that instances of violence where the women know the perpetrator go largely unreported (The Supreme Court of WA, 2009). The financial cost of domestic violence to the Australian economy in 2008-2009 was estimated at $13.6 billion (NCRVWC, 2009). Globally the individual emotional and financial cost to women and their families is profound, being described as “the most pervasive human rights violation in the world” (Hearn & McKie, 2010, p. 139). The Time for Action (2009) report acknowledged that despite significant investment of funding, effort and services in Australia, the rates of domestic violence have not reduced in decades.
How we talk about domestic violence matters from a socio-political context as domestic violence is a gendered crime. The overwhelming majority of domestic violence is perpetrated by men and ninety five percent of victims are women (Berns, 2001). The United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (1993) promotes international recognition of the gendered foundations of violence against women by declaring that the foundation of inequality resides in the social structures and practices that privilege and promote power of men over women, fostering discrimination against women by men and constraining opportunities available to women (Sullivan, 1994).

*The intersection of gender, power, language and violence*

The purpose of highlighting the intersecting relationship between domestic violence, gender, and power is to set the context for the examination of professional language practices in the domestic violence sector that naturalise and excuse certain features of domestic violence in ways that serve to make it intractable. These professional discourses, in talk and text, have been shown to act to replicate power, dominance and control in the professional arena, potentially reproducing the oppression experienced by women in their relationships (Todd, Wade & Renoux, 2003). Analyses of language practices in the domestic violence sector draw on the work of Foucault in understanding that social power as existing in hierarchical and patriarchal relationships and structures, which in turn create an intersecting relationship between language, power, gender and violence (Foucault, 1980). Foucault offered a conceptual understanding of the power of patriarchal processes in producing and sustaining male power (Foucault, 1980). This power is exercised
socially by men to privilege themselves over women, allowing language practices that normalise and legitimise men’s violence against women to go unchallenged (Foucault, 1980). The connection between language, gender and violence is evident in the integration of feminist post structuralist theories which incorporates Foucault’s focus on disputing singular truths with the assertion that knowledge, language and power are inextricably bound as a productive political tool that constructs reality and its meanings, attitudes and behaviours through discourse (Coates & Wade, 2004).

Weedon (1987) emphasised the effects of social discourse, in relationships of power dictating what can and is known, what can be said and by whom. For example, discourses from voices of power and authority, such as professional discourses, can be constructed, privileged, given truth status, normalised and become dominant at the expense of other discourses from marginalised voices, which are often silenced and ignored (Foucault, 1980).

The power of language in the domestic violence context resides in the form of common, accepted ways of speaking about violence against women, often expressed in taken for granted, dominant discourses that have the power to define the reality and meaning of women’s experiences of abuse, men’s acts of violence and the individual and collective understandings of victims, perpetrators and domestic violence itself (White & Epston, 1990).

It is for this reason that how we talk about domestic violence in the professional counselling context of men’s domestic violence programs matters. This context encompasses the facilitation of the men’s groups and the development and management of such programs. Some men attend these groups voluntarily; others are
mandated to attend by a court order. These programs have the aim of preventing and stopping domestic violence, supporting the victim’s safety and assessing men’s behaviour change (Domestic Violence Prevention Unit, 2000). The language used by facilitators in addressing men’s violence in domestic violence group programs, plays a pivotal role in locating responsibility for violence, naming acts of violence and inviting men to challenge and change beliefs and ideas that support their use of violence in their relationships (Coates & Wade, 2007).

Theoretical heritage and influence on language use in domestic violence

The language used in the professional context of men’s group programs has a diverse theoretical heritage, ranging from individual psychological theories to sociological and structural theories, offering multiple and competing explanations of causality, accountability and objectives for intervention (Day, Chung & O’Leary, 2009). Theoretical history is pertinent as each theoretical position informs social and professional domestic violence discourse as if each theory had its own language, having the power to construct and sustain particular versions and categorisations of victims and perpetrators, acts of violence itself, as well as informing program policy and practice (Laing, 2000; 2004). Historically domestic violence was socially reinforced as a silent and private issue; hence prior to the 1970’s feminist movement, there was little accessible language to describe men’s violence (Laing, 2001). Many theoretical frameworks emerged and separated from feminist conceptualisations and continue to influence the language used in men’s domestic violence group programs (Laing, 2000; 2002). For example, according to Bell and Naugle (2008), approaches to domestic violence based on individual psychological theory use anger management discourses that attribute to a combined effect of men’s lack of control
over their anger and poor impulse control and women’s learned helplessness and dependency that prevent them from leaving the relationship. Personality and typology theory discourse explains violence as predispositions to aggressive character traits, thus focuses on improving social skills and reducing impulsivity (Bell & Naugle, 2008). Family systems discourse attributes violence to dysfunctional family or relationship dynamics, seeking to improve the communication skills of the couple. Social learning theory discourse contends that men learn violent behaviours by observing violence in the home (Bell & Naugle, 2008). A criticism of individual, psychological and systemic theories is the related language absolves the man’s responsibility for their violence. For example validating explanatory terms offered by men such as “I just lost it” or “she pushed my buttons” (Wade, 2004).

In contrast to theories that emphasise individual or dyadic features as causes of domestic violence, feminist theories and discourse emphasises abuses of male power and privilege, social inequality and patriarchal beliefs as the main factors that perpetuate domestic violence (Laing, 2002). The feminist informed Duluth educational model for example recognises domestic violence as a gendered crime, providing a gendered analysis of men’s violence, which aims to encourage men to reflect on hegemonic socio-cultural ideas and practices of masculinity that foster a sense of entitlement and privilege over women and support sexist beliefs that sustain the use of violence in relationships (Miller, 2010; Day, Chung & O’Leary, 2009). There is current support for the merging of feminist and post structuralist theory with a specific interest in power and knowledge, discourse and discursive practices; highlighting how patriarchal beliefs subordinate women’s roles and identifying the
social structures and practices that legitimise and support violence against women (Domestic Violence Prevention Unit, 2000). However, despite this, the individual, psychological theory and related discourse has remained dominant through time, conceptualising and treating domestic violence as a pathological problem of the individual, not as a social problem (Howells, Heseltine, Sarre, Davey & Day, 2004). Discursive research continues to show that in the everyday responses to domestic violence, individual, psychological discourse is supported, at the exclusion of feminist perspectives, being used by many participants in the sector including counsellors, judges, lawyers, men who perpetrate violence, psychiatrists and government ministers (Coates, Bavelas & Gibson, 1994; Coates, 1997; Coates & Wade, 2004; 2007), famous personalities and academics (Todd & Wade, 2003) the media (Berns, 1999; Taylor, 2009) and the police (Stokoe, 2010).

This clash of paradigms leads to a theoretical and discursive dilemma for men’s domestic violence programs that operate within a multiple interagency framework. Due to the myriad of interagency exposure to highly supported dominant individual psychological discourses that preside in the sector, programs that hold feminist positions may compete for discursive space and experience difficulty and tension in holding a feminist voice. My aim in this thesis is to explore the responses to this tension among professional staff in a domestic violence program.

*Literature Review*

The following literature review predominantly focused on the discursive research of Wade and colleagues, attests to the prevalence of individualised psychological
discourses in representing domestic violence. This work focuses primarily on the power of discourse to determine, shape and inform how the problem of domestic violence is represented in therapeutic and legal contexts. Coates and Wade (2007) assert that the “problem of violence is inextricably linked to the problem of representation” (Coates & Wade, 2007, p.2). In men’s domestic violence groups, violence is discussed in group conversations and written about in program reports. The discourses drawn on in these conversations and documents have a direct influence on how accurately and appropriately men’s acts of violence and the women and children who are victimised are represented (Coates & Wade, 2007).

Discursive research in domestic violence conducted by Wade, Coates and others, has acknowledged the intersecting relationship between power, language, gender, theory and human rights in a professional standpoint for the safety of women. On the basis of this research, Wade has developed a response based approach to working with victims and perpetrators of violence that is based on the premise that when women are abused, violated and oppressed they “resist” (Wade, 1997, p.23). Wade explains that resistance to abuse may be any overt or covert thought, behaviour or spoken objection to stop, oppose or expose abuse. These actions are considered “responses” to abuse, rather than effects of abuse (Todd, Wade & Renoux, 2003, p. 151). Wade invites domestic violence counsellor’s attention to women’s responses to abuse such as anger and sadness, rather than effects of abuse as to avoid psychologising and blaming women (Todd et al., 2003). However Wade has found that the “language of effects,” which is strongly linked with individual, psychological theories and uses medical language, dominates domestic violence literature and professional and public discourse that positions the woman as
passively accepting abuse (Todd et al., 2003, p. 146). Wade (1997) describes that the evidence of women’s resistance to abuse, in discursive terms, is the men’s strategic and determined use of language to suppress resistance by portraying the victim in a negative way and concealing acts of abuse and the victims resistance to it (Wade, 1997).

**The Interactional and Discursive View of Violence and Resistance**

The “Interactional and Discursive” view of violence and resistance is an analytic framework, based on human rights, connecting language and violence and consists of six tenets to conceptualise and highlight the actions and interaction of perpetrators and victims and the constructive role of discourse to (mis) represent actions in a domestic violence context (Coates, Todd & Wade, 2003). Three tenets focus on domestic violence from an interactional perspective in that “violence is social” (involving at least two people) and “unilateral” (one individual imposing their will against the other), “violence is deliberate” (perpetrators use strategic behaviours to suppress women’s resistance) and “resistance is ubiquitous” (victims anticipate violence and resist) (Coates & Wade, 2007, p. 513).

The remaining three tenets focus on the social discourse around domestic violence, including “misrepresentation” (perpetrators’ and professionals’ strategic use of language to “conceal” or “minimise” their abuse), “fitting words to deeds” (inaccurate or inappropriate descriptions of violent acts) (Coates & Wade, 2007, p. 513). The sixth tenet refers to “four discursive operations of language” that act as discursive devices that “conceal” violence, “mitigate perpetrators’ responsibility” for violence, conceal women’s responses and resistance to violence and “blame or pathologise victims” (Coates & Wade, 2007, p. 513). The tenets listed above are
evident in the following discursive studies, showing the power of language, within
multiple professional sites, to construct and represent domestic violence using
common public discourses that deliberately, inadvertently or strategically
misrepresent key elements of domestic violence.

Sexualised abuse is a common experience in domestic violence (Coates & Wade,
2007; Coates, Bavelas & Gibson, 1994; Coates & Wade, 2004). For example, Coates
and Wade (2004) analysed sexualised assault trial judgments and found that when
judges gave the rationale for sentencing decisions, most judges (85%) used at least
one psychological theoretical attribution as a causal factor to account for the man’s
perpetration of sexualised assault and 97% of the judges’ attributions related to
individual psychological theories of domestic violence (Coates & Wade, 2004).

These causal attributions were shown to minimise the perpetrator’s responsibility for
the crime, contextualise the crime as unintentional, often referencing the behaviour
as out of character (Coates & Wade, 2004). Judges frequently drew on eight types of
psychological explanations that caused abuse including drug and alcohol abuse, sex
drive, psychopathology, dysfunctional childhood, stress and trauma, personality
issues, emotional stress and losing control (Coates & Wade, 2004). Research into
judges’ attributions in sexual assault by Coates (1997) also found frequent
psychological causal explanations for sexual violence, describing the cause external
to the perpetrator. These psychological attributions were prevalent, being narrated
by multiple professionals including, psychologists, psychiatrists, corrective services
officers, witnesses, judges and lawyers during the trial; revealing a collaborative,
multi-agency power in gendered discourse. These professional discourses were
similar to those used among male perpetrators during discussions in men’s domestic
violence programs (Coates & Wade, 2004). The use of psychological attributions to
account for sexual assault was strongly linked to the mandating of inappropriate
counselling services, such as anger management and more lenient sentences (Coates
& Wade, 2004). Neutral, affectionate and passive language terms were used by
judges to reposition unilateral criminal acts of rape as mutual, thus implying consent
was given; for example forced vaginal penetration was misrepresented as sexual
intercourse (Coates et al., 1994). The rape was characterised through language as a
one off incident and out of character for the perpetrator (Coates et al., 1994). This use
of language minimised the man’s responsibility for the rape and represents a form of
collusion with the perpetrator.

Similar language use patterns have also been found in non-sexualised violence
against women. A diverse cross section of accounts of personalised violence were
analysed by Coates & Wade (2007), using narratives from a perpetrator, a judge, a
government minister, a psychiatrist and a counsellor. Findings indicated that a
psychological language was strategically used by all people to mutualise, minimise
and conceal violence, as well as reduce perpetrators responsibility for it by blaming
the woman, highlighting a concern that the misrepresentation of violence was
common and unchallenged as it was integrated into everyday talk. Additionally,
conversation analysis of police reports revealed the pervasiveness of perpetrator’s
normalising their violence, drawing on discourses of denial when questioned by
police in regards to assaulting their partner (Stokoe, 2010). Men used language
strategically to make category based denials to position themselves as not the type of
man who hits women, thus constructing their character as non-violent (Stokoe,
2010). This discourse served to distance the man from responsibility for the crime
and it was found that police were influenced by the men’s discourse, using the same
justifications in their written reports (Stokoe, 2010). This study is supported by Coates and Wade (2007), who found that perpetrators’ strategically use language, deploying taken for granted ideas, mutualising terms, euphemisms and metaphors to de-contextualise violence and manipulate versions of themselves and their acts of violence publically, in order to conceal and mitigate responsibility for violence (Coates & Wade, 2007).

The perpetuation of women blaming discourses in domestic violence as everyday talk is consistently found in the media. Critical analysis of women’s and teens magazines (Berns, 1999) and men’s magazines (Berns, 2001) found domestic violence was represented through a dominant discourse that explicitly blamed the woman and again, used psychological language to normalise the idea that women, institutions, culture and society causes abuse. Additionally, content analyses of domestic violence homicides in newspaper articles show that linguistic tactics were used to explicitly blame the woman for her own murder (Taylor, 2009). Again, the women were portrayed negatively implying their failure to report abuse or mental health issues caused their murder and the men were described sympathetically as victims of financial and emotional strain (Taylor, 2009).

Furthermore, discursive studies of language use of victim advocates (Dunn & Powell-Williams, 2007) and victim support volunteers (Thapar-Bjorkert & Morgan, 2010) both found workers used discourses that blamed women, using the same psychological attributions that were attached to their associated organisational structures and broader social discourses. However a tension was described between intellectual and practiced ideology, in that workers knew women should’t be blamed for violence but in discourse and practice did blame them and this was attributed in part to organisational pressures such as funding (Thapar-Bjokert & Morgan, 2010).
The influence of Contractualism on language

This present study relates to influences on discourses used in mandated men’s domestic violence program reports that are requested by corrective services that fund the program. Studies have shown that contractual obligations may influence how the programs are designed, what data is collected and what language and terminology is used and expected in reporting back to the contracting agency (Carson, Chung & Day, 2009). Program evaluation studies have found that contractualism can contribute to great discrepancies between how domestic violence programs are run, based on many different theoretical backgrounds, contradicting the political stance of the program and changing service delivery and reporting based on obligations and expectations of the contract (Carson et al., 2009). They argued that this is a common mechanism by which domestic violence services are incrementally shaped into the use of language practices that do not reflect the program’s original intentions (Carson et al., 2009).

According to Carson and Wadham (2001) contractualism pressures the service provider agency to standardise interventions, reporting and recording of program information in line with funding department specifications of accountability of the contracted agencies to produce declared outcomes, which are to be reported through standard protocols and templates (Carson et al., 2009). The discourse of contractual obligation and requirement acts as a power relationship between the contractor and contracted as incentives such as funding may be used to ensure compliance with protocols and the use of standardised templates (Carson et al., 2009).
In summary, the literature reviewed above has identified how the common gendered discourses across multiple community and professional settings that serve to benefit perpetrators and disadvantage victims of domestic violence. It also highlighted the complexity and tension linked to particular discourses and theoretical subscription in the domestic violence sector, as well as the responsibility on professionals to manage this tension in order to represent all aspects of domestic violence accurately.

The current study

Coates, Todd and Wade (2003) assert that how accurately victims and perpetrators are represented through professional, academic and public discourse is crucial to the success of prevention and intervention of domestic violence (Coates & Wade, 2004). Additionally, the Best Practice Model for the Provision of Programs for Perpetrators of Domestic Violence in WA document (2000) specifies that men are to be held responsible for their violence and that blaming women is unacceptable. The document draws specific attention to the role of discourse in constructing accountability and the ethical and professional practice standards called for by the sector and the state (Domestic Violence Prevention Unit, 2000). Coates & Wade insist that current discursive practices must change in order for efforts in prevention and intervention in domestic violence to be respectful and effective (Coates & Wade, 2004).

In this study I examine the experiences of professional staff employed in a domestic violence men’s program that has overtly attempted to change its language practices in line with the recommendations of Wade and colleagues’ work and the Best Practice Model. I explore Relationships Australia’s Western Australia (RAWA)
men’s domestic violence program staff’s narratives of changes in the program, in terms of language use in written and spoken form and program discourse that is drawn upon. In particular, program changes that have occurred over time and in connection to attending discursive- response based training by Allan Wade and developing knowledge and awareness of the explicit power of language in the domestic violence context. Specifically language, as emphasised in Allan Wade’s training to de-gender acts of violence (conceal or minimise men’s responsibility) and gender the blame for violence (blaming women) (Coates & Wade, 2007).

The domestic violence programs chosen for this study is Relationships Australia’s Department of Corrective Services Program (DCS) and the Family Abuse Integrated Response Program (FAIR). The DCS program is a 24 week court mandated program, to which men are referred from DCS, following charges of committing domestic violence offences. The men are assessed for suitability for the program and on completing the group, a completion or non-completion report is provided to the Department of Corrective Services, regarding their progress in the group in regards to behaviour and attitude change. Reports regarding men’s progress and engagement in the program are written and sent to DCS. In contrast the FAIR program runs for 24 weeks, attendance is voluntary and there are no reporting requirements. In both programs the group facilitators have contact with the men’s partners as a method providing accountability to assessing risk and safety of the women partners and children.

This study will contribute to existing literature as there is a current gap in domestic violence research focussing on men’s domestic program staff’s language use changes and program changes, in relation to Allan Wade’s training and research on the
Interactional and Discursive language framework. This study is not a program evaluation; rather an analysis on program staff’s perspectives on their accounts of change, what motivated the changes and what it was like for them to attempt to make discursive changes in their everyday language practices in order to represent domestic violence accurately in their work.
METHOD

In this study I focussed on the professional ground level voices of men’s domestic violence program staff. I invited them to speak of their own knowledge of language use and discourse in the program and their experience of any program and counselling practice changes over time; in response to their increased knowledge and awareness of how domestic violence is gendered through language from attending Allan Wade’s discursive training.

Participants

The participants were seven employees of Relationships Australia who were currently working, or had previously worked in the Department of Corrective Services men’s domestic violence group program or the Family Abuse Integrated Response (FAIR) men’s domestic violence programs. There were five female and two male participants. All participants had attended at least one presentation of Allan Wade’s Discursive/Response Based language training, which was the essential criterion for participation in this study. Participants represented diverse program positions including group facilitation, training, supervision and management and were located in a range of metropolitan branches of RAWA. All participants had extensive (5 or more years) experience in the domestic violence counselling field and six participants had a long (over 5 years) tenure of employment with RAWA in the domestic violence field. Five participants worked directly in group facilitation, with some participant’s having domestic violence training, program management and co-ordination experience also. I chose to use ground level, professional voices of domestic program staff. I consider that these voices represent and offer a unique and
expert working knowledge of past, current and dominant discourses in the field, possess firsthand experience of program change and what that change has meant to them as domestic violence practitioners.

**Data Collection**

I presented the research proposal, including an information letter detailing the study (Appendix A), consent document (Appendix B), and a question guide (Appendix C) to the RAWA domestic violence services manager. The proposal was then presented to the RAWA Ethics committee and verbal approval for the study was obtained.

All potential participants were emailed an information letter fully explaining the study. On agreeing to take part in the study, I conducted the interviews at the participant’s choice of time and location (all but 1 interview was conducted in the branch at which they worked). Prior to the interview I fully explained the study, the information letter was read, terms of consent were discussed and a consent form was signed by each participant. I informed participants that they could withdraw consent at any stage of the research, without explanation or consequence.

I interviewed all participants individually, in person, using a semi-structured question format and audio taped with permission. Semi-structured interviewing allowed for rich narratives to extend beyond the questions and allowed a broad scope of knowledge, understands, explanation of changes and issues in terms of how language is used in the program and how the program has changed over time and the meanings of change experiences (Riessman, 2008).

I asked the participants about their experience of working within their program, with particular reference to changes in the language practices made in response to the Wade training they attended. I formulated the questions to address broad theoretical
and philosophical areas including: the nature of the program changes, the influence and impact of this change on program language use, reflections on the issues involved in report writing language, the importance of language change and effects of changes in terms of how they conceptualise domestic violence and view their current and future work. The five key questions asked were formulated as a funnelling down from broader macro level change in regards to program philosophical, theoretical perspective and broader contextual influences on language in the domestic violence sector from a social, political and socio-structural perspective; down to for micro local changes within facilitator’s program practice.

The length of interviews ranged from sixty five to seventy nine minutes. Verbatim transcripts were typed for analysis. In an ethical consideration, I emailed each participant’s transcript to them prior to analysis and gave them the option of removing any statements as a strategy to minimise any risks of participation. No participants requested that any data be removed. To preserve confidentiality I removed all identifying information of identity and position in the program and participants were given pseudonyms.

**Data Analysis**

I analysed the data using thematic narrative analysis (Braun & Clark, 2006) to allow scope for participant’s to explain events and order of program change over time and what changes in program language they have noted and enacted. I chose this approach as it allowed for in-depth, contextually specific accounts of local, contextual, specialised knowledge and a political critique offering the possibility of
research outcome influencing further consideration, review and change of how
language is understood, used and influenced in this program.

Firstly, I read each transcript in its entirety and noted multi-contextual
understandings and applications of domestic violence language use in narratives. I
noted the complexities of language use and the ways in which participant’s
narratives aligned, competed or contradicted. Secondly, I recorded categories of
language use and language change. Categories included what language had changed
in the program, the contexts and sites of program change, the intention of change, the
personal meaning-making of program change (benefits/difficulties), constraints to
change in language, knowledge of discourse effects and impacts in domestic
violence, program factors supporting language change and social contexts of
historical and current program and sector language use. I reduced these categories
into four main themes. The themes included language (discursive) and program
(structural) change in program policy, program reporting, program practice and the
difficulties associated with changing language practices.

**Professional Reflexivity**

Narratives are not stand alone stories but produced, constrained and situated within
social discourses and broader social structures. They are also interwoven and shaped
by the researchers own exposure to domestic violence discourses, knowledge of
program history and political views of the sector (Andrews, Squire & Tamboukou,
2008).

A key element of a reflexive approach is for me to acknowledge my professional
experience and position in the program as a current facilitator of the FAIR women
and children’s domestic violence program and past work in the FAIR men’s program. This experience positions me as being a part of and contributing to the changes in language practices made within these programs. I have also attended the training by Allan Wade that was a catalyst for these program changes. As such I bring insider knowledge and understanding of the change processes studied. I consider this as an asset to informing the focus and issues on which this study is based and brings to attention.

My analysis in this study was informed by a feminist poststructuralist theoretical framework and epistemological position, acknowledging the attitudinal and socio-structural influences of patriarchy and male privilege that support men’s violence and oppression of women. Andrews, Squire and Tamboulcou, (2008) assert that narrative research, informed by post-structuralist thought; acknowledge the power of narratives to resist existing power structures. Whilst this framework has the benefit of analysing the use of power through language within the domestic violence field it also allows scope for the expression and analysis of individual authentic feminist thought in support of women resisting violence (Riessman, 2008). Furthermore, the researcher and participants shared feminist based understandings of domestic violence; therefore the researcher is located in the interview and interpretive process which provided an enrichment of the analysis of data (Riessman, 2008).
ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

In this analysis I present extracts from the seven individual accounts of program change in the men’s domestic violence program. This section is organised to reflect the four main themes found in the analysis: changes in program policy, program reporting and editing processes in the DCS program, how the discursive changes in program practice that have been influenced by Wade’s discursive training; and finally the difficulties staff experience in executing and managing these changes in the context their interagency relationships. These themes reflect issues arising from the conceptual elements of the program changes through to the application of these concepts in group counselling, discursive practices and report writing.

Narratives of change within the program revealed multiple types of and sites of change in how language was used in speech, writing, group discourses, statements of program philosophy, and formal domestic violence program policy documents. There was evidence across the interviews of a commitment to deconstruct and resist influential mainstream social domestic violence discourses. All seven narratives collectively emphasised the cohesive intention to avoid the use of any language, spoken or written, that would mutualise violence, make women responsible for men’s violence, or blame and pathologise women. Additionally a collective belief was expressed in the value of promoting responsible use of language in the program as a discursive tool that represents victims, perpetrators, the program and organisation itself; as well as representing participants’ own ethical position on domestic violence.

All participants reported that their views on the importance of the language used to discuss domestic violence had been profoundly influenced by their participation in
the Wade training conferences or his literature on the power of language. Personal responses included; “It was very stark and amazing,” “Allan Wade’s training for me was like this light globe moment,” “It was a real revelation” “I think I’m much more aware of it now that as what that language is doing” and “erotising of language in that context (sexual abuse) and things like that which were really quite shocking,” signifying a personal raising of consciousness about the power of language in domestic violence.

Policy Change as resistance to the de-gendering of violence through language

A key site of change that emerged in the domestic violence program was program policy; changes in this aspect of the program were discussed in detail by three participants. I asked about theoretical changes in the program following Wade’s training conference. The following extracts focus on why the language used in the policy was reviewed and changed to explicitly reflect the philosophical and theoretical position the program holds. This participant described the program policy change.

Kelly: I think in a way RA has always held the view around the gendering of domestic violence in terms of I guess in that political sense around power and control. I think historically that’s always been there but it’s not often been how it’s played out in practice and I think what’s changed probably significantly is the DV policy that is written and it’s very explicit around how RA situates itself around domestic violence which is you know I guess that political stance which is around looking at the power and control process, but also the gendering of it...... I think it’s much more clearly articulated for people to follow and there’s also I guess that process where it sort of starts to play into practice differently.

Kelly articulates policy as having multiple purposes in the program by stating how domestic violence is understood within the program, operationalised at ground level by group facilitators and represented to the rest of RAWA and the broader community. She acknowledged that historically RAWA has always held a “political”
view of domestic violence around “power and control.” However, she explained that a review of policy language to explicitly name and take a more feminist position has occurred. Across the interviews, participants used a discursive construction, “power and control,” to explain their meaning of the domestic violence. Kelly’s power and control conceptualisation is a key feature of feminist analyses of domestic violence and understands violence against women to be the specific and strategic use of abusive and violent specific behaviours of one person to impose and sustain their will upon the other (Wade, 1997; Pence, 1999). This discourse therefore offers an understanding of men’s violence that emphasises the personal agency of men to make the choice to abuse others, rather than being caused by forces beyond their control, such as anger.

Kelly contextualised the rationale for reviewing language use in the DV policy as the need to address the problem of practice (men’s group facilitator discourses in group) that was not representative of the feminist theoretical framework around power and gender. Another participant also described this problem of policy and practice being disjointed.

Adam:  
*I do know there are still practices within our organisation in men’s groups that don’t match the policy in actual fact*

Research indicates that the integrity of men’s programs can be compromised if theoretical foundations are not articulated, as this impacts understandings of domestic violence and practice, resulting in a drifting apart of policy and practice (Day, Chung & O’Leary, 2009).
Kelly described a role of policy to “situate” and represent the program from a broader organisational standpoint in a particular way to represent gender and power as the theoretical foundation of the men’s program. This relates to an approach in policy formulation that stipulates how the problem of domestic violence is represented, as a problem, depends on the use of language in the policy as to whether it relates to the theoretical perspective on which the program is based (Murray & Powell, 2009).

Across the interviews, participants clearly expressed the view that the program policy was not a neutral document that was open to interpretation, but specifically subscribed and promoted a philosophical and theoretical stance intended to influence practice. This point was extended in the following response:

*Katie:* It’s quite a post-structural policy you know it situates itself very clearly around gender position, discourse, language which is all post-structural and in my experience before people usually take a middle road

Another participant supported this view adding:

*Adam:* ....actually it mentions in our policy, I read it yesterday, that it's informed by feminist thought and post modern slash post structuralist thought. It's in the policy it's stated in there, it's an official RAWA document and therefore DV's seen you know as being abuses of power.

These extracts go further to declare the influence of post-structuralism in the program policy theoretically. Adam and Katie explicitly discuss how this program sits theoretically and ideologically. Here the policy description incorporates not only the global “power and control” discourse, but is linked with a social constructionist, Foucauldian view of domestic violence in the plural term “abuses” of power. Within this social constructionist view, Katie’s connection of “language, discourse and gender” reflects knowledge of interwoven relationships within discourse;
relationships beyond the individual and into the larger community. Nichols (2011) reported the interwoven professional and community discourses circulating from police, court, child protection, counselling and corrective services; influence, inform and shape policy development. These discourses can act to support and sanction violence against women (Coates & Wade 2004, 2007).

A further extract from Katie makes it clear that she sees RAWA’s program policy as a major departure from what is usually seen in the domestic violence sector.

*Katie:* ....... *I think it's incredibly brave for them to take such a position around the work when that position isn’t held by everybody because you know it is quite a radical position, I think our DV policy is quite a radical policy and I know on a continuum of DV, people usually like to kind of put themselves more in the middle, but here you know it is pretty much a gendered one.....*

Katie considers it “incredibly brave” and “radical” of RA to have included a gendered stance in policy. The comparison to “everybody” indicates a disparity between RA’s policy and the majority of the sector. Domestic violence policy research supports the “radical” view of their policy, finding a persistent, un-gendered social, academic and counselling discourse persists in relation to how domestic violence is conceptualised and represented at policy level; not addressing the fact that most perpetrators of violence are men (Hearn & McKie, 2010). I could see in this extract an irony and a contradiction in that if policy is the ground from which practice is based, then although domestic violence programs may subscribe to a “power and control” discourse to conceptualise domestic violence, their policy positions and program practice may reflect de-gendered principles. This in turn will promote a de-gendered language use in that program (Wade, 2004, 2007). Katie described that “people usually take the middle road” in relation to policy statements. She introduced a tension of some sort that if professionals usually take the “middle
road,” then feminist, post-structural declaration in policy situates the program on the margins of theoretical norms.

The following extract highlights the consequence of a disparity between policy, language and practice and introduces resistance to other theories of domestic violence.

Kelly:  
...if you’re saying you’re basing your policy on that kind of political understanding and there’s that gender and there’s that power, then the practice that you’re doing somehow, to make any sense to me, needs to kind of match up to that, so there’s no point in having that policy that says all this stuff, but then in actual fact you’re just working in an educational mode or an anger management mode or a you know systemic mode, which actually kind of ignores all those kind of power structures in that process because they’re coming from two ends of the political spectrum.

Kelly explains the incongruence and contradiction of the divergence of policy from theoretical position and practice. She bolsters this contradiction by referring to other commonly used theoretical perspectives in the sector. Kelly highlights that disparities between policy and implementation represent practice drifting away from its link with policy (Hollin, 1995; Murray & Powell, 2009). Research has found that program policies often ignore gender and the political nature of domestic violence and in doing so; focus at individual level practices of encouraging or trying to teach men how to control their anger (Dobash & Dobash, 1992). Kelly explicitly names the individual frameworks of anger management, systems and educational theories as inappropriate to domestic violence intervention because they obscure the power structures within which domestic violence is perpetrated.

Further to Kelly’s point, Adam explains the meaning and difference between political and apolitical thought and highlights the power of other social professional discourses.

Adam:  
If you get into structuralist thought and post structuralist thought or
thinking of what is political work or apolitical work I think you get into discourses of power, power and resistance then, then you are doing political work but there is so so so strong so strong are the ideas around, around systems theory, communication theory, family of origin and all that sort of and then personal deficits and then psychological factors that so powerful is that, that I perceive sometimes a mismatch between people who believe it’s a power issue but sometimes their practices don’t match. So what’s a political issue is dealt with apolitically.

Adam’s response made the distinction between political and apolitical ways of thinking about domestic violence that arise from different policy perspectives and inform practice. His presentation of theoretical binaries “political and apolitical” were connected to opposing forms of practice “restraints to communication” versus programs teaching “communication skills.” This difference between and statement of political and apolitical practice appeared important to Adam as it was repeated throughout the extract. Adam stressed the power and strength (“so so strong, so strong”) of the ideas of violence from multiple theories that depart from feminist positions. At the same time, Adam recognised the pervasiveness of beliefs that external factors lead men to perpetrate violence. Research highlights that individualistic and psychological theories attribute men’s violence to factors beyond the man’s control, such as poor communication skills or anger; explanations that produces discourses based on the language of effects rather than agency (Coates & Wade, 2007; Todd, Wade & Renoux, 2003).

Adam’s gives credence to the good intentions of domestic violence professionals, whom he believes mentally conceptualise domestic violence as a “power issue” but are influenced by the pull of dominant and opposing discourses in such a way that their practice doesn’t reflect their personal theoretical stance. Adam introduces the difficulty program staff face in resisting the discourses of psychological, family systems and deficit models, acknowledging that staff may theoretically agree with the policy.
He emphasises that it is a struggle to hold theoretical ground against powerful hegemonic discourses “out there” of other professionals they have contact with in their work. Thapar-Bjorkert & Morgan (2010) described the tension between intellectual ideology (non-blaming) and lived ideology (the hegemonic public discourse, that it is women’s responsibility to avoid violence) results in the simultaneous possession of opposing views. This relates to Fairclough’s (1995) view that people can take institutional subject positions that conflict with their preferred ideological position and political beliefs and not be aware of the contradiction (Thapar-Bjorkert & Morgan, 2010).

Participants explained that policy implementation in the program continues as an ongoing process through training, which involves the reading and discussing specific language research, discussion of the actual policy in clinical supervision (introducing gender discussions at the level of personal reflection in group) and talking about policy during staff meetings. When asked how staff are supported in terms of policy change and how the changes are managed, Katie responded:

*Katie:* I think it will be important to talk quite a bit about the DV policy and perhaps at our next meeting............... I think it would be a good starting to bring out the policy and to really talk about how it is political and given that it's political, then how do we do political work?

Katie also discussed using supervision and collective staff meetings as opportunities for drawing attention to language practices in the program.

*Katie:* Yeah and then I would imagine people might say well if it is gendered and political and language-based then how are we meant to work and that’s where we can you know again reinforce the Allan Wade and the Jenkins stuff and perhaps it needs to start from that you know rock bottom, you know the building blocks of the work.
Katie expressed the view that institutional reinforcement (via staff meetings and supervision) were a key means by which domestic violence professionals could be supported in identifying political discourses and avoiding discourses that excuse and support violence. This reinforces the view that maintaining a practice that is consistent with feminist principles that diverge from elements of the hegemonic discourses around domestic violence is difficult to do, and requires frequent bolstering and support. Katie relates to the “building blocks” of the theoretical bases of Wade’s response based and Jenkins invitational approaches as complimentary in relation to seeing domestic violence as a political issue and involving the abuse of power and male privilege.

Another area in which policy change was reflected and articulated was explained by participants as changes in language use in the FAIR program brochure.

Janis: So again there is nothing in the language that suggests that there’s a management of something of some existing kind of pathological problem which um so it’s what it doesn’t say that I really like about it. So it’s non-pathological, it’s non-(anger) management style so it’s not this kind of language of management um. We often pick the men up on that so new guys will say “oh the anger management” and we’ll say “no it’s not actually anger management.”

Again, Janis draws on the counter narrative or explanation that domestic violence is not caused by the loss of control over anger. When I compared past program brochures over the last 5 years, any reference to developing skills to manage anger and stress have been removed in the current brochure. Janis defines domestic violence in her description of the current brochure with a resistance rhetoric of what it isn’t (“pathological problem,” “anger management”), indicating that the brochure now aligns with current policy, but also clearly outlines the program’s theoretical position to the sector, men considering the program and the broader
community.

*Practice change as resistance to the de-gendering of violence through language*

Participants were asked about whether changes in theoretical perspective following Wade’s training and literature had influenced the ways in which domestic violence is discussed in their men’s programs. Participants agreed that they had applied the discursive knowledge they gained from Wade’s training to consider how language is used at both group practice and interagency levels. Participants reported an increased appreciation of how language is used as an action and with intention, such as when men speak of their abuse using language that covers up the severity of abuse perpetrated or implies their partner is responsible for the abuse by making them angry. Consequently participants spoke of reflecting on their own use of language in the group when developing lines of questioning and enquiry in speaking to men about their use of violence. They highlighted the importance of recognising dominant or strategic ways men speak in group to conceal and minimise their violence and reduce their accountability and responsibility for their actions. Participants described changes in their practices by contrasting them with their previous (pre-training) methods of working with their groups, which were based on a model of domestic violence intervention referred to as the “Duluth model.”

When participants were questioned regarding the impetus for change a position was taken as to how that change occurred and how the change process has been perceived. The origins of program practice change were discussed and an assertion was made that this change in group practice was driven by staff at ground level.
Lyn: I think that the change has been driven from the ground up. I don’t think it came from the top down. I think it’s been driven from the ground up....... I think very early in the piece it just felt wooden, it felt not very effective or very real even, it was so structured, it was such a rigid kind of template to put in over this two hours.

Whilst program policy was credited by others as supporting the alignment of theoretical stance and practice, Lyn considered the driving force of change and the evolution of the program as being facilitated by the program staff themselves. Lyn places collective staff objection to past educational formats of Duluth as the impetus for change.

Participants described their views of how the Duluth based way of working played out in group work with men as taking a psycho-educational stance and using a structured format.

Mark: Yeah like we had a topic, this is our topic you know honesty and accountability and we’d be doing whiteboard work with them around what they understand about what about honesty and accountability means.

Similarly another advocate explained:

Lyn: Yeah it was certainly a psycho-educational plan and it was about making sure specific things were covered through the time that the men were in the group.

Lyn and Mark suggest group sessions required the adoption of a teaching style and language to explain these concepts to men. This practice is based on the assumptions that men who choose to use violence lack an understanding of concepts of empathy and respect and need to be taught these concepts and “skills.” Another participant took this point further, reflecting on their experience of how the prescriptive use of the Duluth model contributed to a conceptualisation of domestic violence itself.

Janis: ...it was quite a kind of quite behavioural, quite mechanistic it felt like idea about violence.
Janis’s reference to “mechanistic” ideas of domestic violence suggests a focus on causal explanations of violence and skill enhancement as intervention, rather than men reflecting on their own beliefs and behaviours. In regards to language use, Janis highlights her resistance to the structural components and prescriptive delivery of the Duluth model.

*Janis:* There was very little interest in kind of language or what other ideas were there. It was almost kind of, what it felt like was, that we were meant to be, not that we necessarily did this in group, but that we were meant to be sort of educating men about respecting women. As if they didn’t know how to do that and that was such a kind of really revolutionary idea for me to even hear, even if I didn’t, you know, take up that position, but for it to be overt with Alan Wade that actually people know how to treat other people well. That’s already, that is known to them.

Janis voiced a tension for program facilitators in using an education-focused approach, which promotes the view that violent men don’t know how to be respectful in relationships and actively resisted working from this stance. By assuming that men lack knowledge of respectful behaviour towards women, and the education-focused approach obscures instrumental effects that men achieve through using violence. Janis takes exception to the assumption that men need to be taught these concepts, but choose not to employ them.

Another participant expressed a similar view to Janis on this issue when asked how she managed working a way that conflicted with her personal ideology she introduced a structural impediment to change in the program.

*Lyn:* I think at first it was quite covert really if I’m honest, I think the reality is that because you’re kind of isolated, you’re little islands out in the branches, you know you’re isolated in these groups, to a large degree I think it’s left up to you anyway and maybe there was an assumption that everybody was sticking rigidly to it for a while, but I think it became evident when all of us would get together that most people weren’t really following the manual anymore.

Lyn revealed a difficulty experienced in attempting to change program practice and
language; naming that the disconnection or siloing effect of program staff working in separate branches reduces opportunities for staff to have collaborative conversations and exchange ideas about the work done in groups.

The contrast is evident in that when staff did get together, it allowed for a cross pollination of knowledge. Research supports multi-agency relationships in domestic violence work producing differing theoretical positions and discourses that leads to a siloed and polarised response, however this extract extends the effect of siloing within a program context (Laing, 2002).

Participants explained the value of the opportunity to become curious about why men are not choosing to be respectful to others, specifically by deconstructing the language used by men in group to access underlying beliefs and attitudes that support the use of violence (Coates & Wade, 2007). There was a consensus among the majority of the participants of focussing on the therapeutic alliance to support ethical discussions with men about their abusive behaviour. This narrative emphasises the importance of the client counsellor relationship in group to provide a foundation for conversations about men’s use of violence to occur, explaining:

*Mark:* ......*my natural instinct was to sort of develop good rapport with the men and was to sort of motivate them in such a way through the way that I was relating to them, motivate them to sort of take an active role in the discussion about for instance honesty and accountability*

Research has shown that developing strong therapeutic relationships with the men in group is integral to effective interventions in group programs (Day, Chung, O’Leary & Carson, 2009). A “good rapport” was also described as contributing to the possibility of being able to have conversations with clients that challenged the use of
language to excuse or conceal violence, thus increasing acceptance of responsibility and stopping men blaming their partners.

A consistent theme across all interviews was that it was necessary to adapt many aspects of the Duluth model principles in group to incorporate Wade’s Response-Based approaches, and Jenkins’ (1990) invitational approach. Participants described how these changes enabled a closer consideration of language use in program practice (Coates & Wade, 2007) and the incorporation of aspects of Jenkins’ invitational model (1990); inviting men to identify and address restraints on their accountability, responsibility and being respectful in relationships.

Participants consistently described conscious attempts to identify and address with the man his use of language and emphasise to the man himself his intentional use of discourse. Examples of resistance to the four operations of language are given below that show participants’ attempts to expose violence, clarify responsibility, honour women’s responses and resistance and reject the blaming of women (Coates & Wade, 2007). It is in these examples that participants emphasised the power of language in practice to be a mode of resistance.

Resisting men’s use of agentless language

This participant highlights her recognition of men’s strategic use of language to avoid responsibility for his abuse of his partner in this extract.

Liz: “I don’t know how it happened, but maybe an elbow ended up in her face.”
Tania: The fact that it’s you know the word “happened”
Liz: “It happened” and “an elbow” you know she
Tania: Not “my elbow?”
Liz: She ended up with a black eye because he had her against the wall and you know his elbow went into her eye and gave her a black eye and you know, but he was able to separate, he was busy trying to extricate himself from it and so he
was using that really neutral language around “an elbow” really externalising from him any of it.

Tania: And so were you able to kind of bring that to his attention?

Liz: Absolutely.

Liz provides an example of how violent men can use what Wade refers to as “agentless constructions” to conceal and obscure what done and by whom (Todd & Wade, 2003, p. 146). Liz describes the man’s attempt to de-contextualise the violence. Additionally Liz explains the man’s intention of using this agentless “neutral” term, as being that it mitigates his responsibility. Liz shows confidence in not only recognising this man’s use of language and how this language acts to mitigate responsibility but also that she can address this in group with the man.

Resisting the concealing and minimisation of violence - “A bit of a push”

Another participant explicitly connects his recognition of men using language to conceal and minimise their acts of violence to Wade’s discursive principles in the following extract.

Mark: Yeah and you know I think one of them said “you know so I gave her a bit of a push and you know I mean you know I didn’t know that I didn’t mean you know for her to kind of fall down the stairs and you know split her head open on the cupboard”

Tania: Really minimising what they’ve done too by the sounds of it?

Mark: What did you think, you know as Wade says, using language to conceal their violence and abuse in very deliberate ways and so it was good for me because I had gone back to a couple of the Wade articles and just prior to that night and so maybe it was more at the fore of my mind, but you know it was really clear to me as it was happening

Mark also describes his clarity in recognising what this man was doing with language in his account of assaulting his partner. Mark highlights the man using “deliberate ways” to minimising his violence as a “bit of a push” and “I didn’t mean” it implies his violence as unintentional. Both Liz and Mark use contrasts of how the man accounted for their violence versus their resourcing of Wade’s
principles of language to distinguish an accurate account of what was actually perpetrated and deconstruct this with the man in group.

**Resisting nominalisation – The “incident”**

Participants frequently referred to men’s passive descriptions of their violence as “an incident.” This was also experienced from other professionals in interagency contact.

*Rose:* ...if they’re (men) saying incident well then you know if they were really taking responsibility for their violence, you would think that they would be saying when I hit my partner, or when I assaulted my partner or you know possibly not even that far that you know when we did, but then I think that those kind of terms are offered to them too through the system. I mean it’s a bit unusual that so many of them are saying the word “incident”.

Rose describes the use of what Wade (2003) refers to as “nominalisation” which is the use of language to avoid naming the specific action of abuse and thus avoid responsibility (Todd, Wade & Renoux, 2003, p. 146). Rose explains the frequent use of the term “incident” by men to inaccurately describe their violence and attributes this to “the system,” possibly referring to police and corrective services. Rose proposes that men are socialised into these discourses and this is supported by research of professional domestic violence discourses; finding that violence is commonly misrepresented in language in order to conceal violence and obscure responsibility (Todd et al., 2003).

**Resisting mutualising – “We had a bit of a barney”**

Participants also recognised men’s use of language in group to avoid responsibility by using mutual terms such as “we” that act to shift responsibility to their partner.

*Janis:* I think that that um got me thinking more deeply about language than I had before and I’m much more particular in the group about noticing, noticing that kind of language, or things like and I think I would have noticed before things like “Oh we had a bit of a barney”. I would have been curious about what that meant and to unpack that and realise that there was a mutualising aspect to that, but I think
I’m much more aware of it now that as what that language is doing. That it’s, you know, it’s minimising, it’s mutualising, it’s passive all those things, in a way that I wasn’t.

Janis describes an increasing awareness and knowledge of men’s use of language to “mutualise” acts of violence, that works to imply that violence was not the deliberate of one person imposing their will against another, but a problem between the couple. (Todd et al., 2003, p.146). Janis explains her curiosity in men’s use of language to mutualise violence and her intention to address or “unpack” this in group, as well as acknowledging the power of language as an action as “doing something.”

The extracts above demonstrate how the adoption of an invitational and response-based discursive approach has changed the language facilitators use in group but also how they attend to men’s language practices in the group. This practice continues to be encouraged through training and supervision and was discussed as more widely used in their group work.

**Benefits of discursive review in group practice**

In asking what the benefits are of attending to language practices that can misrepresent violence this participant drew referred to Wade’s training as “a great opportunity because Allan Wade’s stuff really got people thinking” and advocated for more training from Wade on language use, but explained further the idea of discourse as a form of social action.

*Tania: Why do you think that that’s important to bring more of the language kind of awareness out that you know you said Allan Wade’s training kind of kick started that. Why do you think that’s so important in working with men?*

*Lyn: Because the language is what the act becomes you know, the way we describe something, it is then what that act then becomes, so if we describe an act*
and we you know different people can have a very different perspective on the same act and I think that comes about a lot of it through language, how they’re communicating, what they’ve experienced or what they’ve seen, so I think, so that we have consistency around domestic violence or you know whatever’s going on, we need to be constantly having this discussion. I also think it’s really easy to slip back ... I think it’s very easy for it to just slide off the radar and then we go back to the old more mutual kind of way of talking about this.

Liz refers to the Foucauldian notion of language being a socially constructive exercise of power in terms of presenting a representation of an action; not the actual action itself (Foucault, 1980). Liz highlights in this extract the need for ongoing review of and attention to language practices in order to continue to represent domestic violence accurately; particularly by mutualising violence. Liz also describes the consequences of not being vigilant in reviewing language practices as the danger of the “slip back” into dominant discourses.

Liz: And really we want to work the other way don’t we, we don’t want to be driven by the outside discourse, we actually want to develop a discourse that spreads from us to the wider community that says you know this is the language to use.

Liz described the prevalence power of dominant discourses circulating within the domestic violence sector. She acknowledges using a form of consensus in “don’t we” that there are particular ways of speaking about domestic violence that are to be resisted and also explains a commitment for ongoing development of the programs efforts to use language that accurately represents domestic violence. In addition, Liz describes a resistance to community sector discourses by referring to the program being able to set an example to others in terms of program discourse.

When participants were asked what these program changes were like for them to undertake, a participant expressed their preference that the management of change
not be “dogmatic” or prescriptive about group approaches as they believed each
person has their own style of engaging with a client.

Janis: I think I would hate it to become um too um dogmatic really.....
Cos as I say I think these principles can be integrated and I think they’re
enormously, I think they’re invaluable, so I think everyone should have training on it
but I don’t think that they need to feel that they should discard where they’ve come
from as a as their own foundations.

Janis described a high regard for the value and application of Wade’s principles into
her work, but also advocated for group facilitators to have their theoretical
preferences respected and that there is a need to respect their judgment as to how
they best integrate this knowledge of language into practice. This is an interesting
point in terms of the difficulty that may arise in managing changes in program
practice as Wade highlights that particular theories, such as the psychological
theories of domestic violence, would not be amenable to challenging men’s
discourses as they offer psychological reasons as causal attributions for violence
(Coates & Wade, 2007).

A Resistance to the De-gendering of Violence in Program Reports

Another program change I explored in regards to the gendering of violence through
language was changes in the language used in reports. Program staff discussed their
report writing changes in the Department of Corrective Services (DCS) men’s
program. In this program men are mandated by the court to attend group and reports
are written at the stages of assessment and completion of group and also for group
non-attendance. These reports are requested by Corrective Services as a form of
feedback on each man’s level of readiness for and engagement in group and an
assessment of any behavioural attitude changes that would suggest a change towards
non-violent behaviour. There appeared to be mindfulness, across all participants, of
the audience they were writing for and their theoretical understandings of domestic
violence and acute appreciation for the impact and consequences of the written
report, for the man and the woman. Participants considerable changes in the
terminology used both to describe both acts of violence and in assessments of
attitudinal change in men. Participants expressed an intention for program policy and
group practice to be reflected in their reports. They talked about the difficulties faced
in holding onto a discourse that articulates violence accurately, reflects the
program’s theoretical and operational position, while at the same time having to
mediate and resist the expectations and competing discourses of the outside agency
who request the report. These discussions highlighted how the use of language in
written reports and accounts of violence reflects the influences on discourse that
occur as a result of inter-agency relationships and co-existing broader social
discourses (Coates & Wade, 2007; Stokoe, 2010).
All participants voiced ethical objections to the women blaming discourses they read
in other professionals’ reports, such as the Statement of Material Facts produced by
police. This will be discussed in the following extracts as well as how they achieved
the change in report writing.

“Relationship Problems” Resisting mutualising violence in reports

Participants expressed concern that the language used in report writing frequently
reproduces theoretical frameworks that reflect individual, psychological and
depoliticised discourses. For example:

Tania: Then does that change how you would speak about violence or how you
would report on it?
Adam: Certainly changes on how it is reported on. .......we'll sometimes read things like a couple having a very conflictual relationship or the man learning to manage his emotions now I think that's not political work but other reports talk about the man being strongly influenced by attitudes of ownership and entitlement and that he uses the various tactics to control, that would be political language as against non political language.

The terms “conflictual relationship” and “man learning to manage his emotions” uses language in such a way that it represents the act of violence not as the unilateral abuse of power of one to another, but describes it as a mutual problem of the couple or the man being a victim of his inability to control his anger. Adam’s voiced a resistance to the individual- level analysis reference, “man learning to manage his emotions” implying that his use of violence is caused by some lack or inability to control his emotions; therefore his emotions are to blame for his violence not him. This relates to the socially accepted and widely used “anger management” discourse that implies that violent men are in fact victims of their own behaviour and anger (Coates & Wade, 2004). All participants took a strong objection to violence being represented in reports as a problem of the marriage or of the couple. They argued that the reports should be written in ways that clearly recognise that the man is responsible for his behaviour. However, most participants were not optimistic about the potential for the widespread adoption of more appropriate language practices. For example,

Adam: I still read you know domestic violence relationship and I just shudder when I see it because it's still mutualising language.......when I hear people talking about they have an abusive relationship or I've been in an abusive relationship I want to say no you haven't you've been with somebody who's been abusive.

Tania: Using language to kind of represent domestic violence as like a couple’s problem?
Adam: Yeah mutual terms relational problems as against that lovely phrase of Wade's where domestic violence or abuse is a social act done by one person on another that's very you know I think that's wonderfully clear that for it to be a social
act there's more than one person involved but there's only one person responsible for it but that's what's clear to me.

Tania: So it's taking a more clear and definite position on how language is used to sort of really name who is responsible for it?

Adam: Yeah and then the language that's currently used both professionally and in society there just conceals that responsibility.

Adam described the use of this type of language in reports as apolitical as it does not recognise the violence as a gendered abuse of power. Adam linked the violence against women to broader social context of patriarchal structures that maintains and permits the view that men are entitled to abuse women, and argued that this should be reflected in the language used to describe violence (Lehrner & Allen, 2008).

“"She’s got a personality disorder” - Resisting Women Blaming

When asked what was of concern in program reports in the past, a strong position against blaming women for men’s violence in reports, by either explicit or implicit language, was frequently stated. The written construction of deficiency or faults in women causing men’s violence was identified as a discursive practice that reduces men’s responsibility for violence. This was described by participants as a key driver for a review of language used in reports. For example:

Kelly: ...... when I first started reading reports, I actually found a lot of I guess what we term victim blaming, so I could see in the report what facilitators were hearing and what they were paying attention to, which was the man’s story around his partner, which was oh she’s depressed or she’s got personality disorders or well if she didn’t do that I wouldn’t have to do this and it’s all about really that blame, that lack of responsibility, that lack of ownership around their own violence and basically in a way that then obscures his violence ‘cause actually you’re not talking about that, you’re actually then talking about his partner and all the things that are wrong with her.

Kelly expressed dissatisfaction with the ways that facilitators’ reports would reproduce men’s own accounts of their violent behaviour. Kelly describes a concern
with past reports attributing an explicit psychological problem of the woman such as a “personality disorder,” as a rationale for the man’s violence, which acted as a form of “victim blaming”. She highlights victim blaming as a linguistic device, reflecting a conceptualisation of domestic violence from an individual level analysis and ignoring the unilateral and deliberate abuse of power and male privilege (Coates & Wade, 2007).

Kelly also noted (in this extract and elsewhere in her interview) how men’s victim blaming influences the facilitator’s reporting in terms of what they are “paying attention to” by privileging the man’s story and propagating his view in reports. Research supports this concern, finding that when professionals give credence to the woman being the cause of violence, they inadvertently subscribe and perpetuate the all too common broad social dominant discourse that supports that woman are to blame for violence (Russel & Carey, 2003; Berns, 1999). This allows the man to maintain a “lack of responsibility” for and “ownership” of his violent actions.

Kelly described the consequences of reports that do not represent violence accurately.

Tania: With those concerns that you said that you had around reporting with minimising abuse and not laying responsibility where it should be with the men, what’s the ultimate consequence of that if a report’s going back to Corrective Services, what could the consequences of that be?

Kelly: Well I think you know for us the main consequences is about well where that report gets used and what it gets used for and it goes into the Court process and I guess for us too it’s particularly around the Family Violence Court......by writing those reports that minimise and use a language that mutualises you run the risk of them you know of Courts in giving adequate sentences, of not paying enough attention to victim safety and unwittingly perhaps you know we’ve put women and children at risk because of the way we’ve written in the report so to me that’s a big thing.

The consequence of persistent discourses that misrepresent violence in reports is cited in research as having serious implications in the legal and corrective services
forum in those important decisions such as sentencing may be inadequately considered or administered for violent crimes (and detract from the core business of domestic violence work which is the accountability to the safety of women and children (Coates, Todd & Wade, 2003; Coates & Wade, 2007).

“I only pushed her” – Resisting the minimisation of violence

The use of language to minimise violence was also raised by participants as something to be aware of in reports from other professionals. A common concern involved conflating of the man’s account, describing assault as “only a push,” with the language in the legal police document, the Statement of Material Facts which outlines the details of the offence which are often contested by the man.

Kelly:....... he doesn’t agree with the Statement of Material Facts and often then the like you see in the reports the articulation of what he says happened which is very very minimal in terms of and lots of minimising in terms of how he describes so it’s like a push, or no I only pushed her...

Kelly notes how constructing an act of violence as “only a push” works to influence how seriously a violent man’s behaviour is considered. The use of language to minimise violence is a prominent issue in many contexts, (police, courts and professional academic psychology literature) as the language use to explain violence is not a neutral exercise, but is a political interplay through social and professional discourse (Coates & Wade, 2007). For example,

Kelly: that’s an interesting intersection with the legal stuff because even though we would have a Statement of Material Facts which really outlined what the man had done, but it was in that very legalistic sense, a very well this is just a one off incident so it wasn’t connecting anything to a you know any kind of patterning in that kind of domestic violence kind of context...

Kelly explained the influence on language used in reports as a result of the intersection of the legal system and the language it uses to articulate assault against
the woman in police reports such as Statements of Material Facts, such as “incident” where the context and history of domestic violence becomes invisible or “de-contextualised” as a one off “incident” when there may be a long history of violence.

*Changing reporting language – the use of editing*

I became interested in participant’s views about what the DCS program could actually do to resistance the dominant discourses in the sector. On enquiring what specific strategies have been put in place to facilitate this shift to the use of a more “political language” and avoid woman blaming, minimising and mutualising violence, participants responded that an editing process was in place with the deliberate intention to remove certain terms as a commitment to and statement of the program’s theoretical and position, to also to educate program staff as to why this purposeful avoidance of specific terms is encouraged. That is, a goal of the program is to use language accurately to describe and name violence and to locate responsibility with the man (Todd, Coates & Wade, 2003).

Reports to Corrective Services have always been edited; participants reported that the elements the reports were edited for appears to have changed over time. Participants described past DCS editing processes as having focused on grammatical errors and other style issues. This is highlighted in the following extract referring to past views on the role of editing reports in the DCS program.

*Janis:* *there was a kind of chastising you know there would be kind of annoyance that they were wrong or that people hadn’t put dates of birth right and it was all very sloppy and yeah it wasn’t terribly supported it was kind of a bit punitive, how it was discussed.*

This was in contrast to recent editing practices that had changed focus to becoming a form of constructive discursive supervision. Participants explained that in response
to the past mutualising and minimising of violence in reports, recent policy review and training with Wade, the importance of language in naming and representing violence accurately in reports was recognised. Report editing now intentionally removed any “apolitical” and “un-gendered” language that mutualises violence, blames the victim, implies causality (family of origin, substance use, poor impulse/anger control) and offer alternatives that keep in line with program policy. It was explained that this was done so the language in reports reflects the program position that domestic violence is not an anger management or relationship issue but a gendered abuse of power.

Adam: ... in reports we've asked we've said to people there are certain things we want you to avoid and we try to encourage them I had a list of them that I typed up talking about the assault rather than the incident because they always written up as incident reports trying to get them to call it an assault if they talk about the couple argue regularly....

The importance of naming violence accurately and the difficulty for program staff to be consistent in doing so has a relationship to the broader social and professional discourses that predominantly reflect structuralist and causal explanations for violence. Adam highlights the importance of accurately naming acts of violence. Similarly in Rose’s extract below, she emphasises the seriousness of the work through a life or death reference bringing an ethical position to attention; in that assessment and management of risk is a shared responsibility across the organisation.

Tania: And you know the consequence of not representing those behaviours accurately I mean, what do you see as the consequence of that when it’s not.

Rose: Well things can fly under the radar, that a victim’s you know life could possibly be in danger you know and that we should now we have a responsibility really too, you’re working with you know a massively high risk area. I think that there’s a huge responsibility that doesn’t come down to the workers, it should be the organisation to roll out that people have this kind of clinical knowledge and can work from that perspective..
I noted a tension Rose’s extract between her recognising the consequential nature of report language, but indicating that be able to write reports accurately was dependent on level of training offered, thus repositioning the responsibility for language use to the broader management. This is interesting in light of Rose’s acute awareness that these reports could have implications for women and their children in regards to safety.

**What program staff noticed changed in reports**

Participants explained how they had seen reports change towards an invitational and response based approach (Jenkins, 1990; Wade 1997). They noted becoming aware of the shift from a psychological form of writing about men’s use of violence to a stance by which men are invited to take up an opportunity to reflect on their use of violence and how it impacts others. The benefit to this was described as freeing up the counsellor from having the responsibility to evidence change in the man; rather it is the man’s responsibility to accept the opportunity to look at his behaviour.

**Rose:** Well you know from the point of view of the invitational attitude that Allan Wade and Alan Jenkin’s narrative has, there’s been a change and actually just fairly recently I’ve noticed with the reports that I write for DCS and the editing and supervision that comes from those in terms of language and this sort of stance of invitational has played out in those reports with the edits........ it’s shifted away from, if I just kind of think about it, you know, it’s maybe shifted away from some kind of more you know not necessarily as extreme I would say of a medical model, but less perhaps of that kind of clinical perspective, more into just into an invitational stance.

Rose describes the change in her written reports as reflecting Wade and Jenkins’ invitational stance and that this position is supported through the editing process.
Participants described the editing of reports as an educational process. One participant explained how her practice of reviewing of the edited version of the report stemmed from her professional responsibility and accountability.

Rose: ... I read the reports that are edited, they get sent back to me to print out and put in the client’s file, but I’ll actually quickly read them because I’m just interested in what edits have been made so I can ask myself why

Tania: So it’s like a reflective process?

Rose: Yeah because it indicates to me where RA want to go as a program and then so I’ll start writing more in line with that because that’s just where they want to go you know.

Rose explained that the editing process served to inform her where the men’s program sat theoretically and as a self reflective process, she took interest in what particular words had been changed.

Other participants also described the differences noted in their own reports writing following Wade’s training and the editing of reports. Mark commented that subjective comments about a man’s level of engagement and change in group were purposely avoided in an attempt to hold the position that behaviour change is the responsibility of the man and group attendance alone is not an indicator of change itself.

Mark: Well I suppose you know not making any subjective trying to not make subjective statements about the client’s progress

Tania: Is that in recognition that you know that these reports play a part in a certain outcome around sentencing?

Mark: Yeah I suppose what we’re trying to convey to the reader of the report is that this is how we present it in group, you know this is what we observed with this man, this is what he said, this is what he sort of demonstrated I suppose in how he was present in the room..

Mark described a transition away from offering evaluations of men’s progress to instead concentrate on describing how the man presented in group without making
any claims that the way a man presents in group translates to behaviour change and increased safety for partners or children at home.

**Effects of reporting templates – resisting contractualism**

As the Department of Community Services contracts RAWA to operate the DCS domestic violence program, funding agreements and reporting requirements are determined by them. Part of the reporting includes the use of templates to report men’s progress and change back to the agency and courts. Studies have shown that these contractual obligations may have an influence on how the programs are designed, what data is collected and what language and terminology is used and expected in reporting back to the contracting agency (Carson, Chung & Day, 2009).

All group facilitators described that the DCS reports that are written to a format using a template with the use of headings such as ‘substance use,” and “victim empathy”.

*Rose: Yeah it has certain headings and yeah I mean you know the way it’s presented is it’s not in line with Jenkins/Wade invitational type of approach whatsoever it’s really just kind of I don’t know for want of a better word, it’s just kind of very you know very kind of old school and basic and you know sort of that psychological you know*

Rose explained that the use of a report headings and template are in direct contrast to the invitational way of writing and the power of the use in templates is that it invites a certain type of language from the writer and that this itself is a disparity that needs to be managed in writing reports of how men present in group.

I asked what it was like to come from one theoretical (feminist) perspective and have to write to a template that uses a psycho-legal discourse:
Janis: Completely um I found it extremely difficult and had to just do it you know I was relieved then that there was a template because I couldn’t have done that naturally..

Janis describes the difficulty she experienced writing in such a way that was in conflicted to how she wanted to write. Another participant also acknowledged the difficulty in resisting the language used by the program’s funding body, Corrective Services.

Kelly: the challenge to interface with Corrective Services and not use their language was also very difficult..... it’s an interesting thing to navigate because you are driven by their request as the funding body to use their template which then sets you up to write in a particular way because of the mere fact it’s called a Treatment Report.

Kelly described how the contractual nature of the relationship with DCS seemed to impact on the language used and discourses drawn upon in the ways of working with clients and reporting on change.

Another participant described the similar effects of contractualism on program staff in terms of being surrounded by discourses that are not in line with the program’s feminist, post-structural position.

Katie: Yeah it invites people because they spend so much of their time in that world, you know they might be employed say two days a week and half of that time or one of those days at least is in family violence case conference case conferences where people are pathologised and talked about and you know there’s no political agenda there, it’s totally apolitical and those meetings where Police and people talk about the victims in a way that you know it’s very humanist and essentialist about co-dependency about not having boundaries, about all that kind of stuff, so our facilitators are soaking in all that discourse if you like and then we’re saying no we see it this way, but you know they spend most of their working time in that world.

Katie highlighted the impact of contractualism beyond report templates and to the meetings that staff attend in the DCS program that use and invite invited a certain discourse that felt incongruent with the theoretical and philosophical framework from which the program actually operates. This is consistent with Carson, Chung
and Day’s (2009) studies on effects of contracturalism on men’s programs that show a great discrepancy between how domestic violence programs are run in the community based and reporting based on obligations and expectations of the contract. They stated that it is common to find that domestic violence services and the language they use have been influenced by the contracting agency, due to the pressure to standardise intervention, using reporting templates, to satisfy expected outcomes set by the contractor (Carson, et.al, 2009).

Participants described templates inviting psychological language that infers causal attributions such as “drug and alcohol problems” and “anger” and using a discourse that is “driven very much by a psychological model alongside of a correctional model.” However participants also voiced how they resisted this discourse.

Kelly: we’ve got much clearer about what it is the work what is the work that we are doing, so we’re able to be much more robust around that, so you know because we’re much clearer around that, you can push it back to Corrective Services and say look you know we’re happy to use that template, but this is what we’re going to write under those headings

Kelly describes the pressure on discourse from contractual obligation but also highlights that as a result of the current clarity in how the program positions the work theoretically; they are able to stand their ground against contractor discourses and expectations. This shows that the benefit of policy, practice and reporting being in alignment is being in a stronger position to hold onto preferred language practices.

**The difficulty in changing – Siloing**

Every participant in this study described the most substantial impediment to sustaining change in language practices was the physical siloing or separation of
program staff from each other in branches and the separation of domestic violence policy from other RAWA counselling services.

Although staff and management sought and created opportunities to work across programs and with other colleagues in the program as a way of cross pollinating knowledge of current language practices and had regular supervision; staff continued to feel isolated in their branch and felt this hindered their professional development in terms of reviewing language use in the program.

Mark: Yeah I mean those opportunities to get together with other group facilitators it’s an opportunity to sort of get an insight into how their sort of integrating the new information into their approach to the work. I can’t with any accuracy I don’t sort of have one to one phone calls with them either to really talk to them about it....which I think is a weakness in the program for us as a group because it’s not the type of work that you want to be doing in isolation, you do want to feel that you’re part of a bigger team, a supported team where everybody’s in a sense kind of working in line with the same policy.

Mark describes the value of sharing knowledge between program staff, however states the limited opportunity for this to occur and cites this as a weakness in the program. He acknowledges the complexity and difficult nature of domestic violence work, describing geographic isolation in branches contributes to the difficulty of the work. Another participant described the siloing effect of two separate men’s domestic violence programs (FAIR voluntary and DCS mandated program) that has led to staff perceiving that the work is “different” and that this effects the development of staff language practices.

In terms of policy, many participants described the program’s feminist, post-structural policy as “radical” and that RAWA was “incredibly brave” and “out on a limb” and considered “loonies” to hold this position as it was recognised that RAWA’s domestic violence policy was not widely supported in the sector. However
an additional challenge in sustaining a gendered discourse was presented by the 
fragmentation of policy and practice within the organisation in those other 
counselling services in RAWA did not support the policy in practice either; therefore 
staff felt “siloed” and “isolated” within their own organisation.

Katie: I think the risks some of this might be quite political so I don’t really 
know if you want to use it but anyway for me one of the main risks is the DV services 
kind of get isolated from the mainstream because not all mainstream people think the 
way we do and many counsellors have a whole different position on how they see the 
work, how they see DV you know how and couples work, how they see stuff as 
belonging to both people, people are wounded and so therefore women act this way 
and men act that way, not because of gender but because of our own personal stuff.

Tania: Yeah like a couple’s problem.

Katie: Yeah and don’t kind of see DV I mean we see it as political work and I 
would say that our service is the only part of RA that does.

Katie tentatively describes the risks of speaking about domestic violence as a 
political, gendered issue as being seen as not only radical but as separate from the 
rest of the organisation for not subscribing to psychological theories of violence and 
related language, despite current research supporting domestic violence as a 
gendered, political issue (Coates & Wade, 2007).

Furthermore, Katie described the severity of how domestic violence staff perceive 
they are positioned in the organisation due to their political views on policy and 
practice.

Katie: I find here at RA, DV services are siloed off and that I think, this isn’t 
part of the research, but I think that’s a big problem.

Tania: Kind of viewed as its own little speciality side area?

Katie: Yeah and because it’s viewed radically and because not everyone 
agrees, it’s kind of I think the worst case scenario is that we get seen as a radical lot 
of people that don’t actually understand that we’re peddling our own barrow and 
I’ve heard whispers of that and it’s probably not the best thing to say, but that at 
worst I think that can happen if people don’t understand and don’t understand the 
political nature and don’t agree with the DV policy.
Katie describes separation of the domestic violence program from other counselling services within RAWA as a significant problem that impacts staff in the way that program staff are seen in a derogatory way by other services in the organisation because of how they speak of domestic violence. This represents another pressure that staff contend with in holding a gendered stance.

Participants considered RAWA educational programs, such as anger management for men, as inappropriate in the context of domestic violence as these programs do not recognise domestic violence as a gendered crime, based on men’s sense of entitlement to use violence to control women. Mainstream counselling services in the organisation were also recognised as not working under the domestic violence policy, explaining that as a consequence the inappropriate use of couple’s counselling for domestic violence cases occurred, putting women’s safety at risk. Participant’s proposed that the language practices in the domestic violence programs could inform staff in other RAWA services about the importance of attending to the language used to discuss domestic violence.

Tania: And so the aim was to bring across the DV programs all in line and then is there an idea that that might spread further sort of outside the DV program to beyond the whole organisation?

Kelly: Yes that’s right it’s to go into so yes so hopefully this move into the counselling and even across to you know mediation, child contact to be all working well I guess in practise on a similar page.

This participant also described the siloing of policy and hopes to unite other services with the domestic violence program.

Adam: Well it's a start. It's not exactly a rampant social movement. But what, can I just give you what I think we're trying to do. This is RAWA here and this is the policy and everything, C & F, DV program, mediation, education, whatever other, should all be under that.
Both participants also shared the same proposal of the domestic violence policy encompassing the whole organisation in order to have all staff using appropriate language in addressing domestic violence. Adam and Kelly drew on a hypothetical discourse to highlight the need for the organisation as a whole to review language practices and noted the stressing of an imperative action required if domestic violence is to be addressed effectively within the organisation.
GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

This study explored the experiences of staff from Relationships Australia’s of men’s domestic violence (FAIR and DCS) group programs in attempting to implement changes in their language practices following discursive training from Allan Wade. Wade’s training introduced the interactive and discursive view of violence, with emphasis on research showing how men, domestic violence professionals and the public strategically or inadvertently draw on four operations of language to conceal, minimise and mutualise violence, mitigate men’s responsibility for violence and blame and pathologise women in a de-gendered discourse of domestic violence. (Coates & Wade, 2007). An almost unavoidable and saturating de-gendered discourse, which is frequently accessed, deliberately or inadvertently, by men choosing to use violence and domestic violence professionals; that is highly circulated and publicly and professionally promoted through individualistic and psychological theories of domestic violence.

The importance of this study resides in the fact that it extends beyond individual language practices to examine the collective changes in language used by men’s domestic violence programs within an organisation committed to supporting men to cease their use of violence in intimate relationships and supporting the safety of their partners and children. This has not been researched previously and represents a significant gap area in domestic violence literature. This study is not an evaluation of how these efforts at discursive change were experienced by staff.

Multiple sites of discursive review and change were identified as well and significant difficulties in executing the change were highlighted. Sites of language change
included the domestic violence program policy, language practices in conversations with men in group, as well as language changes in writing program reports. All participants described the changing of language used in both talk and text across these three sites as a considered and conscious effort to avoid and resist the minimisation, mutualisation, concealment of violence, blaming of women and the mitigation of men’s responsibility for their use of violence. On many occasions across these sites, participants explicitly referred to Wade’s training as a catalyst for ongoing self reflection and resistance to dominant theories and ways of speaking about violence that use a language offering causal attributions for men’s violence such as to drug and alcohol use, loss of control of anger, personality issues, family of origin, psychopathology or trauma and stress.

Participants discussed that these theoretical perspectives and ways of accounting for men’s violence are also promoted, encouraged and expected in reporting through the use of templates from Corrective Services. This highlighted the effects of contractualism on the program and also presented the opportunity for participants to show how they resisted these effects which was achieved through the editing of reports for any de-gendered language and through supervision. The resistance to such discourses and theoretical subscription was supported overwhelmingly by managers, supervisors, educators and group facilitators in the men’s program and was a key component of staff supervision and ongoing training.

Additionally, this study exposed the difficulties program staff face in their attempts to execute and hold onto the change in their language practices. Discussions revealed pressures to revert to psycho-legal discourse in communications with external domestic violence organisations such as corrective services, police, court and
department for child protection staff. Participants described how a feminist discourse can be co-opted in a language contest with the dominant social narrative that reflects an individual-level analysis of violence (such as victim blaming) often prevails and fosters a depoliticisation of language (Coates & Wade, 2004; Lehrner & Allen, 2008).

Staff described the need for persistent vigilance to resist these discourses in order to represent domestic violence accurately. A key finding was that not only did these discourses and theoretical perspectives have to be resisted externally but also from within the RAWA organisation, as many other RAWA services held non-political and non-gendered views of domestic violence. As a result staff explained a “siloing” effect of not only feeling isolated in the sector, but also as a separate entity within their own organisation. They described the siloing of domestic violence policy, practice and language use as separate from the practices of other counselling and educational services within RAWA. Furthermore they described that both socially and within the organisation that feminist post-structural ideology and ways of speaking about domestic violence were not supported and thus marginalised the program within the organisation. This was discussed as making it not only increasingly difficult to work in the complex area of domestic violence but having to repeatedly justify one’s theoretical and discursive position; despite it being supported by current domestic violence literature (Wade & Coates, 2007).

Participants collectively explained that the benefit of discursive training, review and change was that it provided a foundation for policy, practice and reporting to become aligned.

It is acknowledged that this study, whilst a diverse representation of program staff experience, is a small sample from the field. However this research has introduced
knowledge of what a men’s program is up against when they attempt to make
discursive changes in regards to the power of the dominant psychological view of
domestic violence that plagues the sector. Despite research calling for drastic
changes in language practices, it has been found that significant and pervasive
professional pressures are experienced by those wishing to change language
practices around domestic violence. This warrants further study of how program staff
can manage to address these pressures because as domestic violence professionals
we have an ethical and professional responsibility to commit to the use of language
practices that make clear the structural causes and reinforcers of violence and thus
enhance the safety of women and children.

Language is the foundation of every aspect of domestic violence from representing
gender, power, theoretical position, policy, to honouring acts of resistance to
violence through the conversations we have with the men, women and children we
work for. Therefore it is imperative that we give the utmost attention to how we use
language to represent violence against women. It matters that we respond to
domestic violence using the most respectful, accurate and dignifying language to
give voice to those so often silenced.
REFERENCES


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