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**Difficulty With Detecting:
Metanarratives and a Discourse Analysis
of General Practitioners' Talk About Domestic Violence**

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Abstract

This research project aims to report and analyse the texts of interviews with doctors as they talk about their experience of detecting domestic violence against women who are their patients. The doctors stories of their experiences are summarised and presented as a metanarrative to provide an understanding of their experiences. A discourse analysis of the transcribed interviews identifies and explores the linguistic resources available to doctors and used in common by them in constituting their experiences, themselves, and their women patients who are victimised by violent male partners. The effects and implications of these resources is discussed.

The doctors reported difficulty detecting and dealing with domestic violence as experienced by their women patients. Their accounts support existing research findings. Discourse analysis identifies a discourse of discovery and a discourse of confession realised in the doctors' talk about detection. In the doctors' talk about violence and women who are victimised by their male partners, a liberal humanist discourse, psychological discourses, and discourses of love and commitment were identified. The implications of these discourses used together in the context of medical practice are discussed. In co-articulation with medical discourse, these discourses realised by the doctors simultaneously perpetuate the difficulty detecting domestic violence, and make this difficulty comprehensible.

I want to thank the following people whose contribution enabled me to complete this thesis:

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Preface: Anna's story

For so long I had struggled to keep my secret. How could I tell anyone of my shame? Surely I must have done *something* to deserve the brutality. I couldn't go to our family GP again - I had done that the first time the violence occurred. The doctor was concerned only for my husband's state of health, and had given me much advice about supporting him through his 'problem'. Still now I had escaped with my children, and at last would find the help and support I so desperately needed...

Anxiously I scanned his face... I knew the words had tumbled over each other as my story poured out. Had he believed me? Had he understood? Had he really *heard* me? The pause stretched interminably.

"Well, yes, you have been having a bad time. Yes...I can see you're upset. I am sure we can help you - but I could only make it for ten days." He stretched out his hand, pulled the prescription pad toward him, and wrote a script for ten sleeping pills.

True, the doctor didn't know me for I had just arrived in a new town - visibly bruised, tearful, and accompanied by three shocked children. He avoided my eyes as he ushered us out of the surgery.

So began a second nightmare: the nightmare of struggling to regain a life of dignity in spite of the devastating aftermath of the incest perpetrated against two of my children, and the violence my children and I endured. In silence. Alone. Unheard.