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Women's Refuge Clients'
Experiences of Social Responses to Domestic Violence
Including Interventions Informed by
Response-Based Practice

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requirements for the degree of

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ABSTRACT

In Aotearoa New Zealand, transformation in thinking about and acting to prevent domestic violence is exigent. Response-Based Practice (RBP) provides a transformational framework for ethical social responses for families experiencing violence. RBP attends to ways discursive practices undermine or support victim safety and dignity. The current research involved developing, delivering, and evaluating a RBP group intervention at Women's Refuge. Evaluation privileged women's accounts of the intervention and entailed comparing discourses clients utilised to inform their understandings of violence and position themselves before and after Group participation. Implications of clients' positioning for enabling or constraining their safety and dignity are also considered. The project's design used feminist collaborative action research principles, and thematic analysis in the first study to develop the intervention. Five advocates were engaged in meetings, semi-structured interviews, document reviews, and focus groups. The second study used discourse analysis of women's pre- and post- intervention accounts of their domestic violence experiences and social responses to them. Four clients engaged in semi-structured interviews. Before Group participation, discourses that minimised and mutualised violence predominated, positioning victims as instrumental in provoking and preventing violence, and victims and perpetrators as pathological. Language often represented perpetrators' violence as accidental/uncontrollable and concealed victim resistance. Narratives engaged traditional gender discourses of men's dominance, encompassing coercive control and violence, and women's submission and self-sacrifice, as normative. Women's entrapment by victim-blaming discourses alongside threats of poverty and

condemnation from perpetrators, families, church and social agencies was evident. Following Group participation, resistance discourses prevailed. Clients challenged their positioning as pathological or blameworthy and re-positioned themselves as sensible, competent women. Group content and processes were constituted as privileging and legitimating women's unarticulated knowledge of how concealing violence, perpetrator responsibility and gendered social power relations diminish victims' safety. Narratives of domestic violence evinced increased recognition of patterns of coercive control, entrapment and other non-assaultive violence intersecting with harmful social responses and structural violence. Thus, the Group provided a safe and dignifying social and physical space for clients to collectively reconsider their responses to violence; and discover, discuss, and critique discursive practices that reveal violence, perpetrator responsibility, and victim resistances.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	i
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iii
LIST OF FIGURES AND TABLES	ix
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.....	x
CHAPTER ONE: Preface.....	1
Statement of the Problem.....	1
The Current Project: A Collaborative Research Approach	3
<i>The research aims were:</i>	4
Terminology	4
<i>Domestic Violence</i>	4
<i>Advocacy</i>	7
<i>Perpetrators and Victims</i>	7
Thesis Outline	8
CHAPTER TWO: Introduction	10
Changes to Domestic Violence in the Law	10
Domestic Violence Prevalence in Aotearoa New Zealand.....	11
Advocacy for Women Victims of Domestic Violence	17
<i>Historical Perspectives in Women Victim's Advocacy</i>	20
Representations of Empowerment in Victim Interventions.....	29
Evaluating Women Victims' Groups	32
Women's Refuges in Aotearoa New Zealand: A Brief History	34
CHAPTER THREE: Theoretical Perspectives in the Project.....	41
Discourses and their Consequences.....	41
How Violence Against Women is Defined.....	45
Response-Based Practice: Responses and Resistance to Domestic Violence	56
Summary	70
CHAPTER FOUR: Methodology and Ethical Considerations.....	71

Methodological Framework: Feminist Poststructuralism and Positioning Theory	74
<i>Knowledge Production and Psychological Research</i>	74
<i>Subject Positioning</i>	76
<i>Discourse Analysis and Positioning in the Current Project</i>	77
<i>Research Principles of Collaboration and Action</i>	79
<i>Collaborative Research and Reflexivity</i>	82
Procedural Considerations	82
Ethical Considerations	83
Summary	95
CHAPTER FIVE: Study One – Analysis and Discussion of Advocates' Accounts.....	97
Methodological Procedures for Study One.....	97
<i>Sampling and Participant Selection</i>	97
<i>Data Collection Procedures</i>	98
<i>Data Analysis</i>	99
<i>Focus Groups and the Women's Group Resource Kit</i>	101
Reflections on Collaborating with the Advocates	102
Analysis and Discussion	103
1. Our Kaupapa and Takepū: Group Purpose and Values	104
<i>1.1 Social Connectedness</i>	109
<i>1.2 Positive Social Responses Upholding Mana and Dignity</i>	112
<i>1.3 Learning Together and From One Another</i>	115
<i>1.4 Enhancing Safety</i>	119
Reflections on Theme 1: Our Kaupapa and Takepū.....	123
2. Our Mahi: Group Processes.....	123
<i>2.1 Facilitator Skills and Tasks</i>	123
<i>2.2 On-going Learning with Response-Based Practice</i>	126
<i>2.3 Women Engaging</i>	127
Reflections on Theme 2: Our Mahi - Group Processes	132
3. Our Whakatakoto: Group Structure.....	132
<i>3.1 Programme Structure</i>	132
<i>3.2 Session Structure: Procedures</i>	134
<i>3.3 Individual Session Content</i>	135
Reflections on Theme 3: Our Whakatakoto - Group Structure	138

Overall Reflections on Advocates' Understandings of the Group Programme.....	139
CHAPTER SIX: Study Two.....	141
Methodological Procedures for Study Two, Parts I and II	141
<i>Sampling and Participant Selection</i>	141
<i>Data Collection Procedures</i>	142
<i>Data Analysis</i>	143
The Participating Women: Part I	146
Analysis and Discussion	147
1.1 <i>Concealing Violence</i>	147
1.2 <i>Exposing Violence</i>	155
2.1 <i>Obfuscating Perpetrator Responsibility</i>	160
2.2 <i>Clarifying Perpetrator Responsibility</i>	168
3. <i>Concealing, Elucidating, and Honouring Victim Responses and Resistance</i> ...	174
4.1 <i>Blaming and Pathologising Victims</i>	181
4.2 <i>Contesting Victim Blaming and Pathologising</i>	189
Reflections on Study Two, Part I.....	191
CHAPTER SEVEN: Study Two, Part II	195
Methodological Procedures for Study Two, Part II	195
The Participating Women	196
Analysis and Discussion	197
1. <i>Concealing and Exposing Violence</i>	197
2. <i>Obfuscating and Clarifying Perpetrator Responsibility</i>	207
3. <i>Contesting Victim Blaming and Pathologising</i>	215
4. <i>Concealing, Elucidating, and Honouring Victim Responses and Resistance</i> ...	222
5. <i>Restoring Dignity and Wellbeing Through Group Support and Solidarity</i>	229
Reflections on Study Two, Part II	237
CHAPTER Eight: Conclusion	239
References.....	252
Appendix A: Te Tiriti o Waitangi.....	286
Appendix B: Six Factors in Response-Based Contextual Analysis.....	288
Appendix C: Client Recruitment Information for Advocates.....	290

Appendix D: Letter of Support from Women's Refuge.....	292
Appendix E: Massey University Low Risk Ethics Approval Letter.....	293
Appendix F: Massey University Human Ethics Approval	294
Appendix G: Participant Consent Form (for Clients).....	295
Appendix H: Information Sheet (for Clients)	296
Appendix I: Authority for the Release of Transcript Form (for Clients and Advocates)	300
Appendix J: Interview Schedules 1 and 2 (for Clients).....	303
Appendix K: Research Kaumātua Letter of Support	309
Appendix L: Information Sheet (for Advocates).....	310
Appendix M: Interview Schedule (for Advocates).....	313
Appendix N: Participant Consent Form (for Advocates)	315
Appendix O: Focus Group Participant Consent Form.....	316
Appendix P: Summary of Findings for Feedback Session with Advocates	317
Appendix Q: Women's Group Facilitation Guide	332
Appendix R: Women's Group Handbook	475
Appendix S: Clinical Case Study	539

LIST OF FIGURES AND TABLES

Figure 1: Abusive behaviours checklist for assessing risk and lethality.....	6
Figure 2: Recorded domestic violence-related data 2016: A snapshot.....	16
Figure 3: Response-based practice contextual analysis.....	58
Table 1: Themes in the Analysis of Advocates' Texts.....	104

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CYF	Ministry for Children, Oranga Tamariki. Formerly named Child Youth and Family
FVDRC	Family Violence Death Review Committee
MOJ	Ministry of Justice
NCIWR	National Collective of Independent Women's Refuges
NZFVC	New Zealand Family Violence Clearinghouse
RBP	Response-Based Practice
The Amendment Act	Domestic Violence Amendment Act 2013