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‘You Have No Friends, You Have to Stand Up for Yourself’: Men Negotiating Domestic Abuse

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Abstract

Little is known of how men feel about their own acts of violence and other abuse towards women and the causes thereof. This paper sheds light on the male perspective using data from interviews between male abusers and a support counsellor. It seeks to answer the following questions:

- How do men experience intimate relationships?
- What makes them so vulnerable that they go “off the deep end” and no longer see the relevance in living for themselves or for their partners?
- What are men’s overall perceptions about domestic violence?

The male speech is analysed using discourse analysis techniques, specifically associated with critical linguistics, a discipline which unlocks the meaning potential in spoken and written language through analysis of structure and word choice.

A contradictory role is worked out by the men for their own positioning in society, for they are at once victims and heroes, condemned and marginalized but at the same time the ones who are supposed to be dominant in their relationships. They perceive that women are given

opportunities that are not open to them, that they have to give up valuable occupational space to their educated and empowered women, but yet are the supposedly stronger sex, endowed to have authority in the home. They feel the responsibility of living up to the expectations of their perceived role and have no real support in addressing the challenges of their intimate relationships. Self-respect and a sense of self-worth emerge as critical to the management of domestic violence by perpetrators.

We must re-examine our belief systems, our values, our parenting, our educational system, the legal system and popular culture in order to redefine gender relations in ways that are mutually sustaining. Only by attacking this problem on all fronts can we make some headway towards its resolution.

Key words: men, domestic violence, perception, control, anger.