

NTV Notes' Research Corner – Five books to stimulate your practice

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Five books to stimulate your practice

Finding time to read a whole book is a luxury, even for someone in my situation whose role is to assist organic and formal opportunities for policy and practice development in the field. In this spirit, I hope I'll be excused for not having read, in full, any of the books that I'm about to review! (or more correctly, briefly mention). They are definitely on my 'to read list', and I've made a start, but I didn't want to wait until I've completed reading them before writing this column. All five seem important books to read, and I'd like to let you know about them.

Each of these books is recently published. Four of the books deal directly with engaging male users of family violence – two from Australia and two from the U.S. – and I was very surprised to find them. Whole books written on such specialized work! And they are all obtainable through the normal processes of ordering books.

One of them I've already reviewed in a previous edition of NTV Notes – *Domestic violence: Working with men* edited by Andrew Day, Patrick O'Leary, Donna Chung and Donna Justo (2009). Actually, for those who remember the article, I actually reviewed a review of this book. This book is a very useful compilation of chapters focusing on a range of issues involved in engaging men, from governance in integrated family violence service systems to outcome research of a Duluth-type program in Qld (co-run by community corrections), from an innovative Western Australian program with repeat offenders based on attachment theory, to a South Australian practitioner's reflections on weaving issues of male entitlement and privilege in group work. The book includes a number of case studies and focuses on contemporary practice issues for different stakeholders in their engagement with men. Not every chapter will be of interest to everyone, but I suspect that most readers will find some things of value in the book.

The second book is one that some of you might have already read – *Becoming Ethical: A parallel, political journey with men who have abused* by Alan Jenkins (2009). This is Alan's long sought after update of his 1990 classical book *Invitations to responsibility*. The book is immensely practical as well as personal-political, and provides a rich conceptual platform to build upon his earlier book. With numerous therapeutic questions and case examples, the reader can easily feel as if s/he is conducting a men's behaviour change group session, investigating his/her own ethical journeys, complicities and resistances, and sitting quietly in the corner of a room pondering intensely relevant political and philosophical questions all at the same time.

Alan's languaging is at times beautiful, as are the terms he uses or coins to construct the conceptual framework and practical elements of invitational practice – "misguided blueprints for living", "politics of resistance", "ethics of restorative practice", "practices for anticipating and reflecting on challenge", "opening space for ethical conversation", "declaring a just purpose", "contradiction and windows to shame", "promoting a sober conversation about abusive behaviour", "establishing readiness for the journey", "preparing an itinerary for facing up", etc. Alan's approach is informed by some vital reflective questions such as:

- "How might we promote a focus on individual responsibility for ceasing abusive acts, whilst recognizing that such behaviour is culturally constructed and informed by power relations and practices that are ubiquitous in the experience of all men?"

- “How can we acknowledge and address a man’s experiences of disadvantage, marginalisation or victimisation, without sacrificing a focus on responsibility for his own abusive actions and without promoting stories of blame and justification?”
- “How might we maintain a fair and respectful position which remains open to possibilities regarding a man’s respectful ethics and preferences, in the face of his shocking and disrespectful actions or his apparent insensitivity or disregard for the hurt and distress experienced by those he has abused?”

The next book, *Strengths-based batterer intervention: A new paradigm in ending family violence* (2009), edited by Peter Lehmann and Catherine Simmons, doesn’t have as strong an analysis of gendered power as I would like. Indeed, the book arose in part from dissatisfaction with the lack of significant empirical evidence supporting the effectiveness of batterer intervention programs in the U.S., and the identified need to innovate and change tack from what the authors describe as “traditional approaches” to batterer intervention. Despite what I’d describe as some conceptual simplicities – the editors, for example, attempt to mark out a “new paradigm” in batterer intervention work in part by narrowly and rigidly describing much of the work to date – it is a useful book given how easily we can fail to incorporate men’s strengths in our work with them towards change. There is potential to apply some of the understandings and approaches in the book without necessarily watering down our analysis of male power and privilege.

I have not read most of the chapters on particular strengths-based approaches, so I can’t comment in-depth. However, I’m looking forward to reading the chapters on motivational interviewing and narrative therapy, and having a closer read of the chapter titled “Application of the Broaden-and-Build Theory”. My first flick through the latter chapter made me cringe to the core in many parts ... but also resulted in some useful questioning about the role of engaging with men’s positive emotions as part of a journey towards increased empathy (and/or men’s less selective use of empathy).

The fourth book I wish to highlight is another U.S.ian edited collection: *Motivational interviewing and stages of change in intimate partner violence* by Christopher Murphy and Roland Maiuro (2009). This book focuses on articles exploring the use of Prochaska and DiClemente’s “transtheoretical” or stages of change model to working with men who use family violence, and the application of motivational interviewing approaches and techniques towards enhancing readiness and the behaviour change process. It includes chapters such as “Motivational interviewing as a pre-group intervention for partner-violent men”, “Stages of change in batterers and their response to treatment” and “Motivating substance-involved perpetrators of intimate partner violence to seek treatment: A focus on fathers.” It also includes a briefer section on the application of these concepts to supporting women who experience violence.

The final book, *Undoing Privilege* by Bob Pease (2010), is not a book on engaging male users of family violence. However, it is an important read for people working towards the end of men’s violence against women, and for all those confronting systemic violence, abuse and misuse of power in various ways.

Bob’s book is based on the premise that there is much more written and talked about in terms of understanding oppression and helping the oppressed, compared to understanding and identifying privilege. For example, we talk about the desirability of minimum quotas for women in political and corporate positions of governance and management ... but we never talk about maximum quotas for men in these positions. Bob muses in his book whose interests are being served by comparatively focusing much more on the oppressed, than on the privileged and the use of privilege.

Bob’s book is an attempt to rebalance this focus. It includes chapters on several forms of privilege including western global dominance and eurocentrism, gender-based privilege,

political economy and class elitism, racial privilege and white supremacy, heterosexuality and heteronormativity, and able-bodied privilege. Bob focuses on the intersections between multiple forms of privilege, including how one might benefit from unearned privilege in one form yet experience the lack of privilege in others, and how multiple forms of privilege can interact.

Undoing privilege is quite clearly and plainly written while benefitting from strong theoretical analyses and a well-researched base. It is a very wide-scoping book, but also significantly personal. As one reads the introductory conceptual section, and moves into the chapters on the different forms of privilege, the invitation to the reader to consider his/her own unearned privileges, and how they intersect at the expense of others (and of themselves), is undeniable.

A disappointing aspect of the book is the relatively brief section focusing on challenging privilege and its reproduction. This chapter provides an important overview of approaches towards this end, and some practical examples are given, but it stops short of being the 'activist resource kit' that it could have been. However, the previous chapters include some focus on challenging different types of unearned privilege, particularly in making visible and challenging whiteness.

I've included this book in my list as I believe it is important for male family violence workers to explore the multiplicities of privilege, in our own lives and in the communities we live and work in. *Undoing privilege* can also help us to better understand the intersection between gender-based and other forms of privilege and lack there-of, including heterosexual, classist, racial and able-bodied forms of privilege. It's a book full of those moments of "Sigh, what does it mean if I stay blind to this?"

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2011
