Addressing violent and controlling behaviours associated with possessive jealousy amongst adult users of domestic, family and sexual violence

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Contents

Understanding possessive jealousy

Some adult users of domestic, family and sexual violence (DFSV) experience intense feelings of jealousy associated with underlying belief systems of possessiveness. Some may use social violence as an expression of this jealousy, though social violence can also be used when there's no such jealousy involved.

The emotional dynamic of jealousy is often one of angry, agitated worry and anxiety.[1] It can be accompanied by significant ruminative thinking that often fuels this dynamic. Possessive jealousy is an evidence-based risk factor for the use of serious, injury-causing violence, and is often accompanied by the use of significant patterns of coercive control.

Adult users of DFSV who are heterosexual men will often point to experiences (their own or those of friends) of women being 'unfaithful', while failing to discuss other men's or their own unfaithfulness. Possessive jealousy involves sustained suspicion and distrust of a partner's 'loyalty', and frequent anxious ruminations about perceived/potential infidelity.

Some adult users of DFSV who experience possessive jealousy brood about their perceptions of their partner's imagined or real infidelity on a frequent basis. They escalate this brooding into more agitated ruminations at certain points, related to external events (for example, their partner wanting to go out with friends) or internal states (related to mood, current level of general agitation, substance use, etc).

Social violence is often the behavioural outcome of possessive jealously. In intimate partner relationships, it involves cutting off or interfering with the victim-survivor's social relations, and closely watching their social interactions.

Feelings and behaviours that might come before some social violence tactics include:

- general agitation and anxiety
- escalating suspicion
- making allegations of infidelity
- fear that the victim-survivor will separate from them.

However, some social violence tactics are conducted 'upstream' of these feelings and behaviours, when the level of brooding might be low or moderate. These might be highly planned behaviours focused on monitoring, isolating or humiliating the victim-survivor.

The choice of heterosexual, male adult perpetrators to use social violence tactics in intimate partner relationships often stems from entitlement-based beliefs – that they have the right to monitor and control who their partner sees and under what circumstances. They often frame this behaviour, however, as coming from honourable intentions:

- to 'protect their partner' from other men
- to 'save their relationship' by keeping their partner from 'running off with another man'.

The desire to 'protect' their partner is riddled with paradox and contradictions. For some, this includes a degree of awareness of their own 'woman-using' behaviours as representative of the predatory sexual behaviours of some other men.

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[1] For a more detailed explanation, see Leahy, R., & Tirch, D. (2008). Cognitive behavioral therapy for jealousy. *International Journal of Cognitive Therapy*, *1*(1), 18–32.

The men's entitlement-based beliefs are connected to other gendered beliefs; for example, that women can be possessed as an object and, like any object, can be 'taken' by another man.

In addition to holding entitlement-based beliefs, individuals who use social violence tactics may also struggle with anxious attachment or trauma-based vulnerabilities. They can be highly dependent on their partner and feel that it would be the 'end of the world' should the relationship end.[2]

Entitlement, gendered power, anxiety and attachment

Social violence and other controlling tactics are often chosen by the adult user of DFSV with possessive jealousy as an attempt to *make 100% sure* that their partner will not 'cheat' on them. In this sense, possessive jealousy can have a strong agitated anxiety component.

In general, an anxiety problem is reinforced when the person who experiences the anxiety attempts to achieve absolute certainty that the outcome they are worried about will never happen. When the person does something to attempt to achieve this certainty, they might feel an immediate reduction in their anxiety ("Phew, I've made sure that..."). It is often impossible, however, to achieve *100%* certainty that the feared outcome will never happen. The outcome might be highly or extremely unlikely, but a person struggling with anxiety might feel driven to make absolutely sure, to leave no doubt. This means that the next time the (slightest) possibility arises of the feared event occurring, the person's alarm system fires strongly and they feel 'compelled' to seek reassurance and take immediate action to attempt to ensure no chance of the event occurring.

Men who perpetrate DFSV use their male entitlement, and gender-based power, to engage in controlling behaviours on this fruitless search for 100% certainty. They might choose:

- controlling tactics to try to make it impossible for their partner to 'cheat' on them,
- monitoring actions to attempt to identify any signs or signals that their partner might be unfaithful, and
- violent behaviours to ward off imagined or real infidelity, and to enforce the rules they set about their partner's social interactions.

Jealousy is a common emotion experienced by men who perpetrate violent and controlling behaviours. Some men might perpetrate these types of behaviours in the context of experiencing moderate levels of jealousy. They might engage in frequent brooding that occasionally accelerates into agitated ruminations. Other men ruminate more frequently and vividly about their partner's perceived infidelity or 'potential' to be unfaithful.

The experience of intense anxiety associated with jealousy is not in itself a cause of these behaviours. Many people grapple with intense anxiety without making choices to use violent and controlling behaviours towards their intimate partner and family members.[3]

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[2] See https://www.unk.com/blog/3-relationship-reinforcing-cbt-techniques-for-jealousy/ for an analysis of entitlement-based and attachment-based pathways towards men's choices to use social violence tactics.

[3] Of course, a person's experience of anxiety can create problems for family members, even in the absence of the use of DFSV. It is not uncommon for people who struggle with chronic anxiety to attempt to influence the behaviours of family members so as to support their constant striving towards absolute certainty that the feared events will not occur.

Furthermore, for some adult users of DFSV, the agitated anxiety associated with jealousy is in part fuelled by sexist and entitlement-based beliefs about women and the roles that women 'should play' to 'serve' men.

The intensity of the agitated anxiety characteristic of possessive jealousy can also be fuelled by the adult's family-of-origin attachment based insecurities. An anxious attachment style, developed through childhood experiences of parental separation or unavailability, or of violence and abuse, can result in an adult experiencing intense fear of abandonment and rejection.

These adults might seek constant reassurance and validation from their partner. They can also easily feel 'threatened' when they observe their partner being potentially sexually attractive to others, or when they are not around to 'supervise' her.

Some adults who struggle with possessive jealousy also experience a general sense of mistrust and suspiciousness about the actions of others, and feel that they need to 'always be on their guard.'

Again, however, an anxious attachment style based on childhood trauma, or a pervasive sense of mistrust about the intent and actions of others, does not in itself cause the adult to use DFSV. Men who perpetrate DFSV frequently draw upon male entitlement and gender-based power to attempt to make 100% sure that they will never be 'abandoned', choosing to use patterns of violent and controlling behaviours to do so.

For example, they might use sexual coercion in an effort to seek 'validation' from their partner, irrespective of their partner's wishes at that moment. They might use emotional violence and other tactics to make it too psychologically and/or physically unsafe for their partner to make an autonomous decision about whether or not to consent.

Jealousy is not a pleasant emotion. It is not uncommon for adults in any situation to blame another person, typically their partner or the person they are dating, for 'making them' feel jealous.

Adult users of DFSV, however, can take this to the nth degree. They might believe that they 'can't stand' the feeling of jealousy, and blame their partner intensely for 'making them' feel this way. In part, they choose violent and controlling behaviours to try to prevent their partner from 'making them' feel this uncomfortable emotion.

Adult users of DFSV, particularly men, commonly attempt to make the victim-survivor responsible for their emotions. This is highly gendered behaviour: even in heterosexual relationships where the male partner is not using violence, men often still leave most of the emotional 'heavy lifting' in the relationship to their female partner.

Furthermore, the perpetrator's entitlement-based expectations might create frequent situations in which he feels he is the 'victim' of his partner's actions in this sense. In the process of trying to make 100% sure that his partner will not 'cheat' on him, the user of violence might set non-negotiable rules about her social behaviours that are unfair and often impossible to follow 100% of the time. When his partner 'breaks' a rule that he has unilaterally set (for example, she has coffee with a male friend who he disapproves of), it is common for the user of violence to perceive that she has done something that makes him feel jealous.

The following hypothetical vignette describes how this might work in practice, and how the perpetrator's "I'm the victim here!" thinking contributes to his choices to use violent and controlling behaviour.

Hypothetical example of "I'm the victim here!" thinking associated with choices to use violent and controlling behaviours when jealousy is experienced

John and his partner Sally go to a club in the centre of town. John is older than Sally and considers himself to be more worldly and tough than she is. He's pretty sure she has no idea that guys hit on her all the time because of how she looks. On the way to the club, he says to Sally *Stick with me tonight – you know what happened last time. It's a zoo in there.*

In some situations, men who use violence might start out with 'honourable' intentions, in this case to 'protect' his partner. However, these intentions can be influenced by sexism, a sense of male superiority and gender inequality.

Here John provides an implicit warning of what might happen if Sally doesn't abide his rule that she must be at his side throughout the whole night.

John, who has started drinking, comes back from the loo to find Sally chatting with a guy her own age. She appears friendly and chatty.

John thinks:

I've told her over and over again not to go up and talk to guys she doesn't know. She just doesn't respect me. I keep telling her, but she doesn't listen! She knows I'm a jealous guy, she's doing this deliberately to get at me.

It is common for users of DFSV to work themselves up through rapid "I'm the victim!" thinking, stemming from underlying sexist, entitlement-based (and sometimes) trauma-accentuated beliefs.

He puffs up and walks in an intimidatory fashion over to Sally and puts his arm heavily around her shoulders. When she starts to shrug him off, he tightens his grip. The man she is talking with stiffens and asks Sally, "Is everything alright?". John snarls at him and steers Sally away, towards the bar. There, he commands a double vodka and orders Sally to sit down.

Using alcohol or other drugs can be a way for DFSV perpetrators to give themselves a licence for violence. It can also be a tactic to make family members afraid.

Substance use is not a driver or cause of DFSV, but can increase the risk of the use of more severe forms of violence. The more that John drinks, the more intensely he might ruminate on his jealous thoughts, to the point where he starts to become convinced that Sally is cheating on him.

Sally sits, but then says slowly and carefully, 'That was a friend from primary school'. In his head, John says:

Bullshit, you wouldn't talk to an old friend like that. He must be an ex. She just talked to him to make me react. But if he's an ex, maybe he's going to try to get back together with her. What if …

John's thinking follows a number of 'cognitive distortions'. He jumps to conclusions. He catastrophises. But at the heart of his jealousy is the need to make 100% sure that Sally won't cheat on him. He now feels threatened, and in his mind, needs to act.

The evening is ruined, but they spend another hour at the bar while John downs another couple of drinks and broods on Sally's interaction with her 'old friend'. He's particularly pissed off that she doesn't apologise for going off to talk to someone else.

It is common for users of DFSV to focus on themselves, ruminate and feel entitled to enforce their expectations of partners / family members.

They leave the club. Upon arriving home, John waits again for Sally to apologise and finally – when she doesn't – confronts her about "her behaviour" back at the club:

Adults who cause DFSV harm often build themselves up for violence, brooding on the story of victimhood they tell themselves.

So what was going on back there? You looked real cosy with that guy. Who is he really? You've seen him before, haven't you, you've had it off with him?

Perpetrators' stories and narratives don't always make sense to outsiders, but provide them with a 'green light' to use violence

His voice rises and he clenches his fists:

You're just a whore, face it. I can't trust you at all. You'd probably just chat with any guy who wanted a piece of you.

John's emotional abuse is intentional. He hasn't 'lost it' at Sally. He is deliberately trying to reduce her sense of self so that she feels too worthless to try to 'attract other men'. He is also trying to punish her for not following his rules.

Sally, quite frightened by now, speaks quietly and deliberately:

"I knew him from school, we just bumped into each other, it was really nothing. I won't do it again."

John is mollified:

Okay. But you know what will happen if you do.

Over subsequent days, John thinks again and again about the incident at the club. He continues to harbour suspicions about the 'old friend'.

He trawls back through Sally's social media feeds to see if the guy is there (he's not) and re-checks her credit card expenses just to make sure there's nothing out of the ordinary (there isn't).

One of the reasons perpetrators use violence is that it works. Sally is now unlikely to talk to another man at a club again and John knows this is the consequence of his actions. The violence has also given John a chance to "blow off steam", relieving him of his difficult emotions – at least for now.

John is not out of control. He can hear and respond to Sally's assurances. He expects Sally to respect his authority.

Men who perpetrate DFSV use a range of tactics to reassert control when victim-survivors do not comply with their entitlement-based expectations. By blaming Sally for his feelings of jealousy, John sees himself as the victim, and therefore feels entitled to use social violence, financial violence, emotional violence, intimidation and threats to control her behaviour, and to try to make 100% sure that she will not cheat on him.

Men who struggle with possessive jealousy might feel uncomfortable experiencing negative feelings in a relationship. They might believe that a healthy relationship has room only for consistently positive, pleasant and perfect feelings, and that there can never be any room for disappointment and doubt. They might hold up a standard for their partner that she should never feel attracted to or flirt with others to any extent, without him admonishing himself for feeling sexual attraction to various others and for engaging in flirtatious (or even predatory) behaviours.

Of course, the choices made by the user of DFSV to search for 100% certainty that his partner is not being unfaithful and that he will not be 'abandoned', often destroys the relationship. Rather than his partner being a source of love and relational security, she becomes an object to be guarded and controlled. His behaviour destroys safety, respect and trust in the relationship. His partner becomes an object not only in the sexual sense, but also, to give her whole self over towards fulfilling his emotional needs.

Underlying beliefs

In the long-term, addressing the use of social violence requires the individual to identify their underlying beliefs, and to reflect critically on those giving rise to the 'angry, agitated worry' they experience as jealousy. The *Exploring beliefs via actions and intent* section of this guide provides one approach on how to do this.

It is important in this work to understand the absoluteness and intensity of these beliefs, and to help the user of violence grapple with the impacts on himself and his relationships of holding these beliefs in such black-and-white ways. Men who use DFSV generally do not just believe "women should be faithful in their relationships with men" or that "my partner shouldn't cheat on me".[4] Rather, the beliefs held are often to the extent of "a woman must be faithful 100% of the time, and if not, it's proof that she is a whore", "women cannot be trusted", "it's my right to know who she is spending time with", and the like. Connected with this can be other absolute beliefs related to emotional vulnerability, such as "If she leaves me, it would be the end of the world" and "if she leaves me for another man [sic] it's definite proof that she never loved or cared about me."

[4] Of course, the 'should' in this statement is on a continuum towards a 'must' representative of a rule.

Beliefs as absolute as these can be fed by entitlement, sexism (sometimes as deep as misogyny), and by adverse childhood circumstances. Often, there is a nuanced interplay of these factors in the development of these beliefs.

These underlying beliefs provide validation for men to set rules and to make demands about their partner's behaviour – rules and demands that are not negotiated, but implicitly or explicitly set by the user of violence unilaterally.

These rules are unfair and sometimes impossible to follow – for example, to always validate his emotional needs, never 'make him' feel jealous, always respond to his demands to know who his partner is spending time with and when, and so on. These beliefs also provide the user of violence with perceived 'rights', such as to monitor her movements and to place restrictions when his belief that 'women cannot be trusted' becomes 'validated'.

The role of anxious attachment

In addition to highly gendered beliefs, possessive jealousy can have origins through dysfunctional family of origin experiences where the adult develops an anxious attachment style. Jealousy is a very common experience; adults who experience intense jealousy are more likely than others to have had family of origin experiences where they were not able to trust their caregivers to be available, responsible and responsive to their needs. Of course, this can be associated with the experience of complex trauma, or with forms of family dysfunction.

An anxious attachment style can result in a child, as they become a young adult, feeling a lack of self-worth. An underlying core belief, or schema, that "If I was/am worthy enough, you [my caregiver] would have been there for me." An anxious attachment style can be associated with a lack of trust in intimate relationships, with doubts that others can be counted upon to be faithful and to meet their needs, associated with an underlying sense of lack of worth.

This concurs with the agitated anxiety component of possessive jealousy. A lack of trust, and an ongoing fear of rejection and abandonment, can result in the adult spending a lot of time scanning and monitoring their intimate partner for cues or signs that they are being unfaithful or are about to abandon them.

This is a common characteristic of anxiety: frequent scanning of one's environment for indications that the perceived threats are about to occur. Even amongst adults with intense jealousy who do not use DFSV, it is common to misperceive benign actions or environmental cues as representing signs that their partner is in the process of abandoning them when this is not the case, and to ruminate over these misperceived signals. The advent of the online world has opened up a substantially greater range of opportunities for adults who struggle with intense jealousy to misperceive cues as signalling unfaithfulness or abandonment.

There are direct correlations between an anxious attachment style and behaviours designed to monitor and surveil one's partner for signs and cues of infidelity or rejection. For example, one study found that anxious attachment is associated with significantly higher levels of surveillance of a partner's social media account, especially when the adult was experiencing high levels of jealousy.[5]

[5] Marshall, T., Bejanyan, K., Di Castro, G., & Lee, R. A. (2013). Attachment styles as predictors of Facebook-related jealousy and surveillance in romantic relationships. *Personal relationships*, *20*(1), 1-22.

Intense jealousy associated with anxious attachment can have a very strong somatic component. In addition to cognitive ruminations, the experience of jealousy can be associated with a range of somatic feelings that intensify the experience of anxiety. Adults with an anxious attachment style who experience intense jealousy might feel a strong 'somatic compulsion' to engage in monitoring or other behaviours in response to their ruminations. This is not surprising – any strong feeling of jealousy, even amongst adults without an anxious attachment style, can feel very uncomfortable (for example, the 'knot in the stomach').

To an extent, an anxious attachment style can lay foundations for any adult to use some degree of social intrusive behaviours. This reflects the agitated anxiety component, and the behaviours that adults across genders and circumstances might use in a fruitless attempt to assuage the anxiety and make 100% sure that their intimate partner is not in the process of abandoning them.

The relationship between anxious attachment and social violence behaviours can be mediated by gender, however. For example, a recent study amongst young adults found that high levels of anxious attachment predicted cyberdating abuse more commonly in men who adhered to traditional gender roles in heterosexual relationships.[6] There are other studies, however, which have found that anxious attachment styles are correlated with increased use of monitoring, surveillance and social intrusive behaviours amongst both men and women, at least in the context of early adult relationships.

More generally, in the context of heterosexual relationships, men are more likely than women to give themselves permission to take surveillance and monitoring behaviours further, and to engage in patterned and multi-faceted systems of social violence.[7] There is a continuum here from the occasional transgression into checking up on a partner's online communications and social interactions, to moderate degrees of surveillance and monitoring, to significant patterns of coercive control involving a system of behaviours that substantially constrains a partner's space for action. Male entitlement and the availability of gender-based power enabled in a patriarchal society lays the foundations for men to engage in coercive control considerably more frequently than women in heterosexual relationships.

Some adult users of DFSV with characteristics of possessive jealousy, many of whom embody ah anxious attachment style, have very high levels of psychological dependency on their partner. These perpetrators:

- have a particularly intense attachment to the victim-survivor(s) for their own feeling of self-worth,
- experience a significant increase in suicidal ideation and risk should the relationship end or be at risk of ending,
- be at heightened risk of enacting homicide-suicide in these circumstances,
- appear highly suspicious about who his partner is seeing and what she is doing,
- talk freely about his suspicions that she is unfaithful,
- justify their controlling behaviours and 'repercussions' on the basis of those suspicions,

[6] Sánchez-Hernández, M., Herrera, M., & Expósito, F. (2024). Does the digital environment evoke anxiety cycles in romantic relationships? The Roles of social–interpersonal and individual factors in cyberdating abuse perpetration. *International Journal of Human–Computer Interaction*, *40*(15), 4003-4020.

[7] Valdez, C., Lilly, M. M., & Sandberg, D. (2012). Gender differences in attitudinal acceptance of intimate partner violence perpetration under attachment-relevant contexts. *Violence & Victims*, *27*(2).

- be highly anxious and very fearful of losing the relationship,
- justify their controlling narratives and behaviours as 'expressions of love' ("we are destined to be together for the rest of our lives"),
- might have used violence against other adults who they see as a threat to the relationship,
- leave you with a feeling that they might think 'If I can't have her, nobody will', and/or
- have a history of driving previous partners away, of high surveillance behaviours across relationships, due to possessive jealousy.

These DFSV perpetrators have substantial psychological and other forms of dependency on their partner, and cannot see a life for themselves if their relationship with this particular person was to end.

Possessive jealousy and accelerating risk

Adult users of DFSV with high levels of possessive jealousy have a low threshold for perceiving a threat of imagined infidelity. It does not take much for their frequent brooding to turn into accelerated ruminations.

A range of situations can be associated with an increase in these ruminations, and in the adult's experience of agitated anxiety. A small sample of these include:

- his partner attempts to expand her world despite his attempts to restrict it, such as re/entering the labour force or increasing her hours at work, going back to study, or wanting to see her friends more often
- he perceives that she does not want to have sex with him or is less interested in sex
- she tires of his need for constant reassurance and validation, and he becomes suspicious as to why he is receiving less attention
- she pushes back against his rules about who she should see and under what circumstances
- he discovers that she has, in his view, been doing things 'behind his back', even if totally unrelated to issues of infidelity
- he hears rumours or gossip about who she is spending time with
- he discovers that a male friend has been 'cheated on', and although he knows his partner had nothing to do with it, his mistrust of women deepens.

Unfortunately, the range of situations in which the adult user of DFSV can feel heightened jealousy is vast. It is extremely unfair and totally inappropriate, in this context, to consider that victim-survivors do anything that 'trigger' the perpetrator's felt experiences of jealousy.

In post-separation contexts, the perpetrator discovering that his former partner has started dating or commenced a new relationship can be a time of acute risk, especially if he experiences possessive jealousy. For a detailed resource on identifying and responding to very serious risk in situations such as these, see *Responding to users of DFSV who pose a serious to severe risk.*[8]

[8] Available in the Featured section at https://www.linkedin.com/in/rodney-vlais/ - a linkedin account is required to access the resource.

Substance misuse

Possessive jealousy and substance misuse is a toxic mix for users of DFSV. Alcohol, and possibly some other substances, can restrict a user's focus on various environmental cues, and result in the perpetrator 'locking on' to his ruminative thoughts. An adult user of DFSV is more likely to follow down well-worn pathways in his thinking when substance-impacted, rather than try new strategies in response to the jealousy.

It is therefore highly important to focus on substance use with adult users of DFSV with possessive jealousy. This includes attempting to obtain agreement to work on reducing (or eliminating) binge drinking episodes.

Mental health considerations

While seeped in male entitlement and highly gendered beliefs and approaches to the world, possessive jealousy can have a mental health component. As already identified, possessive jealousy has a significant component of agitated anxiety. There are some (and only some) parallels in working with DFSV perpetrators to manage their jealousy safely, with assisting clients to manage expressions of anxiety in mental health settings.

The overall mental health of the adult user of DFSV who struggles with possessive anxiety can matter. Many readers – including the author – can attest to expanded ability to respond appropriately to anxiety during times of better mental health. For example, good mental health might make it easier for us to leave our anxious thoughts alone, rather than dive immediately into reassurance seeking behaviours in a fruitless attempt to make 100% sure that the feared outcome will not happen.

Of course, improved mental health is not likely in itself to significantly reduce the perpetrator's use of social violence and other violent and controlling behaviours in response to his felt jealousy. Indeed, improvements in mental health might even be associated with an *increase* in these harmful behaviours, if the perpetrator now has more energy, confidence and social ease to expand into new monitoring and controlling behaviours. Improved mental health might enable the user of violence to put more planning and forethought into his controlling behaviours.

Mental health does matter, however, in terms of the potential effectiveness of behaviour change strategies and interventions. Substance abuse and/or poor mental health will make it more difficult – though often not impossible – for these strategies and interventions to effect change.

Beyond this, in a minority of situations the adult user of DFSV might experience **pathological jealousy**, also known as 'morbid jealousy'. In these situations, the experience of jealousy is heightened by particular forms of poor mental health, in ways that can create even further risk for victim-survivors.

There are two sub-types of pathological jealousy – and for both, mental health treatment is required in parallel with DFSV behaviour change work.[9]

[9] Kellett, S., & Stockton, D. (2023). Treatment of obsessive morbid jealousy with cognitive analytic therapy: a mixed-methods quasi-experimental case study. *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling*, *51*(1), 96-114.

Delusional morbid jealousy has a psychotic component, and might occur in the context of substance misuse, dementia or more acute forms of organic brain disorders, schizophrenia or mood/affective disorders. Sometimes it might be the main delusion that the adult experiences as part of a delusional disorder.

Obsessive morbid jealousy occurs when the anxiety component of jealousy has substantial obsessive and compulsive features. This might include obsessive checking of their partner's fidelity, and monitoring and controlling behaviours that have a strong compulsive component. A distinguishing feature of obsessive morbid jealousy is that the adult feels significant shame and guilt regarding their compulsive behaviours, and they are aware that their fear and paranoia about their partner being unfaithful is (very) excessive. Consistent with other manifestations of OCD, they feel driven to engage in compulsive behaviours even though they are aware that their obsessive thoughts and compulsive behaviours appear 'bizarre'.

Only a very small proportion of adult users of DFSV who struggle with jealousy would be experiencing morbid/pathological jealousy as a mental health condition in either of these ways. While mental health treatment is required in these cases, these adults' use of violent and controlling behaviours are often also influenced by entitlement and gendered beliefs and attitudes. Collaboration with mental health services, rather than handing clients fully over to these services, is required.

Case planning and management

Addressing substance misuse and poor mental health will generally not in themselves result in the adult user of DFSV becoming safer for his ex/partner and family members. However, they can be very important contributing factors to target, especially as part of an overall case management plan to reduce serious risk. See the resource *Case planning for adult users of domestic and family violence* for detailed sections on addressing substance misuse and mental health contributions to risk and harm.[10]

Social violence and abuse in consensually non-monogamous relationships

There is substantial mononormative bias within DFSV service systems and in our Western society in general. Monogamy is seen as the 'natural' relationship form, with other intimate relationship arrangements viewed as an 'exotic aberration'. While DFSV service systems are learning to respond sensitively and appropriately to some parts of the LGBTIQA+ rainbow, and are beginning to self-reflect on heteronormative and cisgender bias, multigamous victim-survivors and users of violence remain highly marginalised.

Consensually non-monogamous (CNM) relationships cover a wide variety of forms: polyamory is perhaps the most widely known. Adults enter into these relationship arrangements for a variety of reasons, with a common feature being to work against the possessiveness that can be characteristic of some monogamous relationships. Some adults in CNM relationships rail against the belief that one can meet all of their romantic and related needs through the one partner, and the pressure these expectations can place on this one person. Many attempt to cultivate what is termed as compersion, a form of sympathetic joy experienced in relation to a partner's happiness through finding romantic and sexual intimacy with one or more others.

[10] Available in the Featured section at https://www.linkedin.com/in/rodney-vlais/ - a linkedin account is required to access the resource.

Many adults who commit to a CNM relationship recognise the extent of inner work required so as not to constrain the freedom and growth of their partners by virtue of their own attitudes, beliefs and behaviours adopted through mononormative influences. A lot of 'unshedding' is required in this respect, including in relation to practices of possessiveness.

At the same time, while there is little research and literature focusing on multigamous communities, it is clear that DFSV can occur in CNM relationships. The use of power and control can broadly resemble that in monogamous relationships, though expressed in different forms. The following infographic highlights some of the similarities and differences:[11]

	Classic Signs of Abuse	Additional Elements in Polyamory
 Image: Pavle Matic[2] **Social Control**	• Isolation ("you are not allowed to have friends") • Cutting the survivor off from family • Control of phone/text messages/online messaging/social media accounts • Demanding an accounting of every minute of the survivor's time	• Eroding relationships with the survivor's other partners (slander, "they're not good enough") • Controlling sexual and intimate relationships ("you should date who I say," "if you want to date me you must date that person," "we are a package deal, if you break up with me your other partner will leave you") • Shunning members of a polyamorous group • Demanding access to communication with other partners • Controlling time spent with other partners • Veto (demanding end to another relationship)
 Image: Tuye Project[2] **Coercion**	• Demands of sexual access to the survivor even when it's unwanted • Stalking • Controlling access to basic needs such as food, sleep, or medical care • Physical violence: hitting, slapping, choking • Reinforcement of gender roles	• Making sex with one person the cost of emotional support or intimacy from another • Pressuring polyamorous groups do everything together; discouraging independent hobbies or activities • Economic coercion ("all our finances are done by this person/you need to contribute")
 **Gaslighting**	• Undermining the survivor's memories or perceptions ("I never said that," "you never remember things right") • Trivializing the survivor's feelings or needs ("you always get so upset over nothing")	• Enlisting other members of the polyamorous network in gaslighting ("I was there, you never did that/that never happened") • Group enforcement of one view ("everyone else agrees!"); dismissing other views • "Nobody else has a problem with this; the problem must be you" • Reinforcement of group norms to the exclusion of other opinions • "You're lucky to be allowed multiple partners, why are you complaining?"
 **Emotional Abuse**	• Insults, verbal harassment or humiliation • Damaging or destroying property • Controlling what the survivor wears • Throwing objects, punching walls • Verbal threats directed at the survivor or at children, family, or pets • Groundless accusations of cheating	• Accusations of violating relationship rules; using this to justify ever more restrictive rules on sex, relationships, intimacy, or time spent with other lovers • Verbal threats directed at other partners, or at those who support the survivor • Controlling what sex acts the survivor is allowed to engage in with other lovers • Demanding detailed accounts of sex with other lovers • Group bullying sessions • Kink shaming

1. https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/NISVS-infographic-2016.pdf
2. images from vecteezy.com

[11] See https://www.morethantwo.com/blog/2024/05/some-thoughts-on-polyamory-and-abuse

It is highly important that practitioners immersed in the assumptions and biases of monogamous relationships reflect on monogamy as one, but only one, valid relationship form. This reflection is critical not only to provide an accessible, respectful and sensitive service to victim-survivors and users of DFSV. Bringing these assumptions and biases into practice can result in inaccurate assessments of risk.

As such, practitioners can consider and recognise that:

- The concept of who is a partner can differ in CNM relationships. It might not be automatically clear who might be experiencing an adult perpetrator's violent and controlling behaviour – and which parts of the adult's abusive patterns and dynamics are used against which partners.

- Adult perpetrators in CNM relationships have particular tools at their disposal to weaponise and gaslight one or more of their partners. As there are considerable (and understandable) expectations for people within multigamous communities to do their own inner work to transform mononormative feelings of jealousy and possessiveness, they can be pressured by the perpetrator (and by others in the community) to ignore their internal feelings and experiences that something is wrong about the perpetrator's behaviour.

- Some adults in CNM relationships have complex trauma histories, similar to those in monogamous relationships. The influence of anxious attachment styles can be similar. However, they can experience the addition of the chronic trauma of marginalisation due to their preferred identities and relationship forms. An unfortunately not uncommon response to multigamous victim-survivors when reaching out to a monogamous friend or service for support is one that infers "but you are in an inherently abusive style of relationship". This is also not an uncommon response to victim-survivors in BDSM relationships, where practitioners might fail to understand the implications of telling a submissive who is experiencing DFSV that the main action they should take to become safe is to give up an "inherently unsafe style of relationship." In some respects, this is equivalent to asking a ciswomen experiencing violence to give up their identity as a woman in order to be safe from men.

Strategies to address possessive jealousy

It can take some time to identify, critically reflect on, and change the underlying beliefs that give rise to possessive jealousy. This can take several months, or more, of behaviour change work.

While this process is taking place, a range of CBT strategies can help individuals to make non-violent and non-controlling choices when they experience jealousy.

It is important to prepare the adult that giving up their surveillance and other social violence behaviours might possibly increase their anxiety about their partner being unfaithful in the short term. This is because by giving up these behaviours, they no longer embark on the fruitless search to obtain 100% certainty of partner faithfulness, meaning that they are likely to be experiencing their doubts more intensely.

However, over time, if they continue abstaining from their social violence behaviours, their anxiety is likely to decline. This is because they will be learning to accept that they cannot achieve this certainty – in other words, they will be 'accepting' their jealous thoughts without futilely trying to get rid of them through surveillance and other social violence behaviours.

Once their jealous thoughts are experienced as less of a threat – confirmed by the cessation of immediate action designed to try to get rid of them – the anxiety and compelling nature of the thoughts is likely to decrease.

Mindfulness and other physiological grounding strategies

Agitated worry associated with jealousy can be intense. Some adult users of violence might need to apply initial physiological and grounding strategies *before* they can apply cognitive strategies. These might include mindfulness activities drawn from Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) and Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT).

If you are not familiar with these activities, there are numerous DBT and ACT workbooks freely available on the internet, from which you can select different types of mindfulness activities to try out with your client. Mindfulness skills can help the adult user of violence to watch their jealous thoughts without attempting to struggle or get rid of them.

Help the adult to understand that while the initial jealous thought they experience might be intrusive, they *have a choice in what they think next.* They have the choice either to indulge or stew in the jealous thinking, stacking the initial jealous thought with further jealous thoughts, or to use mindfulness and other strategies that enable them to watch the thoughts 'passing through' their mind.

Adult users of DFSV have often developed ingrained patterns of engaging with their jealous thoughts. This engagement takes the form of repeating, ruminating and expanding on the initial thought, increasing his anxiety and 'drawing him into' wanting to engage in behaviours that attempt to make 100% sure that his partner is not and could not be unfaithful to him. Of course, the adult's violent and controlling behaviours are a choice. 'However', he is less likely to choose violence and control if he is able to experience the jealous thoughts without pushing the 'red alert' button that the thoughts represent danger requiring immediate action to ameliorate.

Mindfulness strategies – and various detachment and defusion strategies drawn from DBT and CBT – attempt to 're-teach' the adult's brain that the jealous thoughts do not represent a threat. And that he can learn to observe the thoughts and 'leave them alone', rather than become alarmed and make decisions to engage in actions in the futile attempt to get rid of the thoughts (such as texting his partner 20 times to check up on her).

Acceptance of uncertainty

Giving up attempts to make 100% sure that the adult's partner is not, and could not, be unfaithful means accepting the uncertainty that this outcome is always possible. And accepting that it is always possible that the relationship might not work out.

Adult users of DFSV with possessive jealousy might not easily come to this point. For some, the thought of living alone and not in a relationship can be highly distressing. For others, the thought of not being in a relationship with their particular partner might be unconscionable. These perpetrators, who feel they cannot survive without being in a relationship, or without being with a particular partner, can pose a particularly serious risk to victim-survivors.

As such, it can be highly important to, over time, build the adult's confidence that he can live alone without his partner if the need arises. Acknowledge that the adult might/does not *want* this to occur. However, that he would be *able* to if the relationship ends.

Building this confidence is easier said than done, especially in situations where the adult has:

- an anxious attachment style based on adverse family of origin experiences,
- low self-efficacy and low self-confidence, and/or
- spent little of his adult life outside of a relationship.

Individual work to help the adult user of violence to build this confidence can be an important adjunct to behaviour change strategies. If the adult believes there is no future for him should the relationship end, he might have little motivation to attempt anything other than futile efforts to achieve absolute certainty that his partner will not be unfaithful. While the adult might be hesitant to enter into these explorations of what life might be like should his current relationship end at some point in the future, gently persist if it is safe to do so.

An adult user of DFSV might also find it difficult to tolerate uncertainty if they are heavily committed to male supremacist beliefs that men 'own' women. Of course, these beliefs can be held to varying degrees. For these men, a partner's unfaithfulness can represent 'insurgent behaviour' that in their view, cannot be tolerated.

Addressing cognitive distortions

Many contemporary approaches to CBT violence-interruption work help individuals to identify their self-talk when they experience a build-up of strong emotions such as anger, jealousy or humiliation. These approaches help the individual to:

- determine whether the thoughts associated with this self-talk are unhelpful
- challenge unhelpful thoughts.

This can be very potent in working with ruminative thoughts associated with jealousy and the use of social violence.

In addressing jealousy, there can also be value in the classic CBT approach of helping the individual identify *cognitive distortions* to their thinking. Choices to use violence are often preceded by ruminative and thought-stacking chains. These chains are, in turn, associated with:

- jumping to conclusions (Client: *"she hasn't returned my texts tonight, something must be going on!"*)
- imagination-based reasoning; for example, becoming convinced that the partner is unfaithful on the basis of images the individual has in mind (Client: *"it must be that fella she talks about at work, they're having drinks together now, I just know it!"*)
- catastrophising (Client: *"if she is attracted to someone it means she will leave me!"*)
- black-and-white thinking (Client: *"I should have known she was like all the other women, I thought she was different. Nah, she's loose like the rest!"*)
- need for absolute certainty (Client: *"I need to know for sure that she's never having an affair, and I need to know now!"* or *"I need to make absolutely sure that she never cheats on me"*).

This need for certainty can act more powerfully than a 'cognitive distortion'. As mentioned previously, for some DFSV perpetrators, using violence can be part of what they experience as 'driven behaviour' to ensure that their fears about their partner's infidelity never eventuate.

Choices to use social violence and associated controlling tactics can be made with the intent to *make 100% sure* that the person's partner has *no opportunity* to 'cheat' on them. But, because obtaining 100% certainty is impossible, attempts to obtain absolute certainty only fuel the person's anxiety.

When using violence interruption-strategies in response to jealousy, it can be useful to:

- identify cognitive distortions such as the ones above
- help the person using violence to challenge their self-talk based on an understanding of the distortion. For example:
  - Client: *"there can be a dozen reasons why she's not returning my texts – maybe she feels that I'm harassing her"*
  - Client: *"that's just an image in my mind, that doesn't mean that it's true"*
  - Client: *"look, she can be attracted to other men but that doesn't mean that she will leave me... heck, I come across women I find attractive all the time but it doesn't mean that I'm hitting on them"*
  - Client: *"no-one is perfect, and what if she flirts a bit with someone else, that doesn't mean she doesn't love me or doesn't want to be in the relationship"*
  - Client: *"I can't be 100% certain that she will never cheat on me, all I can do is trust her not to, and hope that the relationship succeeds"*

Activity: The five-chair technique

This can be a useful CBT activity for a range of family violence behaviours where jealousy is a feature, including social violence.

PART ONE

Arrange five chairs in the room. They should be labelled, in this order: **episode**,[12] **thoughts**, **feelings**, **behaviour**, **outcome**.

The adult user of violence sits in one chair at a time, moving along the sequence. Support them to talk about the episode, then the thoughts, etc. Their responses should be white-boarded, or they could be written on a big piece of paper behind each chair.

Discussion in each chair involves:

- **Episode chair** – they describe the situation leading up to their use of violence.
- **Thoughts chair** – they are supported to identify the unhelpful thoughts leading up to their use of violence.
- **Feelings chair** – they are helped to identify some of the underlying feelings, not just jealousy or anger, they were experiencing at the time. A list of feeling words can be used as a prompt.
- **Behaviour chair** – they describe the family violence behaviours they used.
- **Outcome chair** – they are supported to identify the short-term negative outcomes of their behaviours, and then the long-term negative outcomes.

[12] 'Episode' can be a better word than 'incident', as it encompasses a range of harmful behaviours.

PART TWO

Take the individual through the sequence again. But this time, help them to see things differently.

- **Thoughts chair** – draw on the cognitive distortions analysis to help them come up with different thoughts they could have had in the situation, that peel away the cognitive distortions.
- **Feelings chair** – unpack how different thoughts might have influenced their range of feelings.
- **Behaviour chair** – discuss the different choices they might have made with their behaviour, had they had these different thoughts.
- **Outcomes chair** – explore the different outcomes that might have resulted from these different behavioural choices.

Use of iceberg and 'volcano' analogies

Iceberg and volcano analogies are frequently used in group-based behaviour change work. They are about exploring:

- the **behaviours** that the person uses that have an impact on others
- the **feelings** that sit on the surface, and sometimes those that lay underneath
- the **thoughts** that underpin or lie below those feelings.

You can conduct exercises to help the adult user of violence to explore these behaviours, feelings and thoughts. For example, provide them with an extensive list of emotion words and ask them to draw a volcano representing the behaviours that 'come out' when they experience those emotions. Have them draw an iceberg representing the feelings behind those behaviours and the thoughts lying beneath the surface.

Be careful however in the use of the volcano as an analogy. Many users of violence consider themselves to 'explode' when they 'cannot take it anymore', with 'it' being the 'unreasonable actions' of their ex/partner. They use this explanation as an excuse for their harmful behaviour, believing they had no choice but to 'erupt'. If you use the volcano analogy, draw out the benefits while paying active attention towards minimising these risks.

> Case example (name and particular details amended to ensure anonymity):
>
> John was asked to draw a volcano to represent his anger and feelings of jealousy, and behaviours he chose to try to manage these feelings. He drew a series of mobile phones that erupted out of the volcano, which represented his constant texts and calls to his partner to check up on her.
>
> As he discussed what he drew, he realised that all that anger came from loneliness and from thinking he was not 'good enough to hold down a relationship'. He thought that his partner would become aware of all his shortcomings if she were to meet other people – and he would be alone again.
>
> This insight led John to see his texting and calling as problematic, and he developed some motivation to work on it during the behaviour change sessions. The insight also helped him to face the shame he experienced when acknowledging the harm such behaviours had caused.

Social violence with or without jealousy

Social violence tactics are not only used out of jealousy or the agitated worry associated with it. They can (also) be a pervasive part of the overall coercive control and social entrapment efforts of the adult user of violence. Social violence tactics are used to isolate the partner from supports to make them easier to control and so others don't find out about the violence. These tactics can be indicative of underlying beliefs about trust that are unrelated to issues of jealousy.

Where possible, invite the individual to consider how social violence behaviours sit with their values and strivings for themselves and their relationships. Inconsistencies between the use of these tactics and these strivings can often be easily drawn.

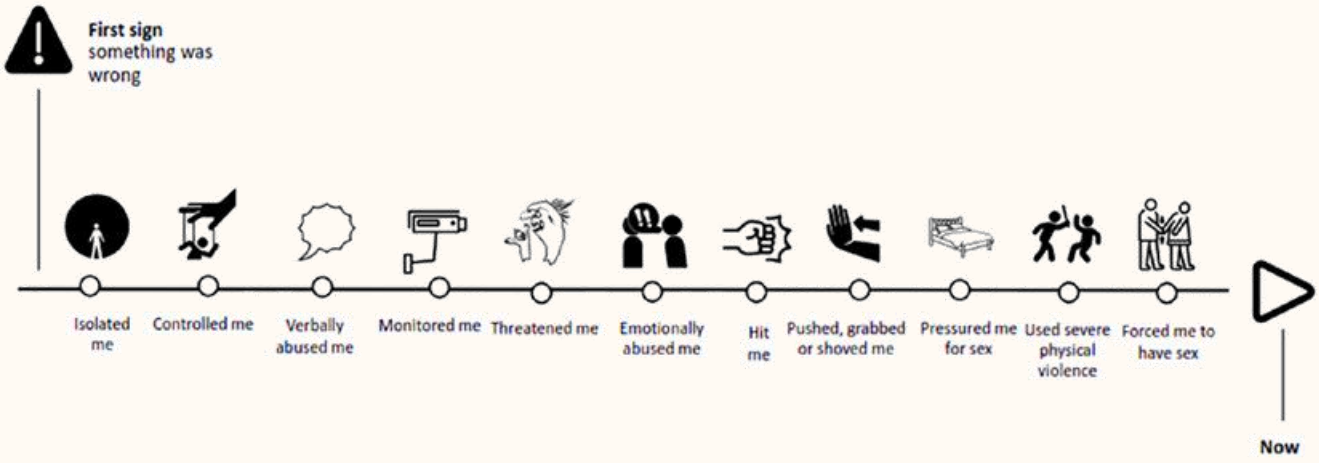
Most social violence tactics are based on beliefs that women (and specifically their partner) can't be trusted, yet many men will identify trust as an essential element of an intimate relationship. in this respect, the very act of social violence destroys what the men are seeking in their relationships. Again, find ways to draw this understanding out of the user of violence.

Be careful not to discuss some types of social violence tactics. It's not appropriate to discuss some types of social violence tactics in your work with the individual, such as tactics of cyber-monitoring or technology-assisted abuse. The adult user of violence could learn about these tactics via such discussion.

Social violence tactics and patterns of entrapment behaviours

Many social violence behaviours are chosen by the user of violence when they are not experiencing jealousy, or at least not intensely, during their planning and implementation. Recent Australian research with 815 women victim-survivors from across the country has demonstrated how DFSV perpetrators often use social violence tactics early in the relationship with the aim to socially and psychologically entrap their partner.[13]

The researchers constructed the following timeline of the progression of violent controlling tactics throughout the relationship, based on these women's accounts about which particular types of violence and abuse arose (if at all) and at what point in their relationship:



[13] McLindon, E., Kyei-Nimakoh, M., Giles, F. C., FitzPatrick, K., Tarzia, L., & Hegarty, K. (2025). Timelines of psychological, physical and sexual intimate partner violence among a nationally representative sample of Australian women. *Women's Health*, *21*.

The researchers found that:

> The early warning signs of abuse are: isolation, controlling behaviors, and verbal abuse. These were followed by a constellation of monitoring acts, threats, and emotional abuse. Emotional abuse (gaslighting, being frozen out) and verbal abuse (insults, humiliation), were tactics that participants most frequently [experienced]... The perpetration of psychological entrapment generally occurred before couples got married or moved in together, perhaps during the accelerated commitment seeking phase... For the survivors with children, physical and sexual abuse often first emerged after they had made a commitment to their partner through marriage or cohabitation.
>
> ... on average, childbirth was followed by increasingly severe sexual violence. This is consistent with other studies that have found changes or escalations to women's experience of violence in the years after childbirth. For many survivors, concern about the impact of the abuse on their children occurred around the same time as they left their relationship and tried to get help, which was preceded by identifying that their child/ren were being used to manipulate them.
>
> ... [In summary] The first set of tactics were psychological, breaking connection with others, freedom, safety, reality, and sense of self. Nonphysical violence was perpetrated against nearly all survivor participants, reinforcing the concept that psychological tactics may be considered a foundational harm. Consistent with previous research, for about half of the survivor participants in this study, psychological coercion appeared to provide the enabling environment in which physical and/or sexual violence could be introduced and maintained. Research with survivors has highlighted the loss of agency, autonomy, self-trust, and self-belief that psychological tactics engender, leading to mental entrapment.
>
> The second set of behaviors used against survivors encompassed attacks to their body. The onset of physical violence—hitting, pushing, grabbing, and shoving—may signal an escalation in coercive control and perpetrator dominance as the survivor is both literally constrained and mentally diminished through the bodily violence.
>
> The final tactic to emerge was the attempt to control the survivor's spirit via sexual violence. Survivors of intimate partner sexual violence have described it in previous research as a deeply dehumanizing and uniquely harmful form of abuse that "kills something inside you" and causes "damage from the inside out". The macro sequence of abusive behaviors suggests that the stepped introduction of coercive violations beginning with separating the survivor from others and becoming increasingly intrusive and degrading to the point of sexual violence. (pp. 9-10)

Many perpetrators adopt a pattern of social and emotional violence behaviours, commencing before they progress to physical and sexual violence somewhat later in the relationship. Isolating and socially controlling behaviours are likely to occur sometimes or often without the perpetrator experiencing intense jealous ruminations at the time of the behaviour.

Trust and respectful relating

The use of violent and controlling behaviours in response to jealousy destroys the foundations of safety, trust and respect required for a meaningful relationship. Jealousy arises out of the adult's fear of losing trust. The more that the adult is afraid of being betrayed, the more they cling to control and suspicion, undermining the relationship and eroding the trust they are trying to protect.

This behaviour can result in the very outcomes that they try desperately to prevent: a self-fulfilling prophecy where the more that the adult mistrusts their partner and uses monitoring and controlling behaviours, the more that the relationship erodes.

Invite the adult user of violence to consider the positive intents and behaviours they might adopt to replace their violent and controlling ones. This can include a focus on trust and support. Consider the following from the Duluth curriculum:[14]

> "Many of the men in our classes often say that they don't trust anyone, or that they trust a few people, namely a friend and perhaps their father or mother. They also have difficulty trusting themselves... the challenge to become more trusting, trustworthy, and supportive when they haven't been that way can seem overwhelming to the men in class. They aren't sure it's safe to be that way. Many of the man have had the opposite experience growing up. They're afraid of being used and abused – the exact thing they are doing to their partners.
>
> As they explore the theme of trust and support, they begin to recognise the risks involved in choosing not to be trusting and supportive as well as the risks of choosing to be trusting and supportive, and the consequences for both choices. What price are they willing to pay? What kind of relationship with a woman do they want? It's their choice.
>
> Another challenge to their willingness to be trusting, trustworthy, and supportive revolves around their thinking that if they are trusting, trustworthy, and supportive there should be a similar response from their partner – that it should be mutual. Here the dialogue can move in a couple of directions. One is about understanding that they don't have control over anyone else's choices. They only have control over themselves and their choices. A common question we ask is, "What kind of man do you want to be no matter how anyone else responds to you or treats you?"
>
> The other aspect of this discussion is about their past abusive/untrustworthy behaviour and the effects. We often ask, "Why should your partner trust you? What are you willing to do to try to earn it back?"
>
> Exploring what trust and support look like in daily living is a way to help the men begin to understand the depth and breadth of the choice to be trusting, trustworthy, and supportive. We begin to list the actions that are trusting and supportive: accepting her choices of friends and how she spends her time; listening to her as she shares her day; following through with his commitments; and coming home when he said he would.
>
> We then move on to think about why he might do those things, the beliefs that support those choices, and the effects of those choices" (2011, p. 152).

It's not likely that these issues can be explored quickly. For serious-risk adults who have experienced complex trauma in their family of origin, these explorations can be particularly challenging and might take considerable time. An intense fear of abandonment and an anxious attachment style can make this work difficult, but still very possible.

[14] https://www.theduluthmodel.org/product/creating-process-change-men-batter-facilitators-manual/

Practitioners should also bear in mind that some adult users of violence might not desire genuine intimacy in their relationships. Some men might be in a relationship mainly for the material, financial and logistical benefits – someone who will take care of the 'back of house' aspects of their lives, 'give them children' and 'give them sex'. Other men might want a certain degree of closeness with their partner, but not to the extent of others. These men might seek a degree of ease or harmony in their relationship, but perhaps view their partner as a 'woman who they struggle to understand and need to learn how to manage' rather than wanting to get to know her as a unique human being. Men's desires for, and understanding of, genuine intimacy and connectedness can vary significantly on a case-by-case basis.

Addressing possessiveness

Entitlement-based beliefs can be a significant driver of social violence (including social violence associated with jealousy). It may be necessary to draw on behaviour change processes that focus on beliefs (see, for example, *Exploring beliefs via actions and intents* later in this guide).

Activity: Exploring possessiveness, including through a cultural lens

- Ask the person using violence what they love about their partner.
- Unpack their answers. Through further questioning and careful listening, sensitively identify the presence of any righteous ownership, entitlement and privilege (while not necessarily using these words with your client).
- Ultimately, the person's possessive forms of love for their partner might create a desire to protect and control her.

The following is an example of how to unpack their answers:

When asking someone who's *not* possessive about their partner what they love about them, responses will often focus on their partner's qualities. This might be "*She's so generous... smart... self-sacrificing... creative... funny...*". The person will be able to respond quickly and easily. But when you ask this of someone who's *possessive*, they'll often need to think for a while about their answers. Then they'll provide a list that's more about their *own needs, expectations and demands*. For example, they might respond:

> Client: *"She shares my values with money"* (he might be attempting to control her finances to limit her spending while he spends widely on alcohol, gambling, etc.)
>
> Client: *"She respects traditional values"* (that 'the man is boss')
>
> Client: *"She's a good Christian/Muslim/Catholic"* (implying that the man is the head of the house)
>
> Client: *"She's a great homemaker"* (she's expected to – and does – take full or most responsibility for domestic work)
>
> Client: *"She's devoted to me; I'm her life"* (he's potentially using a range of tactics to isolate her from others).

This line of questioning can elicit useful content for reflection and discussion. It's particularly helpful with a very controlling/jealous person who professes their love while being very critical or negative about their partner. You can then invite the individual to reflect on their responses, with an element of directness if appropriate and safe:

Practitioner: *"Some people will say that they love how smart and funny and generous their partner is, etc., which are all statements about her. I'm curious what you love about your partner as you've been quite critical of her during our discussions. Your reasons for loving her don't seem to be about who she is as a person, but more about what she provides you and does for you".*

A desire to control their partner is a common motive among adult users of violence, including those with power over the victim-survivor in ways additional to gender (for example, when the person using violence is white and the victim survivor is a person of colour, or the person using violence is middle-aged and the victim-survivor in their twenties). The motive to control can also be strong in those feeling they have little control in many *other* aspects of their life.

Take what you have learned from the adult user of violence further:

- Explore the costs (to the person using violence, to their partner, and to their relationship) of approaching her as a possession that needs to be controlled.
- Discuss how the person using violence came to believe that loving a partner means possessing them.
  - This can lead to a focus on unhelpful masculinities, and/or on influential men from whom this approach to loving a partner was modelled.
  - If you have established enough trust in your working relationship, you could support the adult to take a life history approach towards exploring how, and from whom, they learnt about romantic relationships. This can include what they learnt from their father/parents, from how they interpreted particular experiences in their early relationships, from their peers, etc.
  - Sensitively and respectfully explore any influences from their cultural community, if applicable. **If the adult defends possessiveness as a 'normal' part of their culture**, you could take the following approach:
    - Enquire about the *genuinely positive aspects* of how women are viewed in their culture, the roles that women play in their communities. Practitioner: *"Could you help me understand how women are respected and valued in your community – what does this look like in practice? How are women cherished?"*
    - Ask how their community is grappling with an issue facing *all* communities – how to progress women's choices and opportunities when historically women have been disadvantaged.
    - If it is clear that the client adopts manosphere views that 'gender equality has gone too far and now men are the ones disadvantaged', or if he is very strong in claiming that 'in my culture, men have the right to... women know that their roles should be to ...', respectfully and non-shamingly contrast the absoluteness of these views with what he has said about how women are valued in his culture. Practitioner: *"On the one hand, you are telling me that women have a central and vital role in your families and community, yet on the other, that women should have less freedom than men. Could you help me make sense of this?"*
    - Invite him to consider what other views exist in his community about this. You might frame it as a given that a diversity of views exist about these issues *in every community*. Or you could invite him to consider how others in his community are trying to navigate both what they inherit from their parents and grandparents about family relationships, and Australian norms and expectations.

  - Try not to frame the issue as gender equality, unless the client seems comfortable with this. Some men from some cultures can become quite defensive and animated in pushing back against the goal of gender equality. You might need to work very hard to not be seen as trying to 'impose Western values' onto his culture. The client and his family might be from a community that experiences structural, systemic and everyday racism; male users of DFSV from these communities can rigidly defend their (patriarchal) interpretations of their culture as cultural 'truths' that are under attack from the dominant white culture.
  - It might be best to keep the focus on possessiveness, possessive love and related issues. Invite him to talk about what it looks like in his community when men stand with their partner, rather than stand over them.
  - Take time to understand the client's view about what is important about his culture and community – collectively held values, and what his community strives for. Find values and strivings that appear to exist, at least in part, outside or beyond the realm of patriarchal interpretation. Invite the client to see how possessiveness and possessive love can contradict those values and strivings. Practitioner: *"I can see that family means everything in your community, in ways that are perhaps richer or different to how families operate in my culture. Families living in harmony. I wonder whether your possessiveness towards your partner is taking your family away from trying to find harmony, as you all grapple with being [name of their culture] in Australian society."*

- Discussions can then be steered to cover:
  - the costs of equating love with possession
  - what loving a partner might look like if the love wasn't so possessive – using a strengths-based approach incorporating the individual's own ideas.
- Find the client's own language for what the opposite to possessiveness might be, or when possessiveness isn't so strong. Ask them to brainstorm what being less possessive might enable, or enable more of in their relationship with their partner.
- Summarise the explorations as a continuum. Practitioner: *"You are saying that by being possessive, you are less able to truly connect with your partner. What things can you do to move away from being possessive of your partner, and towards connecting with him?"*
- You might represent this visually as a line with two ends. Under the possessive end, invite him to outline the harmful behaviours (that he is willing to disclose) that occur when he is being possessive. At the other end of the line, what different behaviours he would use if he was being, for example, connecting.
- This visual continuum can serve as the basis for future explorations and deeper elaborations of the difference between (for example) connecting with his partner and possessing them. This can include a focus on the thinking and underlying beliefs inherent at each end.
- Ensure that you also scaffold motivational explorations as to how moving towards the non-possessive end is in tune with the client's values, aspirations and strivings.
- Based on the above or other exploratory processes, discuss what steps can be taken to demonstrate a love that doesn't equal possession. This would include:
  - both actions and commitments
  - things they need to *stop* doing to give this type of love a real chance to surface.

Possessiveness without jealousy

The exertion of power and control is a constant feature in men's, and in many other adult's, use of DFSV against intimate partners and family members. However, not all perpetrators of violence use power and control for entirely the same mix of reasons. Their *motives* differ, to an extent, and this can have implications for how to respond, including to adults who pose a serious risk.

There have been various attempts to categorise different 'types' of DFSV perpetrators. While these explorations are important, until a robust and widely used categorisation evolves (if one is possible), it is perhaps most useful to consider each user of violence as having their own combination of motives, with each motive held to varying degrees.

Obtaining entitlement-based benefits is a central motive for the exertion of power and control amongst most users of violence. Men are provided with gender-based privilege by our patriarchal society, and in this context are expected to coerce emotional, domestic labour, material and sexual benefits from women in intimate relationships. As Ellen Pence from the Duluth approach emphasised, male DFSV perpetrators do not necessarily *feel* entitled; rather they *are* entitled, and have a way of making sense of the world and their position in it shaped by patriarchy.

Motives around entitlement can differ amongst users of violence, however. Men benefit from male privilege without needing to consciously be on a mission to maximise their gender-based power. They use power and control to obtain entitlement-based benefits because that is expected of them in being a (traditional) man. They don't need to think "I'm superior to women", "it's her duty to be provide me with...", "women owe men...", "it's my role to be the head of the family who makes the important decisions..." and so on to benefit from male entitlement.

Perpetrators of DFSV differ in the extent to which they use power and control against their intimate partner to:

- entrap the victim-survivor to purposefully maintain and extend the gender-based benefits and rights they believe they are entitled to – as distinct from 'merely' benefitting from everyday male privilege – without having a real interest in forming a relationship with their partner based on genuine connection;
- express misogynistic hatred, and participate in a sense of collective grievance that some communities of men have against women;
- maintain a positive, narcissistic image of themselves, and ensure that they have a relationship and standing that 'ticks the boxes' of what they need to feel admired;
- express sadist cruelty;
- psychologically 'survive' in the context of substantial emotional dependency on their ex/partner; and/or to
- maintain an 'attack first' mentality associated with patterns of generalised violence behaviours.

These motives overlap. Any given user of DFSV might have a combination of two, three or more of the above motives, each to varying extents. The fifth of these motives has been explored to some extent in an earlier section.

While it is beyond this resource to explore the practice implications of engaging serious-risk perpetrators based on their profile of motives, understanding the source of their decision-making to exert power and control can assist greatly in developing risk management plans and strategies.

An adult user of DFSV who entraps the victim-survivor to purposefully maintain and extend the gender-based benefits and rights they believe they are entitled to might be highly possessive of their partner, even without experiencing intense jealousy. Perpetrators who put more effort into exploiting victim-survivors – as distinct from 'merely' benefitting from male privilege and the gender-based benefits they can take from survivors in the patriarchal sea that we swim in – can tender to pose a higher risk, and cause greater harm. They are perhaps likely to be less interested in genuinely connecting with their intimate partners, less interested in true intimacy and building trust, and more interested in 'consuming' the benefits they can manipulate and coerce from their partner.

Appeals to these men to change their behaviour due to the harmful impacts of their coercive controlling violence on trust, love and connectivity in their relationship might have limited impact, if these men are not interested in, or know little about, true love. They feel deeply invested in continuing to *demand things from* their partner (that they feel entitled to), rather than work towards the intimacy of connecting with them.

In this sense, social and psychological entrapment is on a continuum towards enslavement, and in some instances, has some features of the latter. These DFSV perpetrators believe they have the right to engage in enslavement-type behaviours to extract benefits from their partner and from the relationship, even though most would not consider their partner to be their slaves. They are possessive of their partner in the sense that they believe they have a right to treat them as their possession.

These perpetrators can feel justified in going to particular lengths to punish their partner when she attempts to push against the boundaries of her entrapment, or resists the demands he makes of her. Punishment can, at times, be degrading and severe. Some might be prepared to engage in severe violence to make sure that 'she doesn't win' against him, as for her to 'win' in his eyes can result in him experiencing what he considers to be 'unbearable' humiliation.

DFSV perpetrators with a high degree of narcissism can also be possessive of their intimate partner. These adult users of violence require certain things to be in place in their life to maintain the image of being successful, and to attract admiration. Some have a range of privilege levers (e.g., reputation and standing in their community or profession) that they use to draw admiration from others, and to make it seem like they would be the 'last person in the world' who would use violence and abuse. Some are quite predatory, seeking partners or women/people to have sex with who they believe can be easily manipulated due to the perpetrator's 'up on the pedestal' power.

These users of DFSV can become dangerous when the positive image they project – that is reinforced by others in their community, professional or societal networks – becomes threatened. This might be through the victim-survivor separating from him, disclosing about his violence to authorities leading to police and justice system involvement in his life, and/or calling him out as a perpetrator in a community or public setting. Not only might these perpetrators become incensed at the potential loss of status and benefits that comes with their standing, reputation and access to various forms of privilege and resources being at risk.

They might also experience a deep sense of humiliation, and use severe violence as an act of humiliated fury.[15]

DFSV users of violence with elevated narcissism go to great lengths to avoid self-reflection. Like most perpetrators, they will use denial, minimisation and blaming others to smokescreen responsibility for their behaviour, and adopt a strong "I'm the real victim here" stance. However, they have additional resources and privilege levers to avoid accountability through embedding their positive self-image in their community, natural and professional networks.

By establishing themselves as someone who 'should be admired at', and in some cases by engaging in genuinely prosocial activities that provide them with significant standing and praise, these perpetrators recruit a number of people who are prepared to defend them, and who either inadvertently or explicitly engage in actions that enable them to continue the abuse undetected. Some narcissistic users of DFSV might have high profile connections and admirers in their community or social settings.

Adults with high levels of narcissism sees themselves as exceptional. They are attuned to others mostly in relation to self-relevance: they are very externally focused, developing internal goals based on what they think they need to do to achieve admiration and validation. They have a deeply traumatised 'ego', often due to intense childhood trauma experiences, and often only feel worthy if they are admired and affirmed as 'unique' and 'exceptional'.

Narcissistic adults 'mine' their intimate partner and others for love, support, respect and 'kitten strokes'. They seek to extract adoration and support from their partner and others, to maintain the flow of these 'narcissistic supplies'. They can be highly possessive of their intimate partner, treating them as an object they are entitled to manipulate and control in order to maintain the flow of these supplies.

Individuals with high levels of narcissism are very susceptible to 'ego bruises' and to feeling wronged. They can be easily overwhelmed by shame, and seek a constant flow of narcissistic supplies to avoid shame. Feeling isolated, abandoned or criticised in the slightest can lead to 'narcissistic rage' and the use of violence against the person who they think have lessened them, such as their intimate partner.

Many adults with highly elevated narcissistic traits have an underlying acknowledgement of dependence on others for admiration, and an acknowledgement that this ultimately leaves them in a weak and fearful position. They have an underlying fear of being exposed that can be triggered by intense feelings of envy. This can result In a shift from expressing admiration to someone (you're almost as exceptional as me; idolising and joining with you highlights my own exceptionality) to intense criticism (you're a phony, you're way beneath me) as a way of restoring feelings of superiority and worthiness. These adults can engage in intense patterns of gaslighting, blame-shifting and emotional manipulation.

Behaviour change work with highly narcissistic DFSV perpetrators can be very slow. The practice suggestions and activities outlined in this resource, and other standard behaviour change strategies, might have limited to moderate impact. There are learnings from psychotherapists who specialise in working with these adults that you can draw from. When you suspect that a user of DFSV might have elevated narcissism traits, obtaining a mental health assessment can be crucial. You might also need specialist supervision.

[15] See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sTdmNjnyaF0 for thoughts on humiliated fury by Jess Hill.

Use of video resources and vignettes

If you have access to them, consider the use of video-based resources developed by DFSV behaviour change specialists that focus on men's violent and controlling choices when experiencing jealousy.

Scene 7 of *It's Just a Choice*, for example, focuses specifically on social violence in the context of jealousy.[16] There are a number of ways in which you might be able to engage an adult user of violence with possessive jealousy with this resource:

- Ask your client to identify the behaviours the man used against his partner that reflect possessiveness. Explore the range of behaviours – emotional, social and physical violence.
- Ask what the impact of these behaviours might be on her and on their relationship, particularly if they were to reflect a pattern of behaviours over time.
- Check in whether the man's thoughts shown in the video might be indicative of some of your client's jealous thoughts. Explore what other jealous thoughts your client might have in situations such as these. Sometimes the use of a video vignette can open up a client's awareness of their thoughts, especially if they find identifying their thinking difficult.
- Work with your client towards identifying the *cognitive distortions* apparent in the man's jealous thoughts in the video, and why these distortions are unhelpful.
- Explore why the man's partner might not be returning his texts. If your client says "because she's having an affair!" ask what other possibilities might exist. Focus your client's attention on how the man's partner might be experiencing his repeated texting, and why it makes sense that she chooses not to reply. These explorations can be particularly important as adult users of DFSV with possessive jealousy will often misinterpret their partner's resistance to his social control tactics as 'proof' that she is being unfaithful or has something to hide. **It can be crucial to help the adult user of violence to make less hostile and suspicious meaning out of their partner's resistance to their violence.**
- Invite your client to consider what beliefs the man in the video might have that gives rise to the jealous thoughts shown. Practitioner: *"What beliefs might the man hold – beliefs about himself as a man, beliefs about women or his partner specifically, or beliefs about relationships – that could lead him to be having the jealous thoughts shown?"*
  - Doing so can be a way of opening up an exploration of underlying beliefs.
  - Ask your client what he thinks of the beliefs he identified.
  - Adopt a curious approach rather than moralise at him which beliefs are right or wrong.
  - Invite him to consider where he might have obtained these beliefs from. Depending on the client and your relationship with him, you might explore what he learnt from his father or other men while growing up, peer group expectations about men and women in relationships, from traditional and social media influences, etc.
  - Invite him to consider the costs of adopting these beliefs, or at least adopting them so strongly – costs to himself, his relationships, to what matters in his life. Support him to do the work involved in identifying these costs.

[16] See https://vimeo.com/showcase/4484717 for the full series of video resources, each focusing on different aspects of violent and controlling behaviours. This resource was developed through a collaboration between Relationships Australia and Films4Change.

- Help him to grapple with the beliefs. Men who use DFSV often hold their beliefs as absolute 'truths'. They might not consider them to be beliefs at all, but rather, as truths ('that's just the way it is!'). Scaffolding explorations where the adult starts to entertain other possible beliefs, and starts to allow some doubt into the 'truths' that he has held, is an important step.
- Invite your client to consider what beliefs the man might hold in the rewound version, when he attempts to interrupt his build-up towards violent and controlling behaviour, and respond more respectfully. Ask what beliefs these safer behaviours might be indicative of.
- Again, help your client to grapple with beliefs consistent with more respectful behaviours. It is not a simple case of adult users of DFSV replacing harmful beliefs with more helpful ones in a single discussion. Your client might be uncomfortable with, or have significant doubts about, these new beliefs – attempting to paint over discomfort and doubt might only result in your client sticking with the beliefs he is familiar with. Invite your client to consider how these new beliefs might benefit him and his relationships.

- Before the point of the video where the scene rewinds, ask your client for his views on strategies the man could use to interrupt the pathway towards escalating violence.

- Take your time in doing this. Identify multiple points and opportunities for the man to make different choices, from the early point of build-up, to stewing and ruminating on his jealous thoughts, to his use of checking-up behaviours, to when he was justifying the potential use of physical violence. You could easily spend a half-hour engaging your client in identifying and elaborating on the client's strategies at each of these points, if you take the discussion slowly and thoroughly.

- Then show the final part where the scene rewinds and the man uses cognitive strategies and social supports to interrupt his pathway towards violent and controlling behaviour. Invite your client to reflect upon the strategies used – what strategies would they use in similar situations, what would they do differently, and why.

- Expand the early focus of build-up on in-the-moment grounding. In the rewound version, the video portrays, perhaps somewhat unrealistically, the man engaging in rapid cognitive challenging strategies without a clear prior step of grounding himself once he identifies that he is in danger of using violence. Engage your client in the physiological and sensory strategies he might use in the heat of the moment to remind himself that he has a choice in how he responds to his felt jealousy.

- If you have sufficient time, and your client is ready for this, zero in on the point in the rewound version where the man shares his emotional vulnerability. Brainstorm with your client ways of doing this so that he does not communicate to his partner that she is responsible for his experience of feeling threatened. Be cautious however if your client has a pattern of using sophisticated emotional abuse to control his current or former partners – in these situations, this process might result in your client understanding new ways to emotionally manipulate his current or future partner.

The use of video vignettes such as this allows your client to explore the behaviours, impacts and beliefs of a hypothetical man. This can be an initial step towards them exploring *their own* behaviours, impacts on their ex/partner and the relationship, and their underlying beliefs.

Exploring beliefs via actions and intents

Assisting men to identify and challenge entitlement-based, gendered and sexist beliefs that underpin their use of violent and controlling behaviour is a crucial aspect of behaviour change; however, it is also one of the most difficult processes to take men on a journey through. Merely listing commonly held beliefs and 'moralising' that men should change them will generally produce little if any change – and most likely, will create resistance.

Demonstrations of resistance is often thought of as reflecting the men not being willing to take responsibility for their behaviour. This of course might be, and often is, true. However, it can also/additionally reflect practitioner approaches that 'attack' the men's beliefs head-on, or that are seen by the men as coming from a 'high moral ground'. Resistance can come from men adopting an (understandable) approach of 'what right do you have to judge what I should and shouldn't believe – you know nothing about my life, my circumstances, or how I see the world.'

Change in underlying beliefs can occur through practitioners taking men through a scaffolded, enquiry-based dialogical process using specific examples or incidents of violent and controlling behaviour as a starting point.

The Duluth model has developed and refined an approach towards assisting men to identify and reflect on beliefs over almost 40 years of practice, and has outlined the following steps to do so.[17] Responses can be whiteboarded or recorded on a large notepad to help connect ideas and draw visual links.

1. Invite a man to describe an example or incident of his use of violence: specifically, the situation that occurred, and the specific actions that were violent or controlling (e.g., "grabbed her by the hair", "slammed the door", "called her derogatory names", "took the car keys away from her", "locked her mobile phone away", "shouted at her friend in an intimidatory way").

   Focus on the man describing these actions without the man's usual editorial comment to minimise or justify his use of violence or to blame his partner – ask him to state the actions clearly but succinctly. Record these actions on the whiteboard or notepad using the man's own descriptions.

2. Ask him *What did you want to happen in this situation?* This is a crucial part of the sequence to explore the man's intent in engaging in these behaviours in these situations, to challenge the notion that men take these actions because they are 'out of control'. Exploring intents can occur through the practitioner asking the man about the intents of specific behaviours, or by asking him what he wanted to achieve overall in that situation through the combination of actions he took.

   Exploring intents can be tricky, as often the men will present their behaviour as honourable or at least understandable ("I was only trying to...", "I was wanting to protect her...", "I didn't want another man to get the wrong idea and start hitting on to her, she's really gullible").

[17] This sub-section is adapted from the 2011 Duluth manual *Creating a process of change for men who batter* by Ellen Pence and colleagues.

To explore this, it can be helpful to focus on the man's specific actions. The Duluth manual provides the following example:[18]

Practitioner: John, can you describe to me what your tone was at that time.

John: Well, I guess it was kind of gruff.

Practitioner: Your tone was gruff, OK. Looking at these words on the butchers' paper, what did you say to her or call her?

John: Well, I guess I pretty much called her a slut.

Practitioner: OK, can we act this out to get a better idea of it? Can I ask you to show me at that time, if I was Sally, where you were positioned in relation to me.

John: OK [standing up]. I'm standing, and she was sitting.

Practitioner: [stays sitting]. OK, Sally was sitting, remember, we use partner's first names here, I know it's a new habit to get into. Could you move to where you were in relation to Sally, and show us how you positioned your body.

John: [stands over the practitioner]

The Practitioner then asks John on a scale of 0 to 10, when he called Sally the derogatory names, how loud he was... John reports an 8]

Practitioner: So let me get this right John. Sally was sitting down, and you were standing over her. You called her... with a voice that was an 8 out of 10, and when you called her these names, you were about half a metre away from her face. Sally tried to turn away as you were speaking. How do you think Sally might have been feeling?

John: I guess, yeah, scared.

Practitioner: What were you trying to achieve with these actions?

John: I didn't want her to... [hesitates] I didn't want her to go out with that friend of hers that's bad news.

Practitioner: So your aim was to stop Sally from going out with a friend of hers. Would it be fair to say that your goal was to prevent Sally from leaving the house at that moment, by intimidating her and making her too afraid to leave?

Note: The above dialogue has been truncated to demonstrate the process of exploring beliefs and intent. in practice, John may well minimise or outright lie, for example by saying "just used my normal voice like I am talking to you now" "yeah, like 5 out of 10, if that", "I worked security and I know intimidation and I was not intimidating her at all" etc.

In practice, the practitioner is likely to need to work harder than the above dialogue indicates to get to the point where John is willing to disclose with some degree of honesty about his shouting behaviour.

It is important that these explorations are made in a non-moralising way through a spirit of enquiry, using role play (bringing the past into the present) and the other men's observations and reflections to guide the process.

[18] This hypothetical dialogue has been significantly modified and re-written for use in this resource. While it focuses on a group-work situation, this approach can be modified for individual work with adult users of violence.

3. After exploring actions and intent, the practitioner explores what beliefs the man has that gives rise to his actions and intents. The Duluth manual states:

> Discussing beliefs examines the many societal and personal experiences that have shaped men's values and beliefs about men and women and intimate relationships. It helps men name and understand the source of the many beliefs which support and justify abusive behaviour, including the core beliefs about entitlement they possess. (p. 62)
>
> For men who batter, beliefs are more than a collection of ideas and opinions. They are truisms. The truth is equated with rightness, rightness with something to defend or to preserve. Challenging a long-held belief as being neither the truth nor right by a culturally constructed justification to exploit others will cause varying degrees of defensiveness. (p. 65)
>
> At the core of the [change process] is the attempt to structure a process by which each man can examine his actions in light of his concept of himself as a man. That examination demands a reflective process that distinguishes between what is in his nature and what is socially constructed. The things that are socially constructed can be changed. Each belief he holds can be traced back to his experiences in his family of origin, his neighbourhood, his peers, his school, his military service, his fraternities or other male groups, and his exposure to the media and its countless images of what it means to be a man. These experiences shape his response to a basic question we ask men who batter, 'Why do you want a woman in your life?' (p. 66)

Scaffolding dialogue where the man can identify his beliefs underlying his intents to use violence can be a delicate process. In the above example, John might have beliefs such as that:

> *A man has the right to choose his partner's friends and who she hangs out with*
>
> *Marriage gives me the right to intervene if I think she's making bad choices and hanging out with the wrong people*

To help John identify his underlying beliefs that give rise to his intents to use violence, the practitioner might ask:

> *Practitioner: John, you're saying that you took these actions because you wanted to prevent Sally from leaving the house to spend time with her friend. You are saying that you are worried that this friend is a bad influence. Is that right?*
>
> *John: Yes, I don't want her spending time with that loser, she's bad news.*
>
> *Practitioner: Would it be fair to say John that your goal was to stop Sally from seeing this friend under any circumstance, not just on that occasion?*
>
> *John: Yes, she's bad news, I don't want Sally to hang around with people like that, I'm sure that so-called 'friend' is using drugs...*
>
> *Practitioner: I can see you are concerned, that in your view, you think that Sally shouldn't hang out with this friend. It sounds as though, based on the actions you took, that you were doing more than expressing your views to Sally, more than sharing your thoughts respectfully. If we go back to the Rules, Expectations and Hopes activity we did two sessions ago [the facilitator draws the continuum line on the whiteboard], at that moment, where do you think you would have placed your want for Sally to not see her friend?*

John: Yeah, it would have come across as a rule... well yeah, it was probably a bit of a rule.

Practitioner: [being careful not to be moralising in their voice, but to use a matter-of-fact tone, while also letting John's ambivalent comment 'go to the keeper'] So John, you were setting a rule for Sally not to see this friend, and your intent then was to ensure that Sally understood this rule and abided by it.

John: Yes, I was really worried...

Practitioner: I hear that. What I'm saying here is that you approached this as a rule that, in your view, Sally needed to abide by. To set this rule about Sally not seeing her friend, what beliefs or ideas might you need to hold about Sally, or about what men or husbands have the right to do?

[John hesitates... the practitioner restates the question, but focuses more on the second part of the question rather than the first – what beliefs or ideas men/husbands might hold rather than focusing initially on John's beliefs – as the practitioner can sense John becoming defensive and decides to keep it in the third person for now].

4. Take one belief or set of related beliefs at a time, the man is invited to critically reflect on the belief through addressing the following themes:

   - An outwards-focusing enquiry into the societal/cultural pressures on men to adopt the belief. *Practitioner: Where do you think men obtain the idea that they have the right to set rules for who their partner should and shouldn't see, and under what circumstances? What does this belief say about what men are supposed to do to be a 'real man'? Is it possible for men not to hold this belief? Where do men pick up this idea that... women need to be 'kept in check'... women are just whores who can easily be won over by other men...?*[19]

   - Impacts of adopting the belief. *Practitioner: John, what effect does setting this rule, and using violence to ensure that Sally abides by it, have on your relationship with Sally? ...How might this leave Sally feeling? ...What messages is Sally hearing when you hold this belief?*

   - Relating the belief to values and the men's strivings. *Practitioner: John, how does this belief sit with what you have been saying throughout this program about the man and partner you want to be, and what you want for your relationship? I remember three weeks ago you were saying that... These words on the butchers' paper over here, these are your words, that you want a relationship involving trust. What impact does holding this belief have on building trust in the relationship?*

This is a crucial part of the explorations of beliefs. Again, it is important not to moralise at men to let go of these beliefs. Given how strongly these beliefs can be held by the men – as truisms, not just vague ideas – it can take considerable critical reflection for men to decide to loosen them and replace them with alternative beliefs.

Some men might dismiss attempts to too directly challenge their beliefs as 'proof' that 'men cannot be men anymore' and that "it's the feminists who need to be reigned in, not me!"

[19] Regarding these last beliefs, some men might want to focus on their experiences or suspicions of women being unfaithful in previous or current relationships, which practitioners will need to redirect them away from and towards a focus on male peer cultures, portrayals of women and relationships in mainstream media, etc.

Using skilled questioning, practitioners can scaffold these critical reflective processes where the man engage on their own journey regarding their strongly held beliefs. Practitioners are responsible for scaffolding the process of the enquiry, but not to tell men what they should and shouldn't believe.

Identifying beliefs using men's self-talk as the starting point

Another way to assist adult users of DFSV to identify beliefs is to work backwards from their elicitation of their unhelpful thoughts / self-talk.

For example, in the hypothetical situation outlined above, through a scaffolded exploration the client might identify thoughts that he had at the time such as "I'm not letting you see that loser of a friend...", "I told you before she's bad news, why are you trying to go behind my back...", "For fu..'s sake, you never listen to me!"

To use these unhelpful thoughts as entry points to identify the underlying beliefs that give rise to the thoughts, the practitioner can ask:

What does having that thought indicate about beliefs you might have... about Sally... about women... about your role as the male partner... about your expectations of Sally... about your expectations of women... etc.

As per above, once beliefs are identified, the practitioner can scaffold the same processes of critical enquiry to help the man consider where they (and men in general) might have adopted these beliefs from; what this says about the pressures men face to be 'a real man'; the impacts of holding these beliefs (on those who experience their violence, on their relationships, on themselves); and what adopting these beliefs mean in terms of their articulated strivings to be the best partner/co-parent/father/man they can be.

Processes such as the above might sometimes need to be done in short bursts. In group-work contexts, when a user of violence feels stuck at a particular point in the activity, or feels overwhelmed by the exploration, facilitators can turn to other group members for ideas and to take some of the 'heat' off the person. This isn't available in individual work – persisting too long with something that person is stuck with, in this context, can result in increasing frustration and the person feeling shame.

It is also important to note that some adult users of violence will find it difficult to identify their self-talk that occurred during specific situations. They might find it difficult to respond to the question "What were you thinking when...?" and might respond better to questions about their beliefs and explanations of events rather than asking what they thought during the events. For example, it might be more productive to ask "At the time, why do you think your partner..." or "What did that mean to you when that happened?". This often will provide you with enough to enable you to discern the person's beliefs and assumptions that underpin their narratives and interpretations of events.

Overcommitting to and over-stretching beliefs

Serious risk users of DFSV can be highly committed to the beliefs they hold that underpin their choices to use violent and controlling behaviour, including in relation to possessive jealousy. The beliefs may have become too reinforced by too many factors over a too long period to shift through the standard length of a behaviour change program. The goal of shifting these beliefs might be too ambitious for some of these men in this context. These men might feel that they, or their beliefs, are being 'attacked', even if you adopt an invitational approach.

In these situations, practitioners can adopt a different approach than scaffolding explorations of whether to continue to hold the belief; rather, to introduce the concept of *over-committing to the belief*. That is, to explore with the man how holding on to the belief so tightly can result in negative impacts for himself and for others. This can be an alternative to attempting to facilitate a process where the man grapples with whether he should hold the belief.

In some situations, this approach would be unacceptably collusive, particularly in those where even a 'toned down' version of the belief would be highly problematic. For example, the approach would not be appropriate with respect to a belief such as "women can't be trusted." It might be more appropriate when exploring ideas of masculinity – how the man is overcommitting to particular ideas of what it means to be a man, rather than encouraging the man to grapple with the very nature of masculinity for him.

You can alternatively explain this as stretching a belief too far – 'over-stretching' the belief. For example, a belief that "a real man is in control" can be over-stretched to "a real man must be in control all the time". The absoluteness of this belief leaves no room for doubt and uncertainty, which as outlined previously, perpetrators with possessive jealousy need to learn to become comfortable with. Or this belief might be over-stretched to "a real man never has a 'failed' relationship".

This approach can also be used when focusing on beliefs and intentions that appear, on the surface, to be honourable. For example, a man might defend the need for himself to 'protect' his partner. Engaging him in exploration about the impacts of over-committing to the belief that women need protecting might be more palatable to him than attempting to loosen the belief that as a man he should be protective of women.

Activity: Rules, Expectations and Hopes

This activity – related to the concept of over-committing or over-stretching – can highlight how men's expectations influence their behaviour and impact their partner / former partner and children – in particular, when these expectations are in the form of rules or demands. This activity also continues the exploration of unhelpful beliefs, as often rules and demands are based on underlying, entitlement-based or otherwise gendered beliefs.

Highlight that people go into relationships with their own range of life experiences and hopes for the relationship.

Draw the following on a whiteboard or notepad:

Hopes Expectations Rules

Pace expectations slightly to the right of the centre. This is to signal that expectations are on a continuum towards the unhelpful extremity of rules, rather than being something that represents 'balance in the middle between two extremes.' Holding expectations is not necessarily inherently problematic, but for users of violence, they easily 'slip' into rules.

Explain the continuum as follows.

Most individuals in relationships have *hopes* about how their partner might behave. These might best be verbalised by saying, "*It would be nice if she...*".

Most people also have some *expectations* – realistic or unrealistic – that they articulate as, "*She should...*"

Ask the user of violence:

> *Why might having expectations about how someone should behave, without discussion and agreement, be problematic?*
>
> *Why might it be problematic to assume that someone is on-board with an expectation that you have of them, without checking it out with them?*

Moving further along this continuum, are *rules* (unspoken and not negotiated). Rules are often made by a person who relatively has the most power, imposed on others without discussion or negotiation. Rules can come with an implied and assumed right by those who sets the rules to enforce them if they are broken, and sometimes to punish the person breaking them. Rules are articulated, *"She must..."*.

Ask the user of violence:

> *What impact might it have on a family to impose a rule?*
>
> *Why might it be dangerous when a man who uses violence and abuse sets a rule, and assumes he has the right to enforce it?*

This might require some nuanced discussion. Some men might respond "but we all have rules that we need to follow, if there weren't rules, there would be anarchy!" or "But she sets rules, for example she doesn't let me go near the kitchen..." One approach to this is to invite some discussion or 'rule mapping' that helps the man to see that generally the rules women set for men who use violence do not have much impact on him and affect only a small part of his life, whereas the rules he sets for her impact a much greater sphere of her life.

Invite the man to consider some of the expectations he has had of his (ex)partner. Start with a general discussion of the kinds of areas where people might have realistic expectations and invite him to consider the extent these were negotiated or assumed.

Extend the discussion towards unrealistic, un-negotiated expectations and rules that the men have of their (ex)partner. If you are conducting this activity in a group setting, work towards identifying one example for each man. Depending on the context – for example if you are looking to build towards a focus on intimate partner sexual violence – it might be important for the discussion to include some mention of expectations related to sexual intimacy, as per the list of self-talk statements below.

Ask each the man to put this 'rule' or unrealistic expectation into the form of a self-talk statement, for example:

> "She must not invite male friends to the house when I'm not there."
>
> "The least she should do is have a meal ready for me when I get in from work."
>
> "As my wife she should give me sex at least some of the time."

Invite the man to consider how far their expectation or rule has stretched, for example, from what was initially a hope into something that's now a rule, or from something that focused on something fairly specific to now cover a wider range of situations. You could write the statement as a hope on the left end of the continuum, and visually portray how it has become stretched into an expectation or a rule towards the right, rewriting the statement as a rule.

The concept of 'stretching' can be used to invite men to consider how a hope has become stretched into becoming an expectation or rule. The concept can also be used to consider how an expectation or rule that might have once been very specific has stretched into something

more global over time – e.g. from "I don't want you to invite her [a friend I don't like] into our house" to "I need to know who you are seeing when you go out with friends ..."

Stretching should not be explained as a passive process, as it's the men themselves who make decisions to tighten and broaden their rules, but this concept of stretching can be useful to introduce to men the idea of how the impact of a rule or demand can increase over time, and can increasingly have a more global impact on the family's life.

Ask participants what kinds of behaviour they have used to enforce their expectation/rule?

Invite men to consider, how much space is left for women here, to make their own choices?

If running this activity in a group-work session, break the whole group into pairs or small groups, and provide a Rules Expectations Hopes worksheet. Invite each man to record their rule or expectation in the upper section of the sheet.

Ask each group to discuss, and then each man to individually reframe, his rule or unrealistic expectation in any way that is realistic and that would result in behaviour more consistent with the kind of man he wants to be (that is, with his values and aspirations for being his best self, that hopefully you have explored with him in an earlier session). Invite him to record this on the lower left of the handout, below the 'hopes' end of the continuum. Examples based on the previous rules/expectations include:

> "I want her to be with me because she chooses to. I hope she will not be unfaithful, but it's not the end of the world if that happens."
>
> "I hope she will let me know if she's planning on coming home much later that she initially said, but she doesn't need to."
>
> "It's great when there's a meal ready, but I know she's got her hands full and it's not always possible."
>
> "I want her to have sex with me but there will be many times when she will not want to. I need to respect that."

It is likely that your client will need to be guided in recasting rules and expectations into hopes. He is likely to consider his rules as given, and might find the language of holding hopes awkward or uncomfortable. You might need to provide him with examples. Try to keep the language in the hope statements as simple as you can.

Invite him to consider:

> *What adjustments might you need to make to shift that rule more towards something that is a hope?*
>
> *How might you need to think differently about the issue?*
>
> *What might be the benefits of changing this to be more of a hope rather than a rule?*
>
> *What might you need to give up?*
>
> *How might changing this help you to be the man / partner / father you want to be?*

For example, for a man to change the rule "My partner must not spend money above $50 without my approval" to "Sometimes we will disagree on purchases because we have different values about money – this does not mean that I am right and Sally is wrong. I hope that if Sally can start to feel safer in discussing financial matters with me, we will be able to talk more about this at a future point." will represent a significant change.

To make this change, the man would need to take responsibility for managing his financial anxiety himself rather than blaming his partner; cease imposing his own values about money onto the household, and begin to be curious about his partner's values about money (part of the process of *connecting with* her, rather than *demanding* of her); and compromise and negotiate when they have differences over money rather than insist that she adopt his views. These are all big adjustments when he is used to exercising power and control to get his way.

Similarly, and with respect to possessive jealousy, genuinely changing a rule from "My partner must not be flirtatious with anyone other than me" to "I hope that my partner will continue to consider me attractive" is not a small development.

It is therefore highly important that this exercise is not simply about the men learning how to 'parrot' or 'reframe' words differently; but that they also start to explore the implications of what it actually means to change the rules they set.

To maximise the benefits of the activity, focus on examples that involve potentially 'hot' emotional aspects such as jealousy, demandingness or entitlement. It may be that conceptualising their very strong expectations as rules is difficult for some men. Should that be the case, take an example of controlling behaviour that has been given. It should be possible to work "backwards" to the rule.

It is highly important to explore what changing a rule or expectation to a hope enables the user of violence to focus on, that he previously did not. The hope statements listed previously include a degree of other-centredness or consideration for the other person. For example, that there might be very understandable reasons why the man's partner might not want sex when he does, might not let him know when she's coming home much later than planned, or might not prioritise getting dinner ready above other things. Rules enable no space for the other person's agency, whereas hopes do.

Men may want to stress that some expectations are reasonable and "normal" and do not need to be negotiated or agreed – for example, about sexual fidelity. If this arises try not to get too stuck on this example, although it is important not to dismiss it. In this situation, ask the man how he would know if this expectation has been agreed. Point out that some couples explicitly discuss their views on sexual fidelity, others do not expect fidelity. Ask where the line is. Does it extend to not having platonic friendships? Not going on nights out? Have these expectations been discussed with his partner? Or are they rules that he has set.

This activity focuses on the risks of black-and-white thinking. You can't tell men what to believe but you can promote discussion that introduces shades of grey into their thinking.

This process might require some scaffolding. To segue away from considerations of jealousy and towards financial and economic violence, the following provides an example:

Practitioner: John, you've talked here about how you had an expectation of Sally that she check in with you about what she bought before doing the weekly shopping.

John: Yeah.

Practitioner: How did that stretch into becoming a rule?

John: Well, she kept buying all this stupid shit that we didn't need, that made me very anxious as our finances were tight.

Practitioner: It sounds John that you and Sally had disagreements, or different views, on what was needed. What did you do to stretch this expectation into a rule?

John: Oh, I started to give her an allowance when she went shopping...

This type of exploration can lead into a discussion regarding what the man did when his partner 'broke' the rule, for example if she spent more money shopping than the allowance set – that is, what violent and controlling behaviours the man used to enforce the rule.

It is important in this activity to be prepared to focus on some of the justifications that the men use for the rules they set. Attempting to sidestep these justifications without addressing them can, on some occasions, be problematic. This can especially be the case when the activity is run in a group-work context.

In the above example, when a man discloses an expectation or rule, some (or many) other men might think (though not necessarily voice) "yeah, my missus wasted money like it grows on trees too". These men might become stuck on why the rule seems justified: "I can see why John set this rule, otherwise the family would have gone under financially, I should have done the same with my missus".

Facilitators therefore should be prepared to make judgement calls during this activity about when it might be important to name and explore some of the justifications that the men might be thinking. For example:

Practitioner: John, this sounds like it became quite a hard and fast rule that you set for Sally. You didn't want to feel anxious about money, and you set this rule.

John: Money is so tight, I can't stop worrying about it. Especially since she, I mean Sally, thinks that it grows on trees. I'm sick of needing to reign her in all the time.

Practitioner: I can see that you don't want to feel this anxiety. One of the things we explore in Making Changes is how when you have a strong feeling like this that you don't want to feel, what actions you take as a result, and what impact these actions have on your family. My guess here John is that you felt justified setting this rule about Sally when she went shopping?"

John: "Yeah, I didn't want her, oh I mean Sally, to waste my money"

Practitioner: "Is it OK John if I write this as an idea up on the board – "she wastes my money" – could we spend a few minutes as a group taking a look at this idea? This is relevant to our discussion because we've been focusing a lot on ideas today."

Sometimes it will be best to leave the underlying belief unspoken, when any discussion might only serve to reinforce it more. This is always a judgement call by the practitioner. However, if the activity leaves men focusing/stewing on harmful justifications ("yeah, my misses flirted at the drop of a hat, I should have watched her more closely and then she wouldn't have cheated on me") without some attempt to address them, it could be counterproductive.

When the Rules Expectations and Hopes activity elicits very strongly held beliefs in this respect – beliefs that are rigidly defended as solid truths – consider inviting the men to explore the costs of operating and enforcing a constellation of rules related to their anxiety. Men who use financial violence, for example, generally do not attempt to enforce a single rule – there are usually several, sometimes numerous. To avoid needing to focus on any single rule – if you feel this will be a losing 'battle' because of the strength to which the man or men hold onto it and onto their underlying beliefs that give rise to the rule – it might (or might not) be fruitful to facilitate a process where your client considers the impacts of holding several rules at once to restrict his partner's choices.

Invite him to consider the impacts on something(s) he cares about of having so many rules – how the constellation of rules destroys trust in the relationship, his mental health, etc. Do not assume that he necessarily wants a relationship characterised by genuine intimacy and closeness, however. For example, the initial hook might be helping him to realise how his rules are harming his health and well-being, by worsening his anxiety via the fruitless search for 100% certainty that the feared outcome (financial instability, his partner cheating on him, etc.) will never happen.