

**‘A FIGHT ABOUT NOTHING’:  
CONSTRUCTIONS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**

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## ABSTRACT

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The ways in which men negotiate contradictory discourses to accommodate their domestic violence into their sense of self forms the focus of this thesis. The sixty-six men interviewed for this thesis had attended a twelve-week group in an attempt to stop their violence. Forty-two of their women partners also agreed to be interviewed. Overall two hundred and fifty-nine interviews were conducted with these men and their women partners. The men were found to draw on various competing discourses in their constructions of themselves. One of the sources was the print media. A content analysis of newspaper articles over a period of twenty years revealed that popular representations of domestic violence have increased over time and have privileged physical forms of violence. Representations of the perpetrator of domestic violence featured hegemonic forms of masculinity, emphasising the physicality of men's bodies. Although the men interviewed here had agreed to attend a professional course for violent perpetrators, they were selective in which professional discourses they used to explain their own violence. The thesis outlines legal, medical and human services discourses, focusing on selected interventions, and identifies weaknesses such as the use of prescriptive definitions of domestic violence and the reliance on women to report on their own and their partner's feelings and behaviours. Finally, women's and men's own representations of their experiences revealed that the domestic relationship is a complex entity – where contradictory scripts for masculinity and femininity are acted out.

Feminist and masculinity theories of power and subjectivity are coupled with Foucauldian thought to provide a theoretical framework capable of untangling the contradictory issues expressed in these discursive spaces. A key contradiction occurs between an aspect of the male gender role discourse in which men are expected to 'look out for number one', which requires enacting high levels of self-control and control-over others. This is juxtaposed with the desire for men to exercise non-violent forms of control and an ethic of care for others as well as themselves. Even though women are often identified as the caregivers in the family, a significant finding of this thesis was that violent men work relentlessly to construct themselves as the ethical partner.

## DECLARATION

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This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being available for loan and photocopying.

Michelle Jones

Date:



## DEDICATION

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This thesis is dedicated in memory of my popa, Albert Richard Jones (1911 - 1996). My popa worked as Chaplain and social worker in Yatala Labour Prison. He taught me the importance of living a passionate life committed to social justice. My thesis journey was beginning as my popa's life journey was ending.

As my thesis journey was ending, my daughter's life journey was beginning and so this thesis is also dedicated to my daughter Audrey Iris Beasley Jones (2004 - ). May she live a life free from violence.

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