The Vortex of Violence: Moving beyond the cycle and engaging clients in change.

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Abstract

This article introduces the conceptual practice tool of 'The Vortex of Violence' and one suggested practice model for utilizing the vortex of violence in practice with women who have experienced a domestic violence relationship. The practice tool and model are an expansion of 'The Cycle of Violence' that shifts the focus from explanation of the dynamics of abusive relationships to the exploration of the lived experience of women and the development of a personal/therapeutic template for healing and reclaiming of their lives.

Key words: domestic violence; cycle of violence; practice model; abuse; power and control.

Introduction

'The Cycle of Violence' was originally developed by Walker (1984) and gave workers and clients a tool to understand the dynamics of an abusive relationship and insight into the abusive partner's motives and means. It has now been used for decades when working with women in abusive relationships to highlight these points and often to assist the women to recognize patterns that indicate she may be in an abusive relationship. Although a powerful and imperative tool, it unfortunately has its limits in that it predominantly focuses on the *dynamics* of the relationship and in particular the abuser's strategies and techniques. In my experience this has to some degree made the *people* in the relationship invisible and taken focus away from the *experience* of the woman and the *accountability* of the man. It is time to move beyond the cycle of violence and focus on the experience of the women within it, to assist them to make changes and heal their lives. This, I propose, can be assisted with the use of 'The Vortex of Violence' as explored in this paper.

The vortex of violence is an expansion of the cycle of violence that focuses, not on the relationship dynamic or the abuser, but on the experience of the woman who has lived with the violence. It has been developed through my understanding of theory pertaining to domestic violence (Bancroft, 2002; Cavanagh, 2003; Craven, 2003; Murray and Powell, 2009; Walker, 1984; 1991; 1995; 2006; Worcester, 2002), experience working with victims of sexual assault and domestic violence and my research exploring spiritual theories and practices (Carrington, 2010; 2011).

I worked in the sexual assault sector for approximately two years before leaving to complete my Doctoral Degree. In the sexual assault sector, many of the clients accessing the service were experiencing the sexual assault in a current domestic violence relationship, had

experienced domestic violence in their family of origin or had historic sexual assault and were currently living in domestic violence. Therefore, as sexual assault counsellors, it was essential that we were well versed in practice pertaining, not just to sexual assault, but also to domestic violence. During this time my colleagues and I would often discuss the limitations of the cycle of violence in relation to our experience with clients and try to identify what was missing.

My doctorate research was a comprehensive qualitative research project that explored spiritual theories and practices, specifically those from within Hinduism, Buddhism, Sufism and the newly emerging Integrated Spiritual (Carrington, 2010; 2011). Although the research did not specifically explore these theories in relation to domestic violence or sexual assault, given that this is where my professional interest lies, the information I was collecting and analyzing was often viewed through this lens. The vortex of violence was then developed during the analysis theory building stage of the doctorate research, where the vortex had become an important vehicle in explaining complex, multidimensional and fluid concepts within the research (Carrington, 2011). The vortex of violence, therefore, was developed applying the new learning from the spiritual theories and practices with my theoretical and practical understanding of the cycle of violence and the experiences of the women I had previously worked with.

At that point I shared the tool with colleagues from the sector to ensure some level of trustworthiness. However, it was not until I returned to practice in the domestic violence sector that I was able to gauge its utility with clients. The context of my practice is within a Regional Domestic Violence Service, it is a victims service and therefore we see both female and male victims. However, the vast majority of clients are women and children as reflected

in current literature which recognises the gendered nature of domestic violence (Amirthalingam, 2005; Bell, 2003; Matthews, 2000; Van Wormer, 2009).

This paper presents the conceptualization of the vortex of violence tool and a practice model as developed over the last year in my clinical practice with victims of domestic violence. The paper is presented in six parts. First, the rationale for the definitions and language used is outlined. Second, the cycle of violence is explored and the version used in the vortex of violence tool/model is presented. Third, the structure of the vortex of violence as a conceptual tool is introduced. Fourth, I present one suggested practice model for working with the vortex of violence. Fifth, the implications for social work are explored before making concluding comments.

Clarification of terms

When writing about 'domestic violence' or 'battering', it is important to begin with clear definitions and explanations of the language used, as there is much room for miscommunication due to the co-opting of language and the debate as to what constitutes domestic violence and/or battering (Murray and Powell, 2009; Pence and Das Dasgupta, 2006). For the purposes of this piece, there are three key areas that require clarification, these being why gendered language has been used, why the term 'abusive relationship' has been adopted and why the language of 'abused' and 'abuser' has been used.

Although over the past decade many writers and factions have attempted to neutralize the gendered component of domestic violence, research continues to show that domestic violence is a gendered issue (Kernsmith, 2005; Murray and Powell, 2009; Pence and Das Dasgupta, 2006). Research from multiple sources illustrate that men are the predominant

perpetrators of violence against women (Goldig, 2002; Hegarty, Hindmarsh and Gilles, 2000; Kernsmith, 2005; Pence and Das Dasgupta, 2006; Trujillo and Ross, 2008). Research also illustrates that, in the *majority* of cases where women have used violence against men, it is *usually* reactive violence, the purpose of the violence being self protection rather than attempting to gain power and control over the other (Cavanagh, 2003; Kernsmith, 2005; Worcester, 2002). Therefore, this paper will use gendered language to reflect the gendered nature of domestic violence.

The term 'battering' or 'battered wife syndrome' was initially coined by Walker (1984) and focused on a distinct pattern of behaviours used by abusers. There is much contention within the literature and debate around what qualifies as 'domestic violence' or 'battering' (Pence and Das Dasgupta, 2006). Over the years, the term 'batterer,' which related specifically to patterns of violent behaviours that aimed to gain and maintain power and control over another, has become linked specifically to acts of physical violence, leading to the integral behaviours and components of power and control that separate this form of violence from others becoming lost (Pence and Das Dasgupta, 2006). This has allowed it to become confused with other forms of violence that do not have power, control and entitlement at the core (Murray and Powell, 2009; Pence and Das Dasgupta, 2006).

Pence and Das Dasgupta (2006) suggested the term 'domestic violence' had been a contributing factor in this, as it allowed all violence experienced within the home or intimate relationships to be placed under the one umbrella label of domestic violence. This, then, helped to de-gender and diffuse, or confuse, the specific behaviours of batterers with that of others using violence that did not constitute battering (Pence and Das Dasgupta, 2006;

Walker, 1984; 1995). Pence and Das Dasgupta (2006) in their paper clearly differentiated between the various types of violence and provided recommendations for intervention.

The conceptual practice tool explored in this article is directly related to working with those who have experienced the abusive behaviours consistent with 'battering', as defined by Pence and Das Dasgupta (2006) and Walker (1984, 1995). However, due to the confusion and co-option around this term and that of domestic violence, I have elected to use the term 'abusive relationship' as it allows for the inclusive focus on all the behaviours identified within these relationships, such as emotional, spiritual and financial, as explored in the Duluth Model (1984; 2011), not just that which is physical.

The final point of clarification, therefore, is that, in addition to using gendered language, the use of the term 'abusive relationship' dictates that the terms 'abuser' and 'abused' are used to distinguish the 'perpetrator' from the 'victim'. Concern around the label 'victim' and what this means for on-going therapeutic intervention, further supports the use of such terminology. It is believed that the term 'abused' rather than 'victim' indicates that, although there has been abuse, the individual is not a 'victim' and, therefore, has capacity to reclaim aspects of herself and her life lost within the abusive relationship.

The cycle of violence

The cycle of violence has become well known in the professional helping fields and is a predominant tool or model used when working in the area of abusive relationships. Although the essence of the overall cycle as originally described by Walker (1984), with the three phases of tension building, battering incident and loving and contrite behaviour, cycling in that order, remains the same, there are a number of different versions that are

operationalized. An alternative or expanded model popular in Australia has six phases, those being tension build up, stand over, explosion, remorse, buy back and honeymoon, cycling in that order (Apunipima Family Violence project, nd; Department of Family Services and Aboriginal and Islander Affairs, nd). In addition to these models, in my early days of training as a social worker, I was also introduced to an informal model used by my supervisor that had seven phases, those being tension, build up, stand over, explosion, remorse, buy back, honeymoon and normality, cycling in that order. I personally work this version as I feel it more accurately reflects the lived experience of abusive relationships. Therefore, the cycle of violence presented in this piece will be the latter (see Figure 1).

The additional phase that is included is that of normality between the honeymoon phase and the build up phase. In the beginning, this is the phase where the fervor of 'love' abates and the relationship slips into a routine, the roles, 'norms' and expectations are established. As the rotations of the cycle continue this phase becomes the 'break' or the 'safe zone'. The woman is aware of the norms and what is expected of her and adopts a variety of strategies, including attempting to live up to these, in order not to invoke another explosion (Cavanagh, 2003).

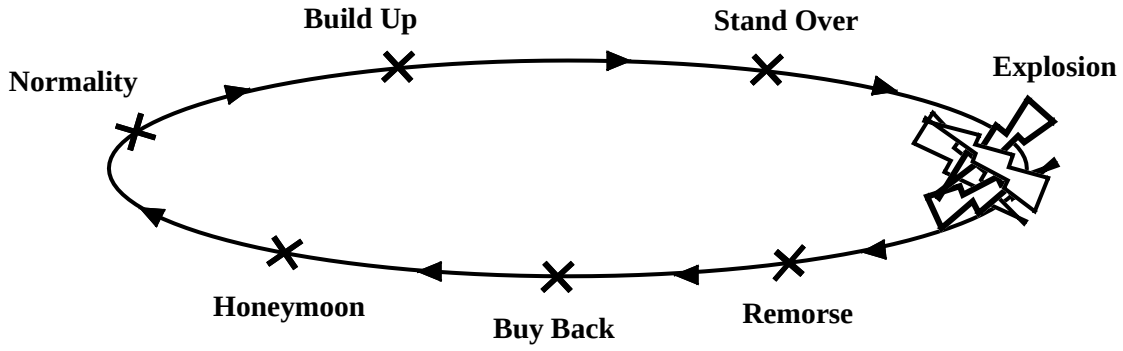

Figure 1 Cycle of violence

Additionally, when operationalizing the cycle of violence, I have seen variations in where the cycle starts. Walker's (1984) cycle of violence, as mentioned above, started with the tension building phase as do the alternatives mentioned above. Although the build up stage is traditionally identified as the first stage, I prefer to start at the honeymoon phase. My reason for this is that it is more in line with the lived experience, as women will often report that their partner was 'so wonderful and loving in the beginning'. Hence, starting at the honeymoon phase is more reflective of the complete picture of the relationship from the point of engagement to the point of the first explosion.

The honeymoon phase is something all new relationships go through, regardless of the outcome of abuse, which is why it is easy to find oneself unexpectedly in an abusive relationship. If the relationship started at the tension build up phase, how many women would actually enter the relationship? Not many, I would suggest. Furthermore, by starting the cycle at the honeymoon phase, parallels can be drawn between the cycle of violence and the grooming phase of the perpetrator of sexual assault cycle, where the perpetrator actively engages in a process of gaining the person's trust and presenting as a 'good guy' before moving through the other stages that lead to the act of sexual violence. This grooming process or phase is often reflected in abusive relationships where the abuser actively seeks to gain the trust of the woman prior to engaging in abusive and possessive behaviours.

The vortex of violence: a conceptual tool

The cycle of violence tells us that with each rotation of the cycle, the duration between explosions decreases. As a practitioner, I learnt to depict this as a spiral in the centre of the circle. In the vortex of violence, this spiral becomes the vortex, with each level of the vortex illustrating a complete cycle of increased intensity and decreased duration. What the vortex

of violence adds to the cycle is that, with each rotation or complete cycle, an aspect of the woman's self construction and life is expelled or 'spun off'. This means that the woman has less capacity to exit the relationship safely with each rotation. Ultimately, when the woman exits the relationship, she exits as a depleted version of her former self. If she exits early in the relationship, or before too many rotations of the cycle, there is still a strong sense of the original self that can be engaged in the healing process and healing or re-building of her life can be relatively quick. However, if the woman has been sucked into the depths of the vortex in a long lasting or particularly ferocious abusive relationship, then what is left is an empty shell of the former self (see Figure 2), which takes considerably more time to heal.

Although some may argue that this description could be internalized by women and become a self-fulfilling prophecy, it is the women's lived experience that this tool captures and the language used is reflective of the women I have worked with. In many cases it is the expression of such feelings as being 'less than', 'lost self', 'not the person I use to be' or 'empty shell' that will indicate to me that the vortex of violence may be an appropriate tool to use with a particular client. Furthermore, and to be explored later, I have found that rather than depleting hope, this model facilitates a sense of empowerment, as the women I have worked with, when looking at their vortex of violence, quickly identify a path to empowerment using that which has been 'spun off'. It also allows the worker to discuss with the woman the external support that may be required to help exit and rebuild and emphasise that this is a normal and acceptable process.

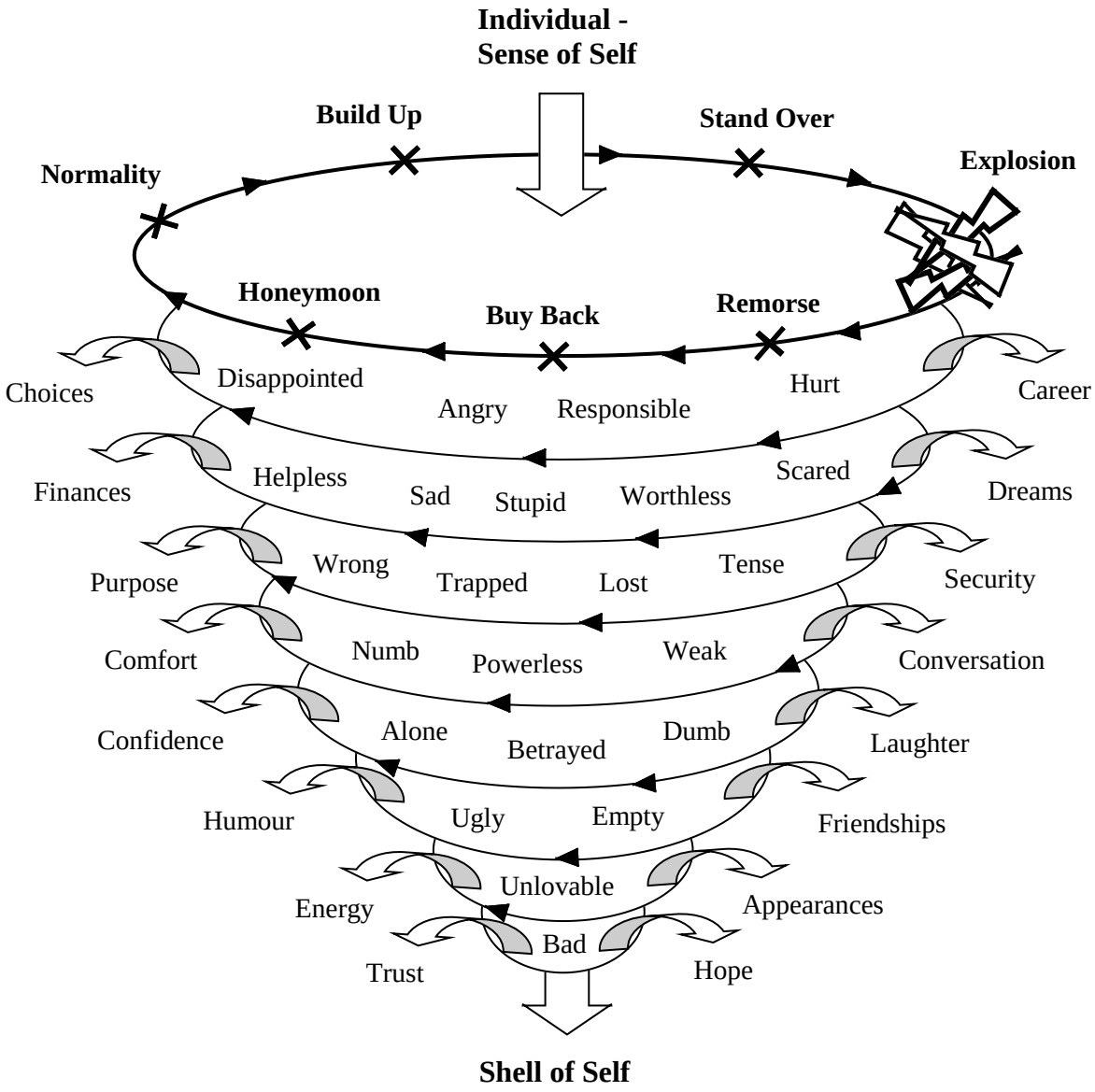

Figure 2 Vortex of violence

The structure of the vortex of violence depicted in Figure 2 captures my initial conceptual idea. The qualities and attributes depicted are by no means exhaustive or concrete. The vortex itself represents the dynamics of the abusive relationship and is perpetuated by the phases of the cycle of violence, with each ring of the vortex signifying a complete rotation of the cycle of violence. Each ring of the vortex is reduced in size to symbolize the decreased time in which the full rotation of the cycle is completed within the relationship. For each

full rotation there are arrows exiting the vortex and these signify the aspects of the woman that are 'spun off' during the various phases of the abusive relationship. These aspects of self and life that are spun off often reflect components of the power and control wheel of the Duluth Model (1984; 2011). That which is then left within the vortex is the experience of abuse, violence and an altered sense of self and reality, as illustrated in the words used to fill the vortex. The arrow at the top of the vortex signifies the woman, or individual 'full self', entering the relationship while the arrow at the bottom of the vortex signifies the empty 'shell of self' that exits as a result of living in the vortex of violence.

The vortex of violence differs from the cycle of violence in a number of key ways. Firstly, it shifts the focus from a two dimensional concept explaining the dynamics to a three dimensional concept that focuses on the lived experience. Secondly, it has the potential to illustrate why it is difficult for women to exit an abusive relationship. Thirdly, it allows for a comprehensive and holistic exploration of the psycho-social impacts of living in an abusive relationship. Fourthly, it provides pathways out of abuse and trauma to empowerment. Fifthly, it is client focused. Finally, it is therapeutically focused to engage clients in change. These key differences all highlight the overarching key difference which is the shift from a tool that explains to a tool that engages.

Vortex of violence in practice: a suggested therapeutic practice model

In this section, I present a suggested practice model that I have developed in my professional practice. This was informally developed in practice over a period of approximately fourteen months. No formal records were kept in regards to the number of clients as it became a staple in my everyday practice with clients. This tool allows for an interactive process that provides the opportunity to capture the client's experience of abuse and allows for individual

practitioners to then apply interventions from their own professional practice framework. It is presented here as a guide or starting point only, **not** as **a prescribed method** of application. I would suggest that individual practitioners utilize or integrate the vortex of violence in their practice, as guided by their professional practice framework and the context in which they practice. In this model, there are four distinct stages – 'the whole', 'within', 'outside' and 'integration'. The first stage or 'the whole' invites the client to record their unique experience of the vortex of violence, transforming the conceptual tool (Figures 2) into a personal record of their experience (Figure 3). This suggested practice model then requires the construction of collages in the remaining stages, as a way to explore in greater depth the lived experience of the different aspects of the vortex of violence. The information gathered is then used to guide intervention, and allow the client's subconscious to engage and begin the healing process. These stages often overlap in practice and should be moulded to suit the individual client. The processes discussed below occur over a number of sessions as determined by the individual client's needs.

The whole

In order to address the psychological impact of abusive relationships, I will often begin by introducing the concept of the vortex of violence to clients in an educative manner, to explain the cycle of violence and open discussion. This process can assist clients to recognize, not only the cycle of violence, but to see more tangibly the effect living in an abusive relationship is having, or has had, on them. Further to this, exploration and discussion of the power and control wheel (Duluth, 1984; 2011) can also be explored, in the process linking the cycle of violence and the components of the power and control wheel in an inclusive and holistic manner. Using the vortex of violence in this manner allows for a

common language to be established between client and worker as they continue to explore the impacts of the abuse on the individual throughout the therapeutic process.

To do this, I start by drawing the top oval with the phases of the cycle of violence, discussing how each relates to the client's unique experience. I then draw in the vortex and explain that the force and gravity within a vortex makes some things spin up and out and others are drawn more deeply into the spin of the vortex. Exploring this dynamic of the vortex alone often resonates strongly with the women, as it captures their feeling of being 'sucked in' and being unable to 'pull themselves' out. I have found this provides the opportunity to explore their feelings of anger, shame and embarrassment associated with the eternal questions 'why did I stay so long?' or 'why didn't I see this or leave earlier?'

I then encourage the client to identify those aspects of themselves and their lives that have been 'spun off' by the vortex of violence. Each aspect or component that is identified by the client is written, in the client's words, on the outside of the vortex with an arrow indicating that it has been 'spun off'. In the next step, I ask the client to identify as much of their experience of living in the vortex as possible. Once again these are captured in writing, using the client's language, in the middle of the vortex. At completion of this process, a large quantity of information has been gathered to assist in the assessment of the client and where intervention may need to focus. Additionally, one can also work with the questions raised above and explore with the client the reasons and dynamics at work that make it difficult to exist in an abusive relationship.

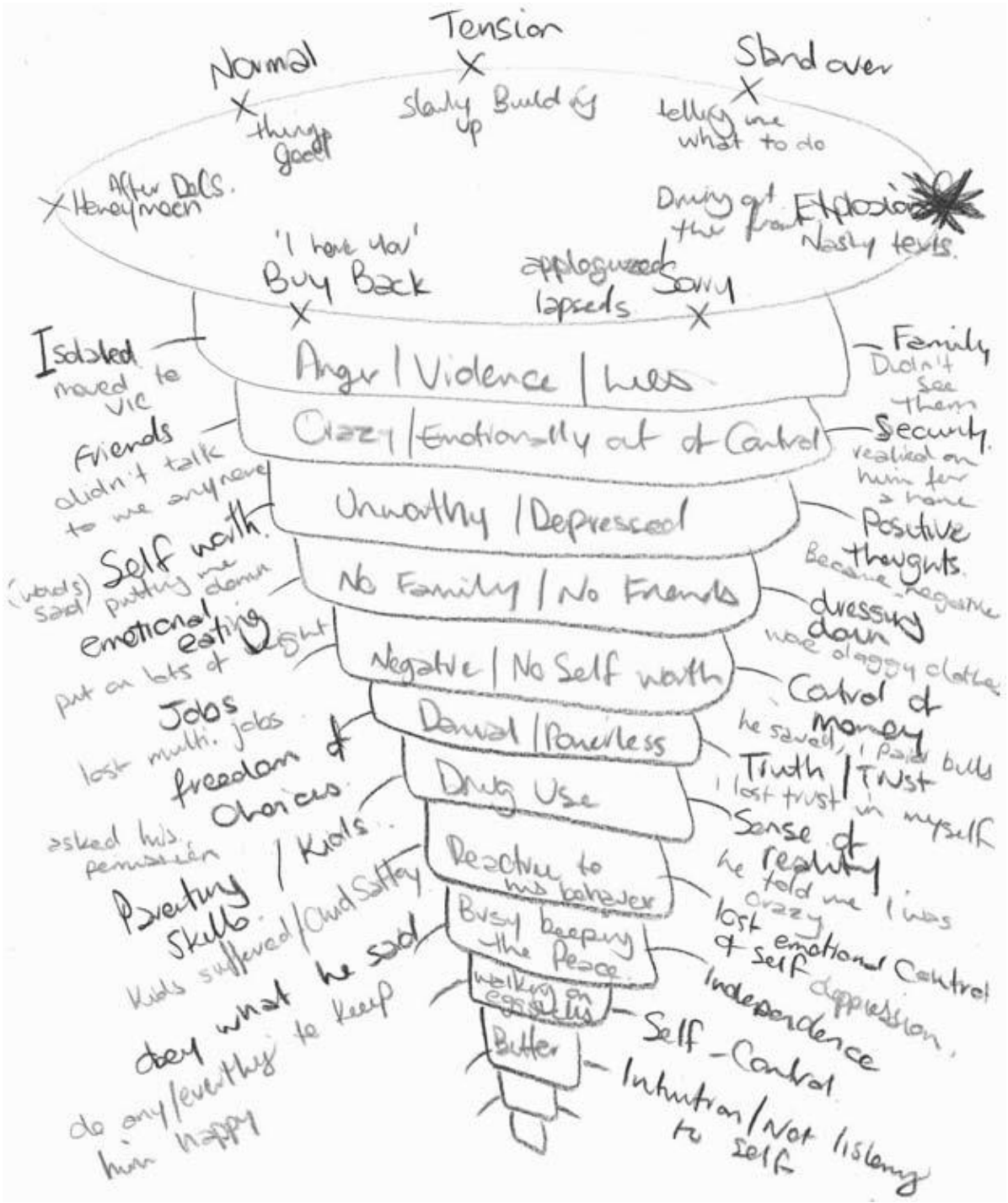

Figure 3 Client vortex – Saturated

As mentioned previously, Figure 2 represents my initial conceptual idea of the vortex of violence but the clients often identify many other qualities and attributes that have been 'spun off' or trapped within the vortex. I have also found there to be a considerable

difference between the vortices completed by women who have experienced long term or severely abusive relationships to those who have exited early, or have experienced a lower level of abuse. Figure 3 depicts a vortex created with a client that was saturated due to the duration and severity of abuse. Figure 4 is an example of a less saturated vortex created by a client who had only been in the relationship for eight months and was already beginning to disengage.

Figure 4 Client vortex – early exit

At completion of this first stage, both the client and the worker have a snapshot of the client's experience of living in the abusive relationship and how it has impacted the 'full

self'. The information captured through this process then becomes the template and guide to the healing and recovery of self.

At this point it is important to note that for a number of reasons I tend not to use the complete practice model with women who are still living in an abusive relationship. Firstly, often women who are still in an abusive relationship do not have a safe space to engage in the therapeutic process. Secondly, my focus as a worker when engaging with women still in the relationship, is predominantly assessing and addressing safety, exit planning and other crisis or support needs. Finally, I have found that women still in the relationship will often only come for one or two sessions and/or erratically as needed.

However, were appropriate, I use the conceptual tool (Figure2) in an educative manner to assist in the consciousness-raising of the client and to assist her to make sense of her experience. If the client is not in crisis I tend also to engage her in the process of creating her own vortex (Figure 3). As mentioned above, women often identify their own pathway out of the vortex through this process. Although it may not be safe to act immediately, it is hoped that the client takes away with her a potential pathway for action when it is safe to do so.

Within

Next I work with the client on that which has been identified as being retained and magnified within the vortex. A woman exiting an abusive relationship, as depict in Figure 2, may often feel like an empty and exhausted shell of their former self but under the surface is that which the vortex has retained and magnified, feelings such as anger, fear, hurt and

betrayal, as illustrated in Figure 2 or more tangible affects such as the use of violence and drugs as depicted in Figure 3.

To begin, I use art as a way to help clients connect with these, sometimes difficult, emotions by asking them to create, through various mediums, the feeling of being inside the vortex. In using this method, I find that the women are able to include emotions that they are not necessarily able to articulate but can still express. Once the experience or information has been captured in this way, I then utilize other practice methods from my professional practice framework to assist clients to process and integrate these emotions and experiences.

Figure 5 is is a reconstruction of a typical client's artwork, exploring the lived experience of 'within' the vortex. In creating this piece, I included common themes that are often present in clients' artworks. This figure demonstrates the rich description and wealth of information pertaining to a client's unique experience of abuse, which can be captured using this process. This then allows for the client and practitioner to identify areas to be covered in the therapeutic process.

To explore this stage further, I will use a client case study. Although her artwork has not been used in this paper, the recreation (see Figure 5) does echo some of the issues that were present for her. In her artwork, and discussion around her artwork, the client identified 'feeling crazy' and 'being a bad parent' as aspects that were retained within the vortex. Once identified, I worked with her to challenge these adopted, or internalised, beliefs of the abuser. After years of living in the abusive relationship, the client was presenting with mental health issues, such as depression and anxiety, and her capacity to parent had been compromised. Therefore, to help her let go of the abuser-imposed beliefs required the

normalisation of mental health issues and compromised parenting abilities, particularly in relation to women who have experienced abusive relationships. In addition to normalising these effects, we were then able to work directly with her depression and anxiety in the therapeutic context. The client and the children were also linked in with the child counsellor at the service to assist with rebuilding her parental capacity and the bond between mother and children.

Figure 5 Client collage – experience within the vortex

This client had internalized the abuser's language to the point where she no longer identified these aspects as the abuser's language or abuse. She had taken the abuser's opinions as her own and said things such as 'I am a bad parent' and 'I am crazy'. Unpacking these statements with the client allowed her to identify that these were areas upon which the

abuser had focused, constantly telling her that she was ‘crazy’ and that the problems in the relationship were because of her mental health issues. Additionally, she was able to identify that the abuser would constantly criticize her parenting and actively seek to undermine her attempts to parent. By challenging the narratives and working directly with her depression and parenting skills she was then able to challenge and eventually let go of the abuser imposed beliefs and adopt new beliefs of her own.

Outside

The focus then shifts to that which has been identified by the client as being ‘spun off’. Again, this model requires the clients to create a piece of art work depicting all the aspects of self that were spun off during the relationship. Through this process, women are able to see clearly, and in a tangible manner, just how much and what they have lost of themselves. The areas identified as being lost then become the ‘Pole Star’ to healing and rebuilding their lives.

For this exercise, I encourage the client to think back to the individual they were prior to the abusive relationship and I ask them to capture this on paper. This exercise is followed by questions encouraging the client to explore how they can reconnect with or bring these components back into their lives. In conjunction with the practitioner, aspects wanting to be reclaimed by the client are identified and goals or steps towards these can be established and followed.

It is important to be aware of client capacity at this stage, as some clients are able quickly and actively to work towards these collective goals, while for others it may be important to focus on ‘baby steps’. This capacity often relates directly to the client’s experience of the

vortex and how deeply within it they exited. For example, one client whose vortex was not saturated, was able to find a safe place to live, get a job and begin studies within a space of six months. However, another client whose vortex was particularly saturated, started by identifying nature and gardening as important aspects that had been lost. Although she did not have the capacity to go camping or tend a large garden as she had done in the past, she was able to make beginning the process of reclaiming her life by starting a small herb garden.

Integration

An integral step in working with women who have experienced abusive relationships is that of identifying the strengths and resilience that has been established through the experience. Using the vortex of violence one can use that which was identified as being within the vortex and reframe to find new resilience and strengths that have developed through the experience of abuse and trauma. This is in line with strength based practice that suggests that trauma can be a catalyst for growth (Smith, 2006). For example, while working with a client, she identified within the vortex that she had become angry and violent, a well documented phenomenon (Cavanagh, 2003; Worcester, 2002). Having captured this in the early stages, we were then able to explore, challenge and deconstruct this anger and violence to find a positive strength.

In this particular case, the client had experienced abuse within her family of origin and in all subsequent relationships. In her life experience, violence was normal but *her* anger and violence was negative because it went against old social and familial programming that told her that *men* had the rights and power and that she was to be submissive and do as she was told. This belief was being further validated by the involvement of Child Safety who had

removed the children, due to an assessment of neglect and failure to protect, but then identified the client's use of violence (often in efforts to protect herself and the children) as a concern in assessing with which parent reunification should be achieved.

By exploring her use of violence, we were able to identify that, although the way in which her anger was being expressed was not helpful, the underlying beliefs, recognizing that she and her children had a right not to live in fear or violence, were in fact positive. Although the violence was not a positive behaviour, the fact that she had shifted this new belief into action, was. This new learning, and taking action to stand up for herself and not be submissive any longer, were both strengths that could be carried forward and integrated into her new life without violence. The client was then able to address Child Safety concerns that she would return to the abusive relationship and was able to develop positive ways of expressing and asserting her rights. In this particular case, this process led to a positive outcome and return of the children to her care.

As a completion and integration exercise, I use the vortex of violence to bring together all that has been explored in the processes above, the aspects that are desired to be reclaimed and the strengths that have been identified, by asking the client to create a picture of who they are or want to be, free of the vortex of violence. Following the above processes and then bringing the learning together into one tangible art piece not only allows the psyche to integrate the experience and learning, but provide the client with a visual connection to their healing journey, and who they are, as they continue living their lives. Themes that are common and often present in the 'integrated' pieces of art include safe and secure housing, the woman with her children, friends and family, financial security, a job/career, study,

laughter, fun, space, freedom, self-esteem, new relationships and the ability to love and trust again.

When the client is able comfortably to identify, or 'own', aspects of self depicted in the integrated collage, is often an indicator that they are ready to disengage from the therapeutic process. An ending exercise I often use is to lay the pictures from each stage in front of them and invite them to discard (by ripping, burning, or shredding) and let go of that which no longer has a place in their lives. The final integration picture is then offered to them as a reminder of their journey and strengths.

Implications for social work

Social workers are often at the frontline in relation to abuse relationships in a variety of roles, such as domestic violence worker, workers in perpetrator programs or workers in child safety roles. This model offers to social work practitioners a client centred approach that has the potential to include all aspects of a client's life and experience of abuse, allowing the social work practitioner to work with the client in identifying how the abuse has impacted her life rather than impose theory upon her. Working in this way, the woman is empowered from the outset as she is able to identify the aspects of self and life that she believes need to be addressed. Such an approach is essential when working with women who have lived through an abusive relationship as the abuser has often had total control over all her decisions.

In relation to policy, I have found that this model can provide a tangible expression of a woman's needs in the therapeutic process as illustrated in Figures 3-6. The current environment of economic rationalism and managerial style delivery in services has

increasingly mandated restricted access to services and limited sessions per service user. At an organizational level, the information collected within the vortices can be used to advocate for extended support and access to services for those clients who present with highly saturated vortices.

As that which has been presented in this paper was developed as an accidental by-product of research into spiritual theory and practice, and my professional experience working with women effected by sexual assault and abusive relationships, further research could enhance the model. Research focusing on its application by a variety of social worker practitioners in a variety of settings, may provide a more structured application approach. Furthermore, formal research exploring abusive relationships and cycles of violence from a spiritual perspective, may prove fruitful as it was spiritual theory and practice that led to the development of the original concept and understandings presented here.

Conclusion

Although that outlined above is the process that I use in my practice, the concept of the vortex of violence can be adapted to any practitioner's professional practice framework. With practitioners with whom I have shared this conceptual tool, the feedback has highlighted this point, as they utilize it in their practice according to their own professional practice framework and the context in which they practice. In addition to feedback from practitioners, I have found that clients respond well to the vortex of violence and express that it captures more authentically their lived experience. For some, the empty 'shell of self' resonated most strongly, while others found that the identification of the lost aspects of self provided hope and a path to reclaiming their lives. I hope that other practitioners find this tool/model to be as useful in working with those affected by abusive relationships as I have

and that, as a collective of practitioners, we can continue to share practices that assist women and children affected by abusive relationships to reclaim their lives.

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