



Victims of Domestic Violence own 50% of the responsibility

On a daily basis, we read some absolutely egregious examples of victim blaming culture: so many that we rarely have time to even log them, never mind deconstruct them. Today, we were sent a link to an article by Sallee McLaren called "The part women play in domestic violence" which was published in the Australian paper [The Age](#). It is one of the worst examples we have seen in a while. McLaren, a clinical psychologist, claims that women living with domestic violence contribute 50% of the responsibility for the violence they live with. It is a clear example of a mental health professional who has no understanding of the gendered reality of domestic violence, how perpetrators function, or the impact on victims.

Any article which starts with the tagline "(w)omen can only command real power once we socialise girls to take themselves seriously and develop mental grit" is bound to be unsubstantiated drivel. The reason for domestic violence is not how we socialise girls: it is how we socialise men. We raise boys to believe that masculinity involves violence. How often do we hear parents, teachers and news media use the phrase "boys being boys" when talking about boys kicking or hitting each other? We tell 3 year olds that it is normal to behave aggressively and then wonder why they behave aggressively as adults. We tell young boys that they are entitled to women's time, emotional support and commodities: that their needs supersede those of anyone else. This is made clear in study after study in education which shows that teachers give more attention to male students and allow male students to speak more than female students.

It is ever so kind for McLaren to suggest that perpetrators are always at fault from "a moral perspective" and we're definitely on board with the idea that we need to understand how and why domestic violence happens in order to stop it. It's just that we, based on actual research, find McLaren's conclusions ill-informed and incredibly dangerous. We're also a little perplexed as to why she doesn't understand that legal responsibility lays with the perpetrator too. Or, quite how she's arrived at a 50-50 'contribution' for domestic violence when there is one perpetrator and one victim.

We're also on board with the need to end gendered stereotyping of boys and girls as it is incredibly harmful to children, and adults, to be raised with expectations based entirely on ill-conceived and factually incorrect assumptions about gender. We just don't support the theory that girls and women are responsible for being victims of domestic violence:

To explain what I mean, I want to tell you about a scenario I frequently see played out in various forms in my work in relation to domestic violence. Let's say we have a male and female couple who are living together and he is becoming increasingly violent towards her. In my work, I have to retrain her exactly as much as I have to retrain him to correct this situation.

It happens like this. Early on in the relationship he becomes aggravated for some reason and raises his voice at her. She tolerates it, lets it go by, thinks to herself "he's not too angry – no need to rock the boat". At that stage he is at 4/10 in his level of anger. By not objecting she has just trained him that 4/10 is acceptable. So he continues to regularly reach that level.



Women are not responsible for "training" men not to be aggressive or violent. The ONLY person in this scenario who is responsible is the man and it is this kind of deeply stupid theory which puts women at risk by blaming them for men's behaviour. This is why no qualified clinical psychologist, councillor, psychiatrist or therapist would recommend joint relationships counselling for a couple where domestic violence is involved. McLaren has just told the perpetrator they have the right to behave abusively: that it is the victim's fault for not saying no.

This might be a shocking piece of information, but here at EVB, we don't think men are stupid. We don't believe they need to be told their behaviour is aggressive or abusive because they are confused or don't understand boundaries. We believe men are perfectly aware that their behaviour is wrong; that they make a choice to commit domestic violence. Men who perpetrate domestic violence, and it is almost always men even when the victim is male, need to be held accountable for their actions. The very last thing they need is a clinical psychologist telling them it's okay to be abusive if a woman doesn't say no.

In comparing her own childhood at being allowed to be bad at sport as the same as a woman living with domestic violence, McLaren brings the woman-blaming to a whole new level of stupid:

I can relate this to my own life. As a child I was allowed to get away with being fairly sooky and ineffectual in sport. I was good enough at it technically but I was never really expected to push through into the realm of real mental toughness. Then, as a young adolescent I found myself standing at the top of a cornice (I had snow skied since I was a tiny child) and it was very steep, narrow and ungrooved. My older brother jumped straight off the cornice without a second of hesitation and skied it aggressively and beautifully to the bottom.

Suddenly I thought: "I'm sick of being pathetic – he does it, why can't I". At that moment I decided to never again be passive. I took off, forcing myself to trust in my own ability, skiing forcefully, fast and with authority and I have skied that way ever since. Most of the girls and women I knew back then have still not taken this step of mental toughness and although they remain excellent technicians, skiing with beauty and grace, they never really learnt just how good they could be.

Women experiencing domestic violence are NOT pathetic and anyone who suggests this should not be allowed to work with either perpetrators or victims. Girls and boys are socialised differently: boys that risk is good and girls to put the needs of others before their own. This socialisation, whilst damaging, does not negate male responsibility for their own violence.

Let us be very, very clear here: women living with domestic violence are not "tolerating" it. They are living in a violent relationship where their choices and safety are decreased incrementally. For some of these women, 'objecting' to the violence will lead to serious physical harm or death - and, they know this. Women do not teach men that "at each stage that his level of anger is tolerable and has no consequences". People who make excuses for perpetrators, like McLaren, are the ones who teach men their behaviour is acceptable.

Domestic violence involves a pattern of coercive control and it is that control which increases



and not all domestic violence involves violence. The failure to recognise the pattern of coercive control shows that McLaren has done very little research or training on the subject.

It isn't just McLaren who is at fault here. The editorial staff of *The Age* made a choice to publish this deeply irresponsible article, which contradicts every piece of research-based evidence into domestic violence and abuse.

The only person responsible for domestic violence is the perpetrator. McLaren and The Age have just published an article that tells perpetrators they don't need to take any responsibility for violence putting women and children at risk. This article needs to be removed from the online version and The Age needs to publish an article from a qualified professional breaking down all of the dangerous misinformation.