Promoting the ‘good’ relationship: Recognising moral dimensions in violence prevention education

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This thesis has not been submitted, in either full or part, for a higher degree at any other institution. The thesis is an original piece and is the result of the candidate's own research endeavour.

Signed

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Preface

This thesis reports a phenomenological hermeneutical critical realist inquiry into violence prevention educators promoting desirable and ‘good’ relationships in practice. This inquiry is based on the premise that promoting desirable alternatives to violence in violence prevention education is a moral activity; in so far as the question of what is desirable in relationships is a moral question. Based on in-depth phenomenological interviews with twelve Australian human service professionals working in the field of primary relationship violence prevention, the thesis provides descriptions of how and why certain versions of desirable relationships are promoted in this field. It will be demonstrated that individual workers’ personal moral commitments are influential in making certain versions of the ‘good’ relationship possible in violence prevention education.

The field of primary violence prevention has a dual function; the first is to ameliorate risks associated with using violence, and the second is to promote desirable alternatives to using violence in relationships. This thesis argues that when workers in violence prevention education promote desirable ways of being in relationships they are promoting moral goods. Few fields in human service work offer an inquirer direct access to the issue of promoting moral goods in practice. The focus of most human services practice is less about the question of the good or flourishing life, and more about assisting people to cope with or change existing social and personal problems. In contrast, violence prevention education is bound up with constructing and promoting desirable human living.

In this inquiry the conceptual task was to understand and describe the interplay between individual workers beliefs and practice style when doing violence prevention education. The thesis identifies four different conventions of this interplay. In two conventions, there was a tendency for workers not to recognise or avoid recognising the moral complexities involved when promoting good alternatives to using violence in relationships. These workers use an ‘expert’ or prescriptive practice approach. In the third convention workers
recognised there is moral and ethical complexity in the practice of promoting desirable relationships. These workers conceive that practicing well in the field of violence prevention education is less about promoting certainty and prescription, and more with posing ethical questions. In the fourth convention was observed inconsistencies between workers’ personal beliefs and how they construct desirable relationships in the public realm of practice. These workers conceal aspects of their personal beliefs because these beliefs sit uncomfortably with secular values, or otherwise dominant cultural norms in the field.

Hermeneutical engagement with the field findings accommodated the literary tradition of human service work ethics, the moral philosophy tradition in so far as it has addressed the question of what makes a human practice ‘good’, and interpersonal violence prevention literature. Interpretation of these literary traditions was underscored by a ‘strong’ hermeneutical framework (Taylor 1989; Gadamer 1976; Heidegger 1962), combined with elements from transcendental critical realism (Archer 2004; 2003; 2000).

The interpretations given in the thesis are evaluative. I argue that that promoting desirable relationships in violence prevention education should be recognised as a practice with implicit ethical and moral dimensions. Based on this recognition, I argue that workers in this field must demonstrate a broader range of ethical skills. Workers should be able to recognise and engage purposefully with a variety of moral traditions that people in the community draw upon to evaluate what is ‘good’ in human living. I argue that it is important for violence prevention educators to develop moral understanding, a personal moral commitment, and a capacity for skilful engagement with groups concerning ethical dilemmas in human living.

This thesis can make a contribution to that tradition in human services literature where scholars and practitioners have engaged the problem of how to conceive ‘ethical’ practice. However, the final contribution of this thesis will be perhaps less with the findings discussed and more with observing that moral dimensions in the field of violence prevention education have not been adequately recognised.
Introduction

I. Significance and Contribution of the thesis
A key function of relationship violence prevention education is to promote desirable alternatives to using violence and abuse in interpersonal relationships (Carmody 2006; Ryan 2005; Rosewater 2003; Mulroney 2003). The violence prevention field recognises that preventing violence in interpersonal relationships is a moral concern, directly related to fundamental human rights like safety and bodily integrity. However, the field has not adequately recognised that promoting desirable alternatives to violence in relationships is also a problem of morality. Rarely does literature in this field recognise that violence prevention workers are educating populations about what could be done in relationships, as well as what shouldn’t be done in relationships.

In this thesis the question of what should be done in relationships, the question of what is good or desirable in relationships, is regarded as a moral-ethical problem. Questions about what is good or desirable are moral questions. The question of desirability in relationships is also a moral dilemma in that people have different views about what is ‘good’ in human relationships, emergent from various moral traditions and value schemas. There is no simple or agreed upon strategy to find an answer to the question what is good in human relationships. By definition we cannot respond to moral or ethical problems in a wrong or right way. We can only seek, and implore others to seek, the best way.

In so far as it can be recognised that promoting desirable relationships in the field of violence prevention education is a moral issue, this thesis provides a ‘moral narrative’. This moral narrative explores the practice of promoting desirable relationships in violence prevention education, revealing moral and ethical dilemmas when workers assume knowledge about so called ‘healthy’ relationships. This moral narrative throws a challenge to how ‘effective practice’ is conceived in the public health or evidence based approach to doing violence prevention education. Through bringing attention to the moral functions of violence prevention education, it will be argued that it is less important that
educators are ‘experts’ about risk and protective factors in relationships, and more important that educators have moral intelligence and skill working with ethical dilemmas.

To arrive at a place where I could critically engage the question of good practice in violence prevention education a number of tasks were undertaken in this project. To theoretically establish a ground for recognising that promoting ‘good’ relationships in violence prevention is a moral-ethical issue, two literary traditions were reviewed. The first was that tradition in human service literature that has argued the nature of ‘ethical’ practice, including literature that has traced the moral legacy shaping human services work. Reviewing this tradition can demonstrate that questions of ethics and morality remain unsettled in human services work. Tensions remain between those who want ethical certainty, and those who want ethical artistry or ethical subjectivity. In the contemporary ‘post-modern’ era scepticism has been expressed about the desirability of sharing ethical ‘goods’; the position that people can only work out what is good for themselves. Other scholars have lamented that the ‘vision’ in caring professions seems diminished. They argue this field must resolve as well as possible the issue of establishing a shared basis or vision for the purpose of human services work. In terms of discerning what is ‘ethical practice’ in contemporary human service work can be observed in the literature a trend where workers are relying on personal value frameworks, and less on formalised ethical codes and principles. These different threads in the literature have direct relevance for this inquiry. Is it desirable that the field of violence prevention education has a common vision about the question of what is ‘good’ in relationships? Are all political positions and moral-ethical frameworks adequate, and desirable, when this field promotes good alternatives to violence in relationships? What could be said of better ways of believing, valuing and practising in this field?

The second literary tradition reviewed is concerned with primary violence prevention activity. Primary prevention is a public health term referring to prevention activity targeting whole population groups, irrespective of these groups experiencing the unwanted problem (violence). A review of this literature enables me to demonstrate that promoting desirable relationships is indeed a key function of primary violence prevention
education. However, perhaps because this field is theoretically and ideologically situated in the domains of public health or crime prevention, it can be shown that the moral and ethical significance of promoting desirability in relationships has not been recognised. A review of this literary tradition revealed no scholars discussing in any detail the moral dimensions when violence prevention educators promote desirable alternatives to violence in relationships.

Having made a theoretical case for recognising there are moral and ethical dimensions when violence prevention educators promote good relationships, the next task in the inquiry was to explore the issue empirically. The fieldwork undertaken enabled exploration of how and why versions of ‘good relationships’ are being promoted in Australian violence prevention education. Questions asked in the project fieldwork were:

- How are ‘good’ relationships being promoted in Australian primary relationship violence prevention work?
- What moral-ethical authorities and beliefs guide individual workers who are promoting versions of the good in relationships? How do workers personal beliefs inform these promotions?
- In what ways do individual workers beliefs make possible certain ways of promoting the good in relationships in practice, and not others?

The project fieldwork involved in-depth interviews with twelve Australian human service workers employed in the prevention fields of child abuse & neglect, domestic and family violence, and sexual violence. These workers, the project participants, recognised their professional role involves ‘primary prevention’; doing prevention work with groups who may or may not have experienced violence. The fieldwork enabled description of the different ways ‘good’ relationships are being promoted in this field. Additionally, interpretative discussion about why the participants construct desirable relationships the way they do was possible, through using phenomenological probing in interviews about moral-ethical frameworks and ideas influencing practice. The trajectory used to explore this issue of explanation - why good relationships are constructed in certain ways by workers - remained at the level of individual workers’ beliefs. For the project purposes, I
was not interested in how organisational policies or workers’ practice context impacted on constructions of the ‘good’ relationship. I was less interested, also, in how programme content defined desirable relationships. The key association explored in this study was between workers individual practice style and workers personal beliefs, as a means of exploring how violence prevention workers personal morality make possible certain constructions of the ‘good’ in relationships.

The issue of moral-ethical vision in relationship violence prevention work was explored in the project using a *phenomenological hermeneutical critical realist* approach. The first philosophical framework in this combination, phenomenological hermeneutics, offered useful tools for accessing and describing the key experience explored in the project: how ‘good’ relationships are promoted in practice. Phenomenological hermeneutics is acknowledged as a useful framework when studying difficult to reach, or elusive social phenomena, in a way that can accommodate layered acts of interpretation (Sharkey 2001). Drawing from the work of Martin Heidegger (1988) and Hans-Georg Gadamer (1976), the inquiry penetrated deeper than merely describing how good relationships are constructed in practice. Interpretation or making meaning about what makes these constructions of the good *possible* was also undertaken via hermeneutical engagement with interview text, key literary traditions, and my personal horizon as the researcher.

The second framework in this methodological blending, critical realism, functioned as a philosophical ‘compass’ in this study. Critical realism recognises humans all think about the world differently, however it does not dispense with the idea that social phenomena can have ontological properties. Specifically, this framework entertains and engages the motif that there are metaphysical realities in our being human (Archer, Collier & Porpora 2004). Because of this stance towards realism, critical realism recognises there are *better* ways of understanding social practices. In other words, that some knowledge claims are more credible than others. This stance contrasts a subjectivist epistemological position characteristic in some varieties of social constructionism, or constructivism. In subjectivist epistemology meaning is created regardless of the object, or thing in the world the constructivist might seek to describe (Crotty 1998:43-4). In critical realism,
knowledge is developed in relation to what is already in the world; there are realities that must be reckoned with when developing knowledge. In this inquiry, theory developed by critical realist Margaret Archer (1988; 2000; 2003; 2004) was heavily influential in how I made evaluative meaning of my project findings. Her thesis about the role of human agency in shaping social practices helped me to recognise that violence prevention workers’ professional discretion and beliefs have an influential role in shaping practice. Fusing the ‘strong hermeneutics’ of Heidegger (1988) and Gadamer (1976), with Archer’s (2003; 2000) theoretical revindication of the human agent, discussion is provided in the thesis that uses a critical and evaluative attitude about better ways of promoting moral-ethical vision in violence prevention education.

The discipline of ‘best fit’ accommodating this thesis is sociology. However, I consider this piece of research unconventional in its subject area and attitude in the context of this discipline. Most sociological narratives do without reference to the ‘good’, in its moral form (Bauman 1990:170). Shaw (2004:79) says in striving to achieve the status of science, sociology has sought to absolve itself of any metaphysical pretension, especially the sort of questions ethics entail. This project returns questions of ‘the good’ –in moral and ethical terms – to a theoretical and critical space. I develop insights that invite readers to see more clearly, and appreciate more deeply, moral-ethical dimensions of relationship violence prevention practice. While in the project I continued to acknowledge uncertainty, mystery and the necessarily unfinished task of interpreting ethics in practice, I sustained a belief about the importance of human service professionals doing violence prevention to better recognise moral-ethicality when they promote desirable relationships. I argue this recognition is seldom achieved, and that issues of morality and ethics need redress in tertiary human services education.

Western societies seemed not to have progressed in being able to definitively answer the question of what makes relationships ‘good’. There is no consensus concerning what

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1 My disciplinary background includes social work and sociology. While social work literature is heavily used in the project, I don’t consider the thesis is necessarily a social work inquiry. Shaw (2007:660) argues that a social work doctoral thesis will include a notion of practice application, i.e. links will be made from theory to practice and visa-versa. While general recommendations are made for the field, I do not provide specific practice recommendations.
moral-ethical frameworks are appropriate as an authority to teach us what is good. We have not ‘progressed’ because we do not share any consensus on how to measure the ‘good’ in relationships. This predicament seems to be all the more cogent in the apparent post-modern epoch (Bauman 1993) following the underlying changes in the way it is possible to address questions of moral-ethicality. In a related vein, MacIntyre (2007) has observed a contemporary trend toward ethical emotivism; where all moral judgements are regarded as expressions of preference. According to these observations every human will begin, it seems, at the beginning in seeking to answer the question of the ‘good’ in their relationships. We seek, and try on different answers to this question amidst the reality of complex, and often messy relationships with our partners, children, family, and friends. Evidently, sometimes we get relationships ‘wrong’. We fail to love and care for those we are in relationship with, and some use violence in relationships. It is because of this that we need morality and ethics; moral-ethical frameworks are so obviously important for helping us discern what could be and what shouldn’t be in human relationships.

Confusion about what we should or could do in relationships, leads some of us to seek the counsel of human service workers for direction, most often when stuck in a relationship ‘problem’. Given this predicament, human service scholars concerned with ethics recognise that professionals have a responsibility to understand and be able to articulate adequate grounds when they recognise and name ‘wrongs’ (Hugman 2005:29). It would seem important, also, that workers understand and be able to articulate the grounds that inform their promotions of desirable ways to be in human relationships. In other words, workers should be able to articulate (or at least be aware of) the range and nature of ethical responsibilities involved when they practice relationship violence prevention work. Questions regarding professional responsibility and ethics are at the heart of the thesis; to what extent do relationship violence prevention workers understand moral-ethical dimensions when promoting desirable alternatives to violence in their work? In what ways does a worker’s personal moral-ethical worldview influence these promotions?
The contribution of this thesis is in illuminating how ‘good’ relationships are promoted and understood by human service workers doing primary violence prevention education. The thesis therein makes a contribution at two levels. The first contribution is providing recognition and description of desirability in relationships being constructed in violence prevention education. The second contribution is to that tradition in human services literature where scholars have engaged with the problem of moral-ethical visioning; the problem of how ‘ethical’ practice could be conceived.

II. Thesis Rationale: A personal engagement with the subject matter
Prior to beginning my PhD journey, I had obtained a degree in social work and had worked in the human services for nine years. For most of this time I worked with victims of interpersonal violence. For three years, my role involved facilitating prevention education programmes in schools, and with allied health and medical professionals. My time working in the field of interpersonal violence prevention was challenging, to say the least. Part of this challenge pertained to being confronted with the reality of violence and trauma in people’s lives; my learning to believe, and how to sit alongside, those who have experienced violence. However, another personal challenge I experienced working in the violence prevention field pertained to the lack of ‘depth’ conversations in practice settings about the question of good human living. Questions like, what are the realistic alternatives for families and individuals who have experienced generational violence? What desirable vision of relationships can be promoted with parents raising children in situations of poverty and in chaotic and violent neighbourhoods? Do violence prevention educators have the ethical goods to offer alternatives to these people? Or do these workers merely try to stop the violence problem (for example, through advocating the state removal of children, or for safer housing, or to have offenders put away)? In my opinion, the violence prevention field poorly accommodated the ‘thorny’ question of what workers can offer as desirable alternatives to violence.

The question of what makes a practice ‘good’ properly belongs to the domain of ethics and morality. Also, our seeking an answer to this question is commonly done via religious and spiritual avenues. And yet, I know from experience working in the violence prevention field this question is posed and is sometimes ‘answered’, by human services
workers who generally haven’t been trained in ethics, or in matters of spirituality for practice (Schuiringa 2007; Hugman 2005). Despite the field being actively involved in promoting the ‘good’ relationship, it seems to have gone un-noticed in the violence prevention field, in the literature and by many workers, that promoting desirability in relationships is a practice with patent moral dimensions.

My experience in violence education prevention work taught me that conversations amongst workers about the question ‘what makes a good or desirable relationship?’ are rare. Perhaps this is because (as stated by one project participant) “planning meetings are usually rushed (and) ad hoc”. Perhaps this is also because such conversations are dismissed as irrelevant for ‘the real work’ of prevention or outside the domains of expected practice. However, as argued in this thesis, the field of violence prevention education actively promotes what people should do instead of violence, or what is ‘good’ in relationships. While working in the field, I found myself wrestling with how programmes or co-facilitators were depicting desirable interpersonal relationships. Questions caught in my throat: what values should workers promote about desirability in relationships? What values could we promote? What moral-ethical frameworks or authorities should or could inform these values? Do clients share the values of what we are promoting as ‘good’ or ‘healthy’ in relationships in this program? I harboured other, more risky questions, too: is it possible for humans to have ‘good’ relationships? What can humans really expect in our relationships? How can workers communicate the complexity of being in relationships – the pain, joy, anxiety, boredom and other things – while staying on track with the aims of prevention practice?

The thesis engages in varying degrees with all of these questions. The quest of this thesis was exploratory; to provide description, and an interpretative discussion, about the matter of human service workers promoting the ‘good’ relationship in violence prevention practice. I knew at the outset the tale told would have a critical bent, because I was venturing with a “crusading spirit” in pursuing my research questions (van Maanen 1988: 129). This crusading spirit was fed by my personal interest in moral-ethical as well as spiritual issues, and my strong ‘antennae’ for picking up threads of conversation about
these matters in the workplace. With my new hat on in the project as the researcher I have pursued the issue of moral-ethical vision with a passion.

For those conversant with the field of relationship violence prevention, the narrative I give in the thesis may be unfamiliar. An important aim of this study was to make the familiar strange, to get a re-newed insider account of violence prevention education work. To say it even more frankly, I hoped to learn and understand more than the participants I spoke to did about promoting so called ‘healthy’ relationships in violence prevention work. In so far as I provide interpretations and not only descriptions it is likely that workers in this field could disagree with my account.

Finally, and because I am the agent doing the interpretation in this project, I share something about my personal beliefs. I believe that the good in human relationships; what is lovely and of worth, has a transcendental ground. As a practicing Christian, I am bound to certain versions of the good, because I believe God reveals what is good in the life of Jesus Christ. In having this faith, however, I don’t have definitive knowledge about what is ‘good’. I can only seek the good, or right, or most beautiful thing. This ‘seeking’ in my own life journey provided the rationale for the project beginnings. Having said this it is important to communicate that while I have a personal position in relation to moral-ethicality, I do not have a specific position to impose in this thesis. What I report in my findings is not necessarily evidence to support my personal views. Throughout the project I cultivated open-mindedness about the possibility of learning from my participants, and learning from the many texts I read. My moral-ethical position, therefore, motivated why I did the research but did not motivate my seeking certain findings at the expense of others. In other words, my faith motivated the questioning, and less the findings, in this study. My final discussions are the culmination of learning, being challenged, and changing, on a cyclical basis throughout the project.

**III. On unusual and contested terms**

As would be expected in a piece of writing of this length, a number of technical terms are used, that may be unfamiliar to the reader. While I provide more detailed descriptions of
terms in the coming chapters, to enable an introductory ease of reading I discuss a number of terms below.

The term **moral-ethicality** is used in this thesis. This term is not frequently used in the human services ethics literature, or in moral philosophy. The term moral-ethicality in the thesis refers to fundamental and practical questions of how we ought to live, and questions of how it is good to practice. Many moral and ethical scholars find no awkwardness in using the terms ‘moral’ and ‘ethical’ interchangeably (Haydon 2006; Nash 2002). For others, a distinction appears to operate when they use either term in their argument. In using the term ‘morality’ I resist the over-narrow and negative uses to which this word is prescribed in some literature. To borrow an insight expressed by moral philosopher John Haldane (2008), morality can function to interpret purposes and not dictate purposes; and it is in the spirit of interpreting what is good that I use the term ‘morality’ in this inquiry. While there is no universally accepted definition of morality or ethics, it is commonly accepted that ethical and moral theory concerns the question of what is good. This conception forms the basis of the thesis argument: promoting desirable relationships in violence prevention education is a problem of morality.

The terms **moral-ethical worldview** and **personal morality** are used in the thesis. These terms accommodate a range of values and assumptions that shape individuals experience of life and the reflective stances we adopt in the practices of living. Following Taylor (1989), I took the view that ‘moral-ethical worldviews’ structure and orient human services workers practices, in that they provide a framework for evaluating what is important or ‘good’ in life. Personal morality is a term used to refer to significant moral and ethical beliefs and ideas held by individuals.

**Human service work** is used to denote those professions that seek to help others. Whether these professionals are ‘caring about or caring for’, Hugman (2005) says these human services professionals are focused on the human person. This distinction is

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2 Singer wrote “some people now think ‘morality’ is out of date... a system of nasty puritanical prohibitions” (1993:1)
interesting because primary relationship violence prevention work in a strict sense is caring about work and is not the pointy end of caring for work. It is perhaps “work in which the professional has a commitment to the wellbeing of the person but does not take on the task of caring” (Hugman 2005:76). The categories of human services work my thesis accommodates include social or welfare type caring work. In the project sample workers came from the following disciplines: social work (my own professional background), law, psychology, nursing, applied social science, religious ministry and community work.

**Relationship violence** is a heuristic tool used in my thesis to accommodate violence used in intimate and family relationships. This term is described at length in chapter 2. It is important to note this term is limited in referring only to violence which occurs between people who know each other –who are in relationship. My sample included workers doing prevention in the areas of family and intimate violence.

The term ‘field’ is used primarily in the thesis when referring to the professional settings where (Australian) primary relationship violence prevention is conducted. I also, to a lesser extent, use the term ‘field’ to denote human services work in general. In both uses, ‘field’ refers not only to the physical settings – workplace organisations and agencies –it also refers to the discursive and written texts (for example, policies) that comprise core elements in such settings. The project questions, and fieldwork, were engaged in the field of primary relationship violence prevention.

**IV. Organisation of the thesis**

*Chapter 1* grounds the broader thesis argument. I review literature about ethics in human services work, including the key traditions in moral philosophy that have shaped this field. Canvassing older ideas in the broader tradition of moral philosophy is paramount in a thesis like this –because these ideas infuse current theories about vision and morality, and notions of what is ethical practice in the contemporary human services environment. I canvass the Australian social work ethical *Code*, and consider commentary about the relevance of human services ethical codes influencing ethical decision making by
professionals. Studies that have explored the range of influences impacting on ethical
decision making by human service workers are canvassed. At the conclusion of the
chapter, I identify three core areas for my thesis exploration. These areas are: how human
services might recognise moral dimensions in practice, how workers go about promoting
moral ‘visions’ in the doing of human services work, and how workers learn about ethical
practice.

Chapter 2 discusses the particular site in human services work where my field project
was undertaken; the primary prevention of relationship violence. I argue the case for
recognising that violence prevention education actively constructs desirable relationships
as part of the work. Based on a review of this literature I argue that while desirable
relationships are promoted in this field, this feature in the work has largely not been
recognised. At the conclusion of Chapter 2 I provide an argument for recognising moral
dimensions in violence prevention education.

Chapter 3 details the two philosophical frameworks drawn on to build the thesis
argument. I discuss my use of Martin Heidegger’s approach to phenomenology, bringing
attention to features in his phenomenological approach that influenced my methodology.
I also discuss Hans-Georg Gadamer’s approach to ‘strong hermeneutics’, and show how
this approach shaped the conduct of my inquiry. Secondly, I discuss components in
critical realism that influenced this inquiry, particularly those suggested in work by
Margaret Archer (2004; 2003; 2000). In the final sections of this chapter, I discuss the
challenges apparent when combining phenomenology and critical realism in my
methodological approach. I discuss the points of confluence and divergence with joining
these frameworks, and outline how this combination works in my data analysis and
interpretations.

Chapter 4 outlines my fieldwork design, and the interpretation strategy used to make
sense of fieldwork findings. I discuss the preparation and process of interviewing
participants in the study, and detail how I analysed the data that emerged from these
interviews.
Chapter 5 provides phenomenological descriptions of the core practice styles adopted by participants when they promote desirable relationships in programmes in violence prevention education. Three core practice style were identified in this project; those of the experts, the experimenters and the revolutionaries.

Chapter 6 discusses the project participants’ personal moral-ethical frameworks. Three categories of moral-ethical worldview were explored in thesis, which have been thematically interpreted. The categories are: beliefs about human potential to use violence and be aware of violence; guiding moral-ethical authority; and beliefs about what characteristics the ideal prevention worker should have.

Chapter 7 provides synthesis theorising of the interplay between participants’ practice style and their personal beliefs. Four conventions of workers recognising moral dimensions in violence prevention education are described.

The final chapter in the thesis, my conclusion, revisits premises in the inquiry and summarises important issues that emerged in the field inquiry. Additionally, I share thoughts grown throughout the inquiry concerning practice vision and ethical practice in violence prevention education. Finally, I propose a number of recommendations for the inclusion of moral vision in violence prevention education.
Chapter 1.
Ethics and Morality in Human Services Work

1.1 Introduction
The journey taken in this inquiry was to explore how relationship violence prevention educators’ personal beliefs influence their practice style when they promote desirable alternatives to violence in practice. In this inquiry, promoting desirable alternatives to violence in violence prevention education is conceived as an activity with explicit moral dimensions. This is because the question of ‘goodness’ or desirability in relationships is a moral question.

To establish a theoretical groundwork for exploring moral dimensions in violence prevention education, this chapter broadly considers moral and ethical dimensions in human services work. Based on an extensive literature review, it will be shown that moral and ethical concerns lie at the core of human services work. However, there is significant debate around how morality or ethics should be conceived in human services work, including debate about how we might indicate ‘ethical practice’. The first section of the chapter introduces the motif there are differences of opinion about what can be visioned as an end in human services work.

The second section of the chapter examines moral philosophies that have been credited with shaping human service work. Moral philosophy often features minimally in discussions of human services’ work ethics (Asquith & Cheers 2001), despite the value this tradition offers for better understanding ethical trends in the contemporary human services field. In this section it is observed that the virtue ethics framework and post-modern approaches to ethics have become increasingly influential, at least according to human services scholars. These frameworks sit uncomfortably in the neo-liberal and risk-management human services ethical environment, which otherwise construes ‘ethical practice’ as being synonymous with expertise or using evidence-based practice.
In the third section of the chapter I review empirical research into how workers conceive ethical practice, and the question of what moral-ethical authorities should guide workers practice. In recent literature can be observed a trend where workers have moved away from relying on professional ethical codes and de-ontological principles, toward relying on personal moral-ethical frameworks. Ethical practice has recently been indicated in some scholarship through employing concepts like ‘practice wisdom’, ‘mature professionalism’ and ‘authentic’ practice.

In the final section of the chapter I condense key concepts and tensions in the ethics in human services’ literature that have relevance for this project. Specifically, I draw out issues that are taken up for exploration and discussion in the thesis. These are: recognising that moral and ethical ‘goods’ are promoted by human services workers; the question of appropriate moral-ethical authority to guide practice; and, the problem of how workers learn to practice better with moral and ethical dilemmas.

1.2 Ethics in human services work

1.2.1 Ethics at the core of human services work

The question of ethical practice is of fundamental concern in human services work. Human services scholars recognise ethics and morality at the core of this work in saying, “work that aims to enhance people’s well-being requires more than competence, it involves modelling ways of life” (Clark 2006: 75). “Issues faced by social workers involve questions of ‘what ought to be’ in addition to ‘what is the case’” (Holland & Kilpatrick 1991). “To practice social work is to act on the morality of social life” (Bisman 2004: 117). “Helping work is irreducibly a moral concern” (Gray & McDonald 2006). In the counselling field, Christopher (1996:24) says, “ultimately, counselling is part of a cultural discussion about ethos and world view, the good life and the good person, and about moral visions”.

These statements place morality and ethics at the centre of human service work. Some comments bring attention to human services work functioning to promote moral visions. However, it can be argued that the human services’ field sometimes evades, or fails to accept, its moral functions. In the human services, the language of ethics and morality is
often substituted for language like best or effective practice (McAuliffe 2005a, 2005b; Reamer 1999), where a good outcome might be clients developing ‘effective’ relationships, or ‘competency’ in relationships. In this ethical climate - where the good has perhaps become synonymous with effective - we are less likely to hear the language of the metaphysical (Gray & Webb 2008). In the field of human services work it is less likely to come across terms like ‘loving’ relationships, ‘unconditional’ regard (toward clients or between clients), or phrases like having ‘good’ or ‘right’ relationships.

The first section of this chapter considers the current state of play of ethics in human services work. I begin by reflecting on why uneasiness seems apparent about issues of morality, ethics and vision, in contemporary human services work, and I consider these questions: what can be said of ethics, morality, and moral vision, in contemporary human services work? What is the role of professional ethical codes? Is there a need to claim a broader moral vision for human services work?

1.2.2 Morality, ethics or values in human services work?

Searching the Social Services Abstracts e-resource at the beginning of my thesis, approximately 1000 peer reviewed journal articles were found that combined key concerns with human services work and ‘ethics’ or ‘morality’. More specifically, 300 articles were found that discussed the place of ethics, or morality in human service work, and conveyed this focus in the article title. While some authors appealed to morality and ethics in an interchangeable way (McAuliffe 2005a, 2005b; Freud & Krug 2002; Reamer 1999), mainstream terms are rarely defined rigorously in articles.

Van Hooft (1995:141-4) communicates what appears to be a general conception of the difference between ‘ethics’ and ‘morality’ in the human services literature. He says ‘ethics’ refers to a vague and undetermined set of socially contextualised worthwhile ways to live, while ‘morality’ refers to a set of universal and objective principles for human conduct. Reamer (1999) avoids use of either term, preferring the term ‘values’, but combines the meanings Van Hooft associates with ‘morality’ and ‘ethics’. He says values are generalised, emotionally charged conceptions of what is desirable, that are
The term ‘ethics’ is derived from the classical Greek term; *Ethikos*. However, there are two inter-related possible root words for ethikos: ethos meaning *habit*, and `ethos, meaning *character* (Edwards 1998; Mautner 1997). The term ‘morality’ is derived from the Latin ‘moralis’. Cicero, a Roman historian writing in the early Common Era, translated the Greek ‘Ethikos’ as ‘moralis’ (Stumpf 1994). Thus, the terms ethics and morality in traditional moral philosophy have generally been viewed as synonymous, or at least interchangeable. Throughout the modern philosophical and social theory traditions there appears to be a general distinction functioning with the terms ethics and morality, despite the conceptual blurring with these terms. As suggested by Van Hooft (1995), in modern social theory the term ‘morality’ generally signifies universal codes or rules of human conduct, whereas ‘ethics’ pertains to specific questions of the contextualised ‘good’, or the good life (Mautner 1997). So while these terms have been sometimes used interchangeably in the classical era, and there remains ambiguity (Banks 2006:5), ‘commonsense’ usage tends to attach different meanings to the two terms.

In recent developments in the social sciences there is a revival of Aristotle’s notion of ‘virtue ethics’, signalling a move *away from* abstract principles and rules to govern notions of ‘the good’ (Hugman 2005, 2003; Houston 2003; Richardson 2003; McBeath & Webb 2002; Meara, Schmidt & Day 1996). For Greek philosophy, epitomised in the work of Socrates, the question of ethics is the pursuit of a good/ proper/ virtuous life. In Aristotle’s work, the question of a good life is formulated within a meta-physical system.
of intellectual virtues and within this, the highest virtue Sophia; the human *telos* of the eternal, and contemplative (Aristotle 2007). Greek ethics, then, is often referred to as teleological and virtue ethics (Bohme 2001). In contrast, ‘ethics’ within the period called medieval or Christendom changed substantially, to be characterised as the question of ‘the good’ in relation to Christian theology. For example, Augustine in Book VII of the *City of God* (1950) constructs a hermeneutical notion of good as the pursuit of God as Truth, and the ethical principle of a good life as love, in a way correspondent with morality via biblical interpretation. During the Enlightenment, Hegel (1770–1831) distinguished between an ethical life (*Sittlichkeit*); the norms which are followed in everyday behaviour, and morality (*Moralitat*); referring to behaviour based on principles. This distinction continues to be influential in contemporary philosophical discussions of ethics (Bohme 2001:12).

The Enlightenment was also a time when the natural sciences became dominant in terms of truth claims. There was a tendency to naturalise or ‘disenchant’ ethics, and therein conjoin ethics and morality. Hobbes (1588–1679) conceived the social contract –with the constitutive ideas of human rationally seeking out right or wrong - as a ‘natural’ phenomena of human conduct. Likewise, Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) formulated moral philosophy as the constitution of human actions within universal law –and saw this as analogous to natural law (Arrington 1998). In short, conceptions of morality coming out of the Enlightenment and modern periods refer to rules, codes (laws), and principles of the good, that are abstracted from the individual, and seen as the desirable method to guide conduct.

Zygmunt Bauman (1994) has characterised this era of abstracted principles, and the impact it has had in shaping modern professionalism, as *parochialism*. The uptake of Bauman’s perspective that abstract ethical principles equals parochialism is considerable in contemporary literature, reviewed further below. However, caution is needed with comprehending the meaning behind Bauman’s use of terms. Bauman advocates that professionals engage in the process of the ‘redemption of moral capacity… and re-*moralisation* of the human space’ (1994:240, my emphasis). Bauman therein reverses
contemporary mainstream applications of these terms’ meanings. The parochial universal laws Bauman calls ‘ethics’. The pursuit of ‘good’ and admirable ways of doing human practice, Bauman refers to as ‘morality’. It is ethics in organisations that Bauman sees as strangling both individual and relational moral impulses (1994:13). The politics of naming something as ‘ethics’ or ‘morality’ is clearly to do with the question of what authority should be relied on to inform the good.

The term ‘values’ is also used in human services’ literature to refer to moral and ethical phenomena. For example, the International Federation of Social Work (IFSW 2004) definition of social work designates principles like social justice and human rights under the heading ‘values’. Banks (2006:6) argues ‘values’ is a term that is applied vaguely, has a variety of meanings, and for these reasons is a problematic concept. This seems to be similar to the difficulty in having a consensual, or shared understanding of the terms ‘ethics’ and ‘morality’, in the human services field.

There is no agreed upon terminology to refer to that cluster of phenomena pertaining to values/ beliefs/ principles that are considered important in human living; different authors attach different meanings to terms, and some scholars including Bauman are intentional in choosing one term over another. In the light of this, the thesis uses the term ‘moral-ethicality’ or makes reference to morality and ethics interchangeably. These terms accommodate ideas of the ‘good’ nominated by external sources, with individual intentions, beliefs, values, personal epistemologies, and commitments that pertain to the ‘good’.

1.2.3 A minimal moral vision for human services work? The history of moral visioning

Another contentious issue observable in human service work scholarship is the problem of moral vision; defining what should be the unified purpose in the field. In this debate questions include: Should human services workers work with the whole or only the (problem) parts of people’s lives? Should workers be concerned with social well-being, or individual well-being, and are these in tension? Finally, is social change a desirable end in itself for the vision of social work?
Some suggest that the field adopt a pragmatic or modest vision. Healy (2008) writes “if there is to be a common purpose, I suggest that it should be a modest one of making positive differences to the lives of the individuals and communities with whom social workers practice”. Others suggest the vision of caring professions be more expansive. Clark writes “what is or should be distinctive about social work is that the social workers concern for her client ... extends... to the client’s life as a whole” (2006:78). Expansive illustrations of moral vision are particularly evident in professional ethical codes. For example, the British Association of Social Workers (2002) says the goals of the profession are “problem solving in human relationships, and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance wellbeing”. Hugman (2005: 38) observes that the term ‘well-being’ remains un-defined in ethical codes. He asks “does this term infer an absence of distress about basic life necessities, or is this illustration of maximum personal fulfilment?” What conceptions of ‘well-being’ are assumed by tertiary educators, agencies and workers themselves when a professional ethical code states the purpose in the work is pursuing human well-being?

For a general overview of the shifts in conceiving professional ethics in social work, Reamer (1999) provides this typology;

1. The morality period – in which good practice was seen as that which upheld conventional morality,
2. The values period – in which social workers debated the underlying values of their profession, such as ‘respect for all people’, and ‘justice’,
3. The period of ethical theory and decision making – in which conscious exploration of theories was related to the development of skills in applying ethics in practice,

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3 Ideas associated with ‘wellbeing’ vary in social and psychological literature. Some examples are: Maslow (1908-1970), a humanist psychologist, theorising there exists a human hierarchy of needs and that at an ultimate level, humans have ‘being needs’, including the need for self-actualisation and self-esteem (1970). Erikson’s ‘ego-identity’ and Jung’s ‘individuation’ are other psychological terms that accommodate the notion of ultimate self-fulfilment (Porpora 2001). Charles Taylor (1989) describes the ‘hypergood’ as the ultimate purpose in human life. Our ‘hypergoods’ are “goods which not only are incomparably more important than others, but provide the standpoint from which (other values) must be weighed, judged, decided about” (Taylor 1989: 63).
4. The period of ethical standards and risk management (the current era) – in which ethics are prescribed in great detail as standards of conduct and so, ethical risks.

In Reamer’s typology can be recognised significant shifts in terminology when referring to that cluster of phenomena pertaining to the good, moral, ethical or of value. What was earlier referred to as ‘morality’ became ‘ethics’, and then ‘ethical standards’. To gain an understanding of why this terminology has shifted I will canvass scholarship that has traced the evolution of moral focus in professional caring work. While I would have liked to have focused on Australia for this discussion, privileging the uniqueness of an Australian vision for caring work is hampered by gaps in, or unhelpfully biased knowledge concerning the historical development in this work (Mendes 2005). The first and only national history of secular social work in Australia was researched by John Lawrence, published in 1965.

Lawrence’s work traces back to the 1920s only (Hughes 2002), the time when social work schools were being set up in Australian university settings. Therefore, the focus of the earliest history of national Australian social work occurs when this field was already being influenced by forces which privileged expertise and technical proficiency. In this period social work was being conceived by at least one scholar as the “science of doing good” (cited in Woodroffe 1964: 48). Yet, other than modernist ideals of the role of science in enabling solutions to social problems, where else was Australian social work getting its ideas for its vision? In a challenge to the ‘terra nullius’ version of the history of Australian social work, Hughes’ unpublished thesis (2002) on the work of Catholic Sisters in Sydney in the nineteenth century has canvassed the role of religion as a motivating and shaping force in the provision of welfare. Her documentation of the religious based, and compassionate stance, taken toward the poor by the Sisters in this era, challenges arguments made by Peel (2004, in Mendes 2005) and Musgrove (2003, in Mendes 2005) who claim pre-twentieth century versions of charity were versions of middle class morality, where poverty and hardship was deemed the fault of the individual.
For other clues on what ideas shaped the vision of early Australian social work, Garton (1990, in Mendes 2005: 125) says Australian social workers were trained on the British model which emphasised the social causes of poverty. Bisman (2004) discusses the overtly moral grounds that were articulated in the formative years of social work in the UK. The first secretary of the Charity Organisation Societies (C.O.S), established in 1870, makes the claim “(this) organisation might bring to bear on the removal and prevention of evils ... it could renew and discipline the life of the people by a nobler, more devoted, more scientific religious charity... it could help us to realise in society the religion of charity without the sectarianism of religion” (Loch 1904: 67-8, cited by Bisman 2004). Early social work efforts in the UK viewed society as a moral community; a body of people held together primarily by intimate sentiments of responsibility, love, duty, caring and sharing (Leiby 1984:535). Bisman (2004:112) notes that alongside a commitment to set things ‘right’, early social work developments in the UK were motivated by religious evangelism, concern about potential violence from the existing social unrest, and the health and financial cost of poverty. The importance of values, then, for both ‘being’ and doing was clearly articulated in early accounts of organised British social work.

A new era of social work in the UK occurred when social work schools became part of universities; the C.O.S founded the first school of sociology in 1903, and by 1912 the school joined the London School of Economics as its Department of Social Science and Administration. Bisman says this era is notable for ‘the worship of the scientific method’ (2004:13). In this era there was a focus on developing knowledge and an empirically informed skill base. According to Bisman, this was to the detriment of social work concentrating on its moral vision of the ‘common good’. She laments the loss of vision in social work that has corresponded with the professions pursuit of applied knowledge and technical expertise, observing “without values and morality, what good is knowledge attained and skills used by social workers?” (2004: 115). Bisman comments that the only thing that will mark out professional caring and welfare work from other professions is the moral vision, or ends served. McBeath & Webb (2002) make a complementary observation in saying the priority of social work today is as a task. They say in the
contemporary social work context, appeals to ideological, political or religious conceptions of wellbeing are bracketed from the ‘real’ task of practice performance. Freud & Krug (2002: 476) also argue that issues of vision have been minimised in professional dialogue, and that the profession has perhaps been led away from humanistic striving. They suggest this may be due to the search for respectable professionalism through seeking licensure, the adoption of scientific language, and increasing demands on the profession to claim having technical expertise.

The picture drawn by these authors is one where social work has lost its way in terms of ‘vision’, and is instead focusing on professional competency and technical expertise. If, as these scholars indicate, professional social work has now a diminished or lost vision, it seems important to ask this question: What visions, values and moral-ethical authorities are influencing workers practice? To begin this trajectory of exploration in the thesis, I consider the role of professional ethical codes, ‘best-practice frameworks’ and consider critical commentary about these things as sources for ethical practice.

1.2.4 Professional ethical codes and best practice frameworks: Overview and critiques

The purpose of professional ethical codes is to enhance public accountability through dictating expected and acceptable behaviour by managers, staff and volunteers (McAuliffe 2005a). Professional codes are also a tool for, and result of, increasing professionalisation of disciplines like nursing and social work (Freud & Krug 2002:481). Currently, Australian human service organisations and professions have adopted the ‘values’ approach to promoting ethical practice, which involves the development and promotion of professional standards and guidelines as articulated in formal ethical codes (Lonne et al. 2004).

Based on reviewing a number of Australian professional codes, including medicine (AMA 2003), nursing (ANC et al. 2001), occupational therapy (OTA 2001), physiotherapy (APA 2003), psychology (APS 20024), social work (AASW 2002) and teaching (NSWTF 2002), Hugman observes the overall structure and content of codes are

4 The APS Code of Ethics (2007) has changed structure considerably; however is still based on principles.
similar (2005: 143). These codes provide statements about right action and are based on a pluralist ethical approach that adopts ‘principalism’. Codes also make reference to individual worker virtues.

A closer inspection of the Australian Association of Social Work ethical code (1999) serves these observations. The purpose of social work is stated as the pursuit and maintenance of human well-being; having an “equal commitment to enabling individual and social wellbeing, and working to achieve social justice through social change activity”. Descriptive statements about how the individual social worker might achieve this include: upholding people’s rights; pursuing equitable access to social, political and economic resources; raising awareness of structural inequities, and acting to bring about social change. The ‘five basic values’ underlying social work are: “human dignity and worth; social justice, service to humanity; integrity and finally, competence” (p.8). The bulk of the code’s content involves explicating these values in the form of principles. Prescriptive statements made about the ethical comportment of the social worker are not absolute (pp.11-21) however personal characteristics of social workers are named. These include the need for workers to have dignity, and be honest, reliable and impartial (p.9).

A criticism that can be made about this professional code, and arguably other human service work ethical codes, is in recognising the disjuncture between idealism and realism. Ideal images permeate these professional codes. For example, the Australian Institute of Welfare and Community Workers ethical code (1999) states the aim of practice is with ‘maximising the human potential and worth of all persons’. The problem of disjuncture between such idealistic aims, and the vision promoted in everyday worker’s practice, is at the heart of this thesis’ concerns. Do workers in violence prevention education wish to promote an extensive vision of ‘the good’ in human relationships, or is this work merely about achieving an absence of abuse or violence? Is the absence of harm or violence in human relationships the same thing as an ethical or desirable ‘good’?
Some scholars have criticised idealism in human services’ professional codes. Briskman & Noble (1999) bring attention to the AASW ethical code’s invocation of concern for broader social justice and structural disadvantage, which can be undermined by the emphasis on individual choice and individual wellbeing in the stated principles. Briskman & Noble’s (1999: 61) empirical research with Australian social work academics, found salient concern that this code fails to commit to progressive politics, and concern that social justice provisions in the ethical code do not extend to political advocacy. Others (Ife 1997) have brought attention to the AASW code of ethics’ silence of the political-social context of ethical decision making. Freud & Krug (2002) make the general claim that formalised social work values are idealistic, and that the reality of the work involves being pulled in conflicting directions in order to co-operate with employing agencies, government and other authorities to which they are accountable. They soberly note the participation of German social workers –in the name of social justice –participating in their nations’ anti-Semitism (Heide 1999, in Freud & Krug 2002:475). Closer to home, Australian social workers have been instrumental in the removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families in the last century, under the banner of so-called ethical practice (Mendes 2005).

More generally, the purpose and function of professional ethical codes has been widely criticised in the human services literature, despite the key role formalised codes play in service accreditation (McAuliffe 2005a). Some of these criticisms are directed at the assumed philosophy in professional codes (Freud & Krug 2002; Briskman & Noble 1999). These scholars suggest alternative approaches must be developed to enhance worker ethics, and call for increased focus on individual virtue. However, there is another movement to be reckoned with in determining ethical practice, the evidence based practice movement.

Of particular interest in some recent writing on professional ethics is a trend where ethical practice is used interchangeably with ‘evidence-based’ practice (Gray & McDonald 2006; McAuliffe 2005; Lonne et al. 2004). Gray & McDonald (2006) observe that in the neo-liberal or New Public Management era, ‘good' practice is conceived as
that practice which is accountable to empirical evidence, whereby good practice is synonymous with effective practice. In a study trialling the Social Work Ethics Audit (developed in the US) with social work practitioners in Queensland, McAuliffe (2005) observed practice ‘improvement’ has become synonymous with updating policy and procedures. Lonne et al. (2004) discuss the changed interface of employee accountability in the New Public Management era where ethical accountability is increasingly to the funding provider and away from the client. They observe that the ‘values’ ethical approach in contemporary human services work has a changed accountability structure, and that ethical ‘values’ adopted by market-businesses are not the same as those advocated in caring work (2004:347). For example, a private childcare agency might ‘value’ maximising shareholder profits, above the value of providing quality education.

An interesting thesis about why alternative approaches to moral vision and ethics in the human services – alternative to professional ethical codes and evidence based approaches – has been argued by Ferguson (2001). Ferguson says the fundamental concern of social work in a post-traditional context is ‘life politics’; “the heart of life politics… is a new relationship between the personal and the political, expertise and lay people, in which practices such as social work take the form of life-planning for late-modern citizens” (2001:42). Ferguson observes new skills are required in this era because workers cannot assume fixed social norms, and can no longer accept the simplistic dualism evident in ‘emancipatory’ politics, “social work practice (in this era) is not simply attempting to free vulnerable clients from violence and oppression, but enabling (people) to explore who they are and how they should live” (p.53). Ferguson suggests new skills are required given workers engagement with ‘life-political questions’ in client work; when having conversations about self-actualisation and how to live an authentic life (2001:43). Ferguson’s observations are of interest to, and have direct relevance for, the findings of this inquiry. He observes that a worker’s role can reach beyond structural and social emancipation issues, into the realm of personal (existential, self-actualisation) development (2001:42). When this occurs, as indeed it does in the field of violence prevention education, we might ask: What philosophies or beliefs do workers draw on to guide others in asking ‘life-political’ questions? Do violence prevention educators
recognise when they have moved beyond the domain of emancipatory politics, to promote visions of human flourishing in their work?

It is evident that the question of guiding ethical sources remains unsettled in the human services. The following section aims to show why the question of guiding moral and ethical authority is such a complex issue, through considering the variety of moral and ethical frameworks that have been recognised as important in shaping the human services tradition.

1.3 Ethical and moral frameworks shaping human services work

This section canvasses ideas in historical and contemporary moral philosophy that have been influential in shaping conceptions of ‘ethics’ in the human services. While there is a level of agreement in the literature concerning the question of which moral traditions *have* shaped the human services, there is less agreement concerning the question of which moral traditions or ethical principles *should* guide practice. Historically speaking, different practice contexts in the human services have dictated the relevance of some moral philosophies, and not others (Banks 2006:4). Some scholars suggest different moral and ethical theories are compatible. Others argue they are not, and dictate the relevance or superiority of some ethical approaches over others.

In the contemporary literature pre-enlightenment moral philosophy is being re-cast as having a role in ethical practice. Specifically, ‘virtue ethics’, which emphasises the individual moral agent who has acquired virtues commensurable with the pursuit of the good life, has gained greater visibility in the literature. Some scholars (McBeath & Webb 2002) argue virtue ethics is the way forward for professional ethics. Others disagree, and regard the merits of Kantian deontology and/or utilitarianism as essentials if professional codes of ethics are to provide a sound basis for enacting social justice and human rights (Clark 2006; Banks 2006; Bersoff 1996). Below, I critically review the main content of ethical theories recognised as instrumental in the human service work legacy. Critical commentary shows that the problem of moral-ethicality is undecided. In choosing one framework over another, tensions still remain. Inevitably, there is much simplification in
this discussion but sufficient information to observe distinctions between moral-ethical frameworks.

The issue of moral-ethical visioning in practice; how workers promote moral goods, is at the heart of this thesis. Because the participants in this inquiry promote desirable and good relationships in their prevention work, I wanted to learn not only how they promote these moral goods, but why. What moral and ethical approaches or beliefs guide these promotions? Because the question of guiding or influential moral and ethical belief is such a significant aspect of this inquiry, the review provided in this section is extensive. My intention is to show that current ethical trends in human services work have a history and broader disciplinary origins. The need for workers, and even for academics teaching human services courses, to have a broader understanding of what ethical traditions shape conceptions of ‘ethical practice’ has been recognised elsewhere (Gray & Gibbons 2007).

1.3.1 Kantian deontology and Utilitarianism

Discussions of professional ethics in the late twentieth century have tended to emphasise the influence of two moral philosophies that can be described as modernist. First, is Immanuel Kant’s (1724-1804) deontological theory, and secondly, utilitarianism (Banks 2006, 2001; Lebacqz 1986). Two main themes permeating the liberal modernist philosophies of Kant and utilitarianism include: humanism combined with individualism; or replacing God with humans being at the centre of the universe, from where a human can be all powerful if their will is strong enough; and universalism; the idea of applicability for all humans, for all times (Carroll 2004). MacIntyre (1999) says deontological and utilitarian ethics aim toward human beings thinking for themselves about the good, rather than in accordance with prescriptions from an external authority. However, these theories also provide robust general principles of right conduct applicable to moral agents (Clark 2006:76). Hugman (2003:7) suggests Kantian deontology and utilitarianism share the following assumptions:

1. The moral value of individual persons as autonomous rational beings,
2. The universality of values and principles,
3. The possibility of deducing moral ‘laws’ through rational reflection,
4. The goal of individual liberty (including freedom and emancipation) in society.

Through offering abstract principles for the neutral agent to apply to moral quandaries, both theories are intentionally silent on the specific content of the good life (Richardson 2003).

Kant’s rationalist ethics centres on the moral law; a universal code that is *a priori* of humans. Here, the principal task of human reason is conceived as understanding the moral law; where the moral law is itself built into, or is an expression of, practical reason. Known through reason, indeed humans are depicted as knowing what they ought to do and as having the freedom to do it, the moral law is acted out through will, where ought is synonymous with can. Autonomous choice is therefore the basis for ethical principles, according to some interpretations of Kant (Carroll 2004:149, Lebacqz 1986:33, Horton & Mendus 1994:7). Two further principles of Kantian ethics have fallen heavily across professional ethics. Firstly, Kant proposed that individuals must be seen as ends, not as means (Stumpf 1994:707). The individual is a rational being with an autonomous will, recognised as valuable in themself. To treat people simply as a means or as an object is to deny their humanity. Secondly, Kant advocated acting practically ‘always on that maxim whose universality as a law you can at the same time will’ and ‘never to act otherwise than so that I could also will that my maxim should become a universal law’ (1994:705). In other words, act in obedience to the universal law of reason, irrespective of the consequences of the act –irrespective of personal interest. This is what good people do, according to Kantian reasoning, it their duty to act according to the moral law (Carroll 2004:149). Because of these ideas, Kant was a *deontologist*, in the sense he assigned a primary place to duty regardless of the circumstance in which people find themselves. Kantian principles, and the development of them in the second half of the twentieth century, have materialised in formally recognised universal human rights, and have provided political democracy with a moral basis (Clark 2006). The concept of ‘*rights*’ is a pervasively used moral concept that has originated from deontological theory (Sumner 2000:289). Rights function as moral safeguards in social life, which can be invoked as trumps against the pursuit of collective goals.
The principle in utilitarianism according to Mill is ‘the greatest happiness principle (holding) that actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to promote the reverse of happiness’ (Stumpf 1994: 709). This framework is sometimes called consequentialism, or an ‘outcome based’ principle. It is basic in its reckoning: the right thing to do is what produces the most good (Lebacqz 1986: 15). This principle has had great influence and is still apparent in ‘cost-benefit analyses’, defences of market economies, and is a common sense approach used with decision making in groups. In adopting values like ‘best outcomes’ and ‘effective practice’ (McAuliffe & Congress 2006; Lonne et al. 2006) it can be recognised that the human services field is extensively influenced by utilitarianism.

What do commentators make of the abstract principles advocated in the works of Kantian and utilitarian theorists? Critical evaluations of assumptions in these theories suggest they demonstrate a limited understanding of human ‘nature’ and the potentials of the human agent; and secondly, they construct a one size fits all approach to different people’s social and political positioning. Thirdly, there is criticism that these frameworks fail to provide any means of arbitrating between different conceptions of ‘the good’.

On the limited understanding of human nature, Benhabib (1992:49) says that “a major weakness of cognitive and procedural ethical theories has been their reductionist treatment of the emotional and affective bases of moral judgement and conduct”. There is a general devaluation of the active role of human consciousness, and human agency, in constructing our reality in deontological moral philosophy (Nash 2002:49). Also, procedural and utilitarian versions of ethics downplay the possibility that emotions can play a role, alongside thinking, in our ethical commitments.

Another assumption in deontology and utilitarianism about the ‘nature’ of humans that commentators have been critical of is the idea that people in every social context can

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5 This idea has been developed by a number of feminist ethical scholars (Gilling 1982; Noddings 1984), described further below.
exercise their free will in order to be dutiful to (Kant), or seek the outcome of (utilitarianism), a rational morality. The picture sketched in Kantian deontology and utilitarianism is a moral actor who is dispassionate in their decision making, and who is capable of separating themselves from their context and commitments. However, it has also been argued, people cannot detach from the ‘roles’ into which they have been ‘drafted’ (Macintyre 1981: 216). The pursuit of a good life is perhaps not a matter of individuals acting independently of their context, but “is realised through cooperative action relative to the culture’s values” (Tam 1998, in Clark 2006). A further criticism on this theme is the assumption that people are equally capable of using rationality to arrive at ethical decisions. Without access to sufficient resources an individual could become powerless to act, or may be disinclined to act. One particular area in human services work where this can be demonstrated is the area of informed consent (Clifford & Burke 2005).

The classic Kantian respect for autonomy seeks to avoid coercion and ignorance, but does so on the assumption of neutral provision of information to a client who may or may not have freedom and/or the cognitive capacity to make a decision. Clearly, in some areas of human services work, social oppression interferes with a person’s ability to exercise autonomy. For example, some people rely on a sponsor, parent or guardian because of mental illness, refugee status or their disability. Collier (1999: 99) observes we are not all equally good at evaluating evidence, nor do we have equal access to the evidence.

A second area of criticism directed at Kantian deontology and utilitarianism concerns the inflexibility of abstract principles. Which principle should we abide by in the messiness and complexity of everyday living? If we focus only on what could be a ‘good outcome’, or people as ends –what about all the interactions in between? This scope of criticism is directed also at neo-liberal and late twentieth century ‘radical’ trends in human services ethics. For example, social work scholars McBeath & Webb (2002) consider the narrowness of the ethical law of anti-discrimination. With its roots in the Kantian notion of people being an end in themselves, the law of anti-discrimination has perhaps “reduced humanity to narrow sociological driven categories of race, gender and disability” (2002: 1019). McBeath & Webb argue that because the moral obligation
toward these groups has been seen as self evident, via the principle of anti-discrimination, discussion has been shut down. A similar challenge is made by feminists concerning the legalistic way that rights discourse has been shaped (see, for example Hardwig 1990). Feminists have seen the discourse of rights as locking us into a legalistic form of thinking where justice becomes the pre-eminent framework, based on an assumption that individuals are indifferent to each other, and therein need the protection of fenced off private domains (Sumner 2000:296). While a justice framework may be appropriate for the public sphere, some feminist ethicists argue the principle of loyalty, or the virtue of trust, might be more important in close personal relationships (Young 1997).

The third area of criticism toward abstract ethical principles pertains to the assumption that the moral is a consensual notion and can be the logical outcome of rational choice. Lebacqz (1986:41) draws on Marxist and critical theory scholars to make the charge that the assumptions driving concepts including what is ‘logical’ in these theories, have deep biases. She observes that concepts of humans as free, equal and rational are not neutral concepts, because in a Marxist perspective human nature cannot be defined in separation from class. The a-historical, ‘whole world’ assumptions in the theories are antithetical to some basic Marxist assumptions about class struggle and social change, with Lebacqz (1986:11) contending “struggle and conflict may indeed be good”. Additionally, MacIntyre (1999) has discussed the naïve belief in the power of reason to find moral truths in Kantian and utilitarianism, in saying the absence of any overarching set of values or traditions makes it impossible to decide which rationally argued view of right action deserves support.

Despite accusations directed at Kantian deontology and utilitarianism in focusing on abstracted principles and outcomes, the achievements of these theories should not be underestimated in shaping modern welfare systems. Kant’s moral theory has been particularly influential in the way moral debate is conducted, in providing principles that privilege universal human rights (Clark 2006, Carroll 2004, Houston 2003). The silence of these theories on the specifics of a good life, and what is ‘good’ for different people in diverse cultural settings, is the mainstay of the criticisms reviewed. The paradox for
human service workers created by this (Clark 2006:78), where workers must be committed to liberal conceptions of rights and duties, yet engage with people who have specific values for the good life, leads to the argument that the liberal individualism of modernist theories does not alone enable ethical professional practice. A number of scholars are discussing the value of virtue ethics in the wake of this paradox. I discuss this now.

1.3.2 Old and ‘new’ versions of virtue ethics, communitarianism, and feminist ethics
The approach to moral thought that emphasises virtue, or ‘good character’, as the basis for ethics predominated among the ancient Greek philosophers. Aristotle (384–322 B.C.) is credited with the idea that a systemic method can be applied for the self-development of a virtuous character (Hugman 2005). His basic commitment was to common sense, seeking a theory that would allow for both moral values and scientific truths (Mautner 1997). The basis of morality, according to Aristotle, could be found in the structure of human nature and accordingly, the ‘good’ person is the person who is fulfilling their right function as a person. Aristotle said each person must work toward the best state of being, which is *eudaimonia*; “a state apt to exercise deliberate choice, being in the relative mean (between the extremes excess and defect), determined by reason, and as the man of practical wisdom would determine” (cited in Stumpf 1994). Aristotle said moral virtues must be learned and practiced (Stumpf 1994: 80-107); that people are not naturally or spontaneously virtuous. While Aristotle posed that virtues can be taught, he conceived this would occur only in a community that shares and embodies a tradition of values (Kitchener 1996). For this reason, a traditional virtue approach to ethics and morality is *normative*. It accommodates beliefs about the right character necessary in making ethical claims about how people should act.

The consideration that virtue ethics might have something to offer modern professional ethics in the human services can be traced to the mid 1980’s (McBeath & Webb 2002). This renewed interest in ‘virtue’ ethics was developed in reaction to the hegemony of abstract Kantian or utilitarian principles. It returned the construction of professional ethics to the less formulaic realities of each individual’s lived experience, in focusing on
the character of the agent rather than whether an agent’s action conforms to abstract moral rules (Clark 2006; Richardson 2003; McBeath & Webb 2002). Similar to classical virtue ethics, the ‘new’ virtue ethics places emphasis on an individual’s judgement, experience, understanding, reflection and disposition (McBeath & Webb 2002). ‘Virtues’ made reference to in the human services literature include benevolence, compassion, loyalty and temperance –and the holistic idea that a combination of these virtues can enable a truthful engagement between worker and client (Clark 2006: 87). Hugman (2005: 9) observes three particular strands in the theoretical revival of ‘virtue’ in the human services; subjectivity (or ‘post-modern ethics’, discussed in the following section), emotion (as playing an important role in ethical living) & experience – or relational ethics.

The strands of virtue ethics identified by Hugman as emotion and experience can be associated most cogently with feminist ethical theory, in its various versions. Early in the development of feminist ethics, Carol Gilligan (1982) provided a vision of gender based normative ethics, in advocating that women and men have distinct paths of moral development. Gilligan (1982: 19) argued women supposedly develop a way of thinking that is relational; relying on personal communication techniques that accommodate the needs of others and strive to maintain harmony between people. In contrast, Gilligan argued men develop impersonal modes of thinking; they value abstract reasoning and refer to external rules and principles in discerning good conduct. Another key feminist ethicist who has written about an ‘ethics of care’ is Nel Noddings. Noddings (2003; 1984) argues that an ethics of care is not primarily an individual virtue, or something that inheres in the subject. Neither does it centre on obedience to abstract commands. Instead an ethics of care is relational, a reciprocity between the ‘one-caring’ and the ‘cared-for’. According to Noddings (1984:14), caring requires an alternative form of knowing that apprehends the reality of another person; “the displacement of interest from my own reality to the reality of the other”. Noddings distinguishes women and men’s capacity to care in this relational way in saying that women have ‘biologically facilitative factors’ that are not available to men (1984:130). Evidently, there has been criticism of the naturalism and foundationalism in both Gilligan’s and Noddings work. Gould (1988)
observes that Gilligan’s dualistic positioning of female/male approaches to ethics hides how different women as a group, and men as a group, are. Jean Grimshaw (1986) argues that a separation of female and male natures can be politically defeatist, and will not be helpful for feminism. Grimshaw is doubtful about the generalisations attributed to women and men in naturalistic feminist ethics. She sees that both women and men employ a complicated ethical approach based on reasoning.

Despite the rich variety in feminist writing on ethics, it is possible to draw out salient themes. Koehn (1998: 5) observes that the key motifs in contemporary feminist ethical discourse include: a focus on relationships, cooperation and connection; benevolent concern for the most vulnerable; valuing difference over the value of consistency and; imaginative discourse, rather than deductive reasoning. Further, there is recognition in contemporary feminist ethics that the ‘good’ is embedded in a divided and unequal social world. This recognition of power differences has prompted feminist ethics to resist universal ethical principles (Koehn 1998:161), including universal statements about human virtues. Feminists have been critical of the traditional virtue ethics approach, bringing attention to how ‘virtue’ has been defined in a way that excludes women. Minnich (1993: 73) observes that in this tradition, virtue derives from the Latin virtus, “manliness, valor, worth etc. from vir, man”. She says by such definition there cannot be a ‘virtuous’ woman, except perhaps a “manly woman”. Minnich, like feminist ethical writers before her, would have us locate a fuller array of virtues for humans of all sorts, and do so by remembering and revaluing what it is to be a woman (1993: 78). In casting a wider net around what might be considered a virtue, Iris Marion Young (1997) has discussed the virtue of cultivating ‘moral humility’ in order to listen well to others.

A different theoretical appropriation of virtue ethics is found in communitarianism; a social and political theory emerging in the 1980’s which places emphasis on collectively shared conceptions of the good. Communitarian theorists, including Michael Sandal and (earlier work by) Alasdair MacIntyre, conceive that the virtues needed for human flourishing, can only be exercised in a society where there is a communal way of living (Mautner 1997). Within this, our flourishing “depends on those virtues that enable us to
function as independent and practical reasoners, and those virtues that enable us to acknowledge the nature and extent of our dependence on others” (MacIntyre 1999:155). A virtue here becomes related to specific practices, the whole of human life, and a moral tradition condoned by a community (Hugman 2005). What is ‘good’ or ideal will only be discovered by entering into relationships which constitute communities, where communities have a shared vision concerning the good. In communitarian ethics, because virtues can only be developed and recognised communally, a level of consensus needs to exist in the given social context.

Critical commentaries on the uptake of virtue, or the focus on an individual’s character, in application to professional ethics range from outright dismissal to nuanced critique. An example of outright dismissal of the relevance and functionality of virtue ethics is expressed by Bersoff (1996), in relation to ethics in counselling psychology. He observes that most cases brought to the American Psychological Association’s Ethics Committee are to do with issues concerning principles: lying, cheating, or stealing. Bersoff says the way to deal with unprofessional conduct should remain with overarching principles, enshrined in ethical codes and the law, not in “the singular vagaries of a psychologist’s character” (1996: 89). He states that communitarianism, and virtue ethics, can result in immorality if the collective ‘wisdom’ of populations is characterised by racism, sexism and other prejudices that contrast with the de-ontological principles of human rights. Other scholars, also, suggest that too strong a reliance on virtue ethics for the purposes of professional ethics could be detrimental. Clark (2006) observes that the disputed meanings of virtues like benevolence, loyalty or temperance can quickly erode their having a real meaning for the purposes of ethical human service work. Further, Houston (2003) brings attention to problems when defining virtue, arguing that the theory of virtue ethics involves tautology. He says Aristotle wrote that we define virtue through looking at the character traits of the virtuous person. However, in order to identify the virtuous person, we must have some preconceived ideas about ‘virtue’ so we know what to look for. Houston (2003:820) argues it is necessary to have preconceived ideas of the good, in order to make Aristotle’s virtue work as a moral theory.
A final critical observation canvassed in this literature concerns the problem of teaching virtues to professionals. Aristotle believed that virtues are developed during childhood and youth, by ‘the judicious application of pleasure and pain, when we are punished and rewarded’ (cited in Kitchener 1996:95). Aristophanes (448 B.C.–338 B.C) considered the likelihood one will possess a virtuous character will be fixed by the age of seven (Nash 2002). If this view is accepted, then tertiary education is already too late to develop virtuous character; tertiary students studying caring vocations will either be virtuous, or not. And if it is not already too late, can tertiary human service work courses actually implant virtue in students? From Socrates point of view, the purpose of teaching someone about courage (a virtue) was not so they could define it, or defend that definition in debate. The purpose of teaching someone about courage is to make them courageous (Rouner 1993:141). Do university courses have sufficient impact, in terms of socialising students into desired virtues, that virtues are actually inculcated? How can human service work courses go about inculcating virtues like love, loyalty and compassion? A related however separate question, is the question of whether virtue can be learned. This dilemma has been around at least since Socrates, who defined virtue as ‘insight’ – virtue is to be re-collected or sought by humans, not learned ([1844] Kierkegaard ed. 2000:117). Vexatious questions remain about how to teach and learn virtue. Also, problems remain with identifying what is a virtue. Who decides what should be considered a virtue? Who can decide what is good in human practice?

Relying on virtue ethics as a way forward for developing professional ethics poses some uneasy questions. However, the appeal of virtue ethics lies in its concern with the whole person acting ethically in the flow of living (Richardson 2003). Its appeal also lies in developing professional workers reflexivity; in a virtue ethical approach each ethical choice is the choice about what character we have become, and strive to become (Nash 2002:62).

1.3.3 Continental and post-modern ethics

While not sharing the same level of recognition in the human services literature as the moral philosophies discussed in the previous sections, ‘post-modern’ approaches to ethics
can be recognised as an emerging trend. The origins of post-modern ethical approaches are with the Continental tradition; ethical thinkers including Nietzsche, Sartre, and Levinas, who shared a common value that there is something deeply suspect about morality itself (Schroeder 2000:375). Given this heritage, it becomes understandable that post-modern approaches to ethics are highly sceptical about moral truths.

A primary goal for Continental philosophers has been to determine the conditions for ethical flourishing for various types of individuals, rather than to establish the borders for behaviour that must not be transgressed. Becoming ethical, according to continental and post-modern scholars, involves a transformation of personal existence. Attention is paid to the cultural, psychological, interpersonal and emotional conditions of the personal transformation that makes ethical achievement possible (Schroeder 2000:375). The idea of the ‘ethical relation’ is a central motif, also, in post-modern ethics. For example, Bauman’s version of the ethical return in contemporary society is premised upon the primacy of a relationship between self and other. Following Levinas (1905-1995), Bauman asserts this ‘ethical relation’ or ethical responsibility is a priori, and suggests ethical commitment to the Other precedes awareness (Robinson 2008:63; Shaw 2004:82). A key idea in post-modern approaches is not to seek new certainties, in the sense of fixed eternal standards, but via ‘inter-subjectivity’ each individual is to seek moral responsibility in themself and in others (Hugman 2005:112).

The ‘post-modern’ genre in social theory is united by a commitment to heterogeneity and the question of difference. A contribution of this genre that is perhaps the most influential and contentious is the challenge to modernity, especially bearing on questions of values and ethics (Cooper & Blair 2007; Parton 2003; Leonard 1997). In the modern ethical frame, heavily shaped by Kantian deontology and utilitarianism, the goal of professional ethics was to produce knowledge through which we can have greater certainty of what is right. In distinction, ‘post-modernity’ rejects the idea that any one system of belief or

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6 However, not all post-modern theory makes a strong case for ethical responsibility toward others. For example, Foucault’s requirements of autonomy and freedom (where freedom is understood as a kind of relation to oneself conditioned by the degree of mastery over oneself), stands in contrast with the Levinasian ethical imperative of responsibility for the Other (Venn 1997:2).
theory can produce truth. Despite different camps in post-modern theory positing different attitudes to the future of ethical structures in practice\textsuperscript{7}, an essential element associated with post-modern perspectives of ethics is the plurality of truth; the plurality of goodness or rightness. Post-modern versions of ethics do not seek to establish what might be called ‘positive goods’\textsuperscript{8} (MacIntyre 2000). In distinction, post-modern ethics proposes a subjectivity of method where claims to truth can only be seen as reflecting the particular stance or position of the person asserting that truth (Hugman 2005: 106). Less clear in the post-modern ethics literature is any distinction between the idea that what is \textit{taken} to be true is relative to the individual (a pervasive theme in social theory), in separation from the position that what is \textit{really} true is up to the individual. This predicament seems understandable given the focus on subjectivity, and on comparative investigation in post-modern approaches to ethics (Cooper & Blair 2007). In the post-modern approach to ethics, ontological and normative statements are generally snubbed.

Scholars interested in post-modern themes for the purposes of ethics in human services work advocate the value of inter-subjectivity in reconstructing new ethical forms (Hugman 2005; Parton 2003; Briskman & Noble 1999). The premise for this inter-subjectivity, at least according to Bauman, is the absence of ethical truths ‘out-there’, external to how we perceive them or interact with them. Instead, the grounds of morality begin with an individual, who is now the beginning point, “\textit{moral responsibility is the first reality of the self….a starting point rather than a product of society}” (Bauman 1992: 13). The processes of ethical competence become relational in the post-modern approach, where each individual seeks moral responsibility in themselves and seeks it in others (Bauman 1994:19; Hugman 2005:112).

According to Briskman & Noble (1999:60), conceptual markers of post-modern theory shaping a ‘post-modern ethics’ for human services work include particularism,

\textsuperscript{7} For example, Rosenau (1992) has differentiated between ‘skeptical’ and ‘affirmative’ versions of post-modernism. The former is characterized by nihilism, while affirmative versions take a more courageous stance in the face of uncertainty.

\textsuperscript{8} The term ‘positive goods’ refers to ethical goods that are an end, and not a merely a cause. MacIntyre (2000) discusses equality and freedom as being causal or minimum ‘goods’. However, caritas (care), love and life are construed as positive goods.
difference, relativism, contingency, fragmentation and deconstruction. These must be worked out with, or used as correctives to, the modernist precursors of universalism, commonality, truth, structure, essentialism and determinism in a desirable conception of professional ethics. Briskman & Noble argue that the challenge of reconciling post-modern and modernist themes has been realised somewhat in the New Zealand social work ethical code, with a bi-focal epistemological framing of Pakeha and Maori worldviews. A further potential for an applied post-modern ethics is advocated by Hugman (2005). Here, ethical codes will be treated as ‘discursive documents’, with the differentiation between ethical principles and the interpretation of them becoming the task of inter-subjective encounters. In this situation, ethics would become the responsibility of everyone involved in the human service encounter, and not only ‘ethical specialists’.

The potential for a ‘post-modern’ ethics in human services work has been criticised on the basis that there exists an intractable problem of relativism in post-modern ethics, that ethical conceptions always in flux, and always to be negotiated cannot stack up in a risk management culture that demands accountability. Banks observes (2001:141-2) that inter-subjective approaches to ethics are not strong enough on which to build a professional community in which there is consistency and accountability. In an article defending rational approaches to practice in response to Gray & Webb’s (2008) ‘social work as art’ perspective, Healy writes (2008:195) “it is simply inconceivable that a social worker could ethically, let alone legally, participate in risk assessment without reference to the most rigorous and credible evidence available”. Clifford (2002:40) argues that in the current (post-modern) practice context, uncertainty needs to be resolved “as well as possible” if human services work is to uphold its ethical commitments to those most vulnerable in society. An unrestrained emphasis on ‘difference’, or practice as art, characteristic in post-modern approaches to ethics, could lead to an intense individualism where ultimately the individual becomes licensed to make what they will of the good (solipsism).
Related to this criticism, is the perspective that ‘post-modern’ approaches to ethics show an excessive reluctance to address fundamental questions of ontology (Smith 1997: 3). In foregrounding the array of contingencies and different points of view available with respect to the question of what it means to live a good life, post-modern approaches to ethics can demonstrate blinkeredness about what we share in being human\(^9\). Generally speaking, the post-modern approach actively keeps ontological issues out of view (Archer 2000).

To summarise, post-modern ethicists in the area of human service work bring attention to the changing ways that ethical questions may need to be approached in the current social and political era. A post-modern ethical approach will resist the dominance of modern ethical traditions, interrogate the discourses of these traditions, and return the focus to ‘ethical subjectivity’ in our seeking out our own and others ethical responsibilities (Cooper & Blair 2007). However, those critical of a ‘post-modern’ ethics might contest that the promise of ethical subjectivity can be undermined by ‘real’ social constraints. According to other moral traditions there are more important ethical tasks than pursuing “the endless practice of (creating) freedom” in relationships; the ultimate goal of ethical work according to social historian Michel Foucault (1984:351).

1.3.4 Religious and spiritual morality

Religion provides complex moral-ethical frameworks that cut across a divide between external principles or internal virtue. The purview of religion is to offer a life-encompassing vision of the good, and vocabularies through which to reflect on questions of ultimate meaning (Porpora 2001: 54). In contrast with the other moral frameworks reviewed in this chapter, most religions give transcendence to morality. Moral obligations—for example the obligation to love others in the Christian faith - are accepted as coming from God and are founded in God’s nature. Maimonides (1135-1204), a Jewish philosopher, contended that all morality and ethics is founded on a desire to imitate God.

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\(^9\) Related to the uptake of ‘post-modern ethics’, MacIntyre (2007) described a trend toward ethical emotivism in contemporary western culture. Emotivism is the doctrine that all moral judgements are nothing but expressions of preference, or expressions of attitude and feeling (MacIntyre 2007:12). He comments that people now think, talk and act as if emotivism is true which has grave implications for our being disconnected with rich moral traditions.
There is abundant scholarship that could be used to demonstrate the intertwined and historical relationship between faith and ethics, or the problem of faith and different approaches to ethics. In fact, it would be more difficult to identify religious scholarship that doesn’t discuss morality and ethics; so intertwined is the relationship between faith and the question of the good, or flourishing life, in all religions (Angus Brook, academic in the philosophy of religion, personal correspondence). In the Islamic tradition, Fakhry (1991:11) makes this point when he says the Koran, and interpretation of the Koran, is bound up with human ethos; bearing on fundamental ethical issues including the nature of right and wrong; divine justice and power; virtue; and moral freedom and responsibility.

Some prominent Christian scholars who have developed ethical theories in different moral traditions include: Alistair MacIntyre (moral philosophy in general and virtue ethics), Thomas Aquinas (in the area of virtue ethics and natural law theory), and Friedrich Schleiermarcher (in the area of virtue ethics). In the area of feminist religious ethics Susan Frank Parsons (1996) is a prominent scholar. Frank Parsons conceives a Christian feminist ethics “hopes for liberation and fulfilment… attempts to formulate an interdependent understanding of the human person in community …searches for the redemptive community” (1996:222).

Fashing and Dechant (2001, cited in Robinson 2008: 27) argue that religious scriptures and people of faith have a tradition of ‘audacious challenge’ toward secular norms. People of faith must discern, and sometimes challenge, what might otherwise be considered as having the greatest utility. Robinson observes that traditions of audacious challenge can be noticed in the teachings and experiences of Buddhist, Hindu and Islamic communities, in addition to Jewish and Christian communities (Robinson 2008). Robinson goes on to say, “this suggests there is a robust tradition in which ethics (as working out what justice or goodness means) can contend with God, or the view of the Church” (2008:28). This tradition of challenge is recognisable, also, when human services workers challenge inhumane and unjust social structures or institutions because

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10 Robinson (2008) also makes clear that the approach of some religious scholars makes dialogue between their religion and the ethical world beyond difficult (pp.28-30)
of their faith. For example, in the domestic violence field, Wilcox (2007:105) describes her Christian spirituality as compelling in a political sense. Quoting from the book of James in the New Testament, she says “being a ‘doer of the word’ can mean taking on struggle – providing a drive and ambition for working for a new, non-violent world that is different from the ego-focused ambition that drives modern Western-dominated societies”.

Broadly speaking, religious writing on faith and ethics depicts active yet limited human agents who dynamically engage with externally derived norms that come from religious law or teachings. In these traditions one cannot have ‘virtue’ without a greater, most often transcendental, source of the good. Another ethical teaching found in most, if not all, religious and spiritual movements is that humans must foster a sense of responsibility for, and connection with, others (Robinson 2008; Canda & Furman 1999). The Dalai Lama said “all religions share a common root, which is limitless compassion. They emphasise human improvement, love and respect for others, and compassion for the suffering of others” (2002:35).

The extent that human service workers should, or conversely shouldn’t, draw from religious sources in practice has been debated in the literature. Gale (2007) says it is common acceptance that reliance on religion and spirituality should be avoided in the helping professions. Holloway (2007) argues there remains a deep antipathy toward religion especially in social work. She compares this trend with nursing, another caring profession, which she observes is happy to acknowledge its Christian foundations. Gray (2008:175) writes, “social work has worked vigorously to shake off its religious, moralistic beginnings, and to embrace the secular trappings of professionalism”. Similarly, Gale, Bolzan and McRae McMahon (2007) and Holloway (2007) argue that antipathy or an avoidance of religion is a product of modernisation; in order to establish social work as a secular profession, religion was de-legitimised in favour of rationality and science. The trend of invalidating religion continues in the post-modern human services climate, possibly because religion and spirituality is equated with particular oppressive historical forms. Another reason offered to explain why the human services
tends to avoid religion and spirituality concerns workers misusing their role. Gale discusses how the culture of human services work mandates that workers must avoid imposing their personal beliefs and values because this might constitute a misuse of power in the helping relationship.

The veil around the role that religion and spirituality has in professional caring work seems to be lifting. This is evident in recently published books including *Spirited Practices: Spirituality in the Helping Professions* (Gale, Bolzan and McRae McMahon 2007) and *Spirituality, Ethics and Care* (Robinson 2008). In these texts, are given accounts from workers coming from diverse faith traditions discussing the integration of spirituality and religion, in their pursuit of ethical practice. Robinson (2008:30) argues that recent developments in this field show an increasing concern to link spirituality with ethics in a way that ethics is not dependent upon a particular view of spirituality. He also observes that those workers interested in the connection between faith and ethics desire an alternative to ‘meaningless relativism’ in the field of ethics.

**1.3.5 Ethics: All that is new is old again?**

“Some of the new things said, are not new; and the rest of the new things said, are not true”

Anon in Lukacs (2002).

A fair observation about social theory is that old ideas will be expressed in fresh, new ways to make the revised theory saleable. Human services scholarship which discusses moral frameworks shaping human service work frequently uses categories like ‘deontology’, ‘utilitarianism’ and ‘virtue ethics’ to communicate different authoritative frameworks. In recent scholarship, categories like ‘feminist ethics’ and ‘post-modern ethics’ are included (see for example Banks 2006 and Hugman 2005). In my reading of some recent scholarship, ‘post-modern ethics’ seems positioned as the final roll call in the moral legacy; capable of swallowing and spitting out all that has come before. However, there are many possible ways of representing moral traditions, and post-modern ethics need not be positioned at the end of chronological representation. Perhaps, there are
moral traditions yet to feature in human services scholarship on ethics and it is not yet time for the final roll call.

With regard to issues of representation, this thesis makes a fresh contribution. I attempt to represent various moral-ethical traditions through using a blending approach when describing the moral-ethical authorities which influence the project participants’ practice. Also, ‘religion and spiritual moral frameworks’ are recognised as an influence in workers practice. This is rarely recognised as a distinct category in mainstream human services literature that reviews moral-ethical traditions shaping workers practice\(^\text{11}\).

The current revival of ‘virtue ethics’ in the human services; where there is a focus on ethical inter-subjectivity and individuals taking radical self-responsibility in decision making, has occurred in response to the popularity of ‘post-modern’ scholars including Michel Foucault and Zygmunt Bauman. Both of these theorists argue that the influence of meta-ethical narratives has been detrimental. They advocate for conceptions of ethics (Foucault) or morality (Bauman) not constrained by external contractual arrangements. These theorists focus on a moral-ethical approach that involves discipline of the self. Foucault’s central argument about ethics involves what he calls *rapport a soi* – a reflective relationship one ought to have with one’s self which creates and cultivates how the individual constitutes the self as a moral subject (Carmody 2005: 469; Macey 2000: 135; Rabinow 1984: 263). Bauman similarly focuses on the moral-ethical capacity of the individual agent, advocating for individuals to be guided by a moral conscience, and having ‘moral knowledge and skills’ (1993). He is critical of the unfree-ing capacities of external authorities, which force agents “to act against their will, and so suffer for not being able to behave according to their wishes and finding themselves doing what they would not do of their own will” (1999:78-9). Both Bauman and Foucault signal an appeal to *difference* as leverage points through which to speak of ethics as a domain of relations between self and other (Shaw 2004: 87). In both ethical conceptions; Foucault’s depiction of *rapport a soi*, and Bauman’s formulation of the ‘ethical relation’, can be recognised a

\(^{11}\) However, Somers-Flanagan & Somers-Flanagan (2007) cover ‘traditional African and Asian moral and spiritual worldviews’ in their review of moral ethical theories in the helping professions.
return to individual/virtue ethics and a rejection of external or traditional ethical forms. According to these theorists, who lay claim on individual agents having potential to be radically reflective in the pursuit of moral-ethical conduct, the ‘ethical’ occurs in a world where certainties have disappeared.

However, as canvassed in the above section, religious and spiritual approaches to moral-ethicality demonstrates there can be an and/and accommodation of norms nominated by external sources, with the individual agent growing ethical discernment, responsibility and maturity. Religious writing on ethics and faith depict active agents working out the good. Robinson (2008) contends there has been a tradition of ‘audacious challenge’ in religious ethics; where an individual or faith community might challenge or blend religious-based notions of duty in the act of being loving, faithful or peaceful.

A joining approach to individual virtue and externally nominated moral laws in workers’ practice has been recognised by a number of human services scholars reviewed in this chapter. As discussed before, Reamer (1995:11) talks about ‘values’ as being historically created and derived from individual experience. Freud & Krug nominate values, duties, responsibilities and obligations as sources to govern ethical conduct (2002:475). Based on their empirical study of the ethical informants of human services workers, Beauchamp & Childress argue that practitioners sometimes adopt a ‘principlism’ approach; a realist approach that brings together ideas about duty, consequences, character, relationship, and emotion (2001, in Hugman 2005). Some of these are externally derived principles, and other values are from the virtue tradition. Beauchamp & Childress conclude the ‘end result’ in what ‘ought to be done’ requires “a blend of principles, rules, virtues, passions, analogies, paradigm, narratives and parables” (2001:408).

The criticisms virtue ethicists and proponents of modernist abstract principles direct at each have similarities. Adopting either of these positions offers no promise that an agent will practice ethically. Neither position can guarantee that workers will recognise the dimensions of moral complexity in practice. Ethical subjectivity in the human services field could fall prey to solipsism, or could isolate workers from each other in the process.
of working out ‘ethics’ in shared contexts. Abstract principles, including those canonised in ethical codes, can be blind to specific circumstances of ethical problems in everyday living, in specific social environments. We know from the practice literature that many human service workers use a joining approach with different ethical and moral frameworks in the attempt to do what is right (Freud & Krug 2002). Issues faced when fusing different ethical frameworks is considered below.

1.4 Indicating and developing ‘ethical practice’

1.4.1 Moral-ethical authorities guiding human service workers

There exists a modest volume of literature which discusses moral-ethical authorities, and ethical decision making processes, in human services work (Osmo & Landau 2006; Walmsley 2004: 3). An even smaller amount of empirical research has been done concerning ethical decision making in specific practice contexts (McAuliffe & Congress 2006). What the existing literature about ethical decision making in human services can tell us, is that workers personal moral-ethical frameworks are significant authorities in workplace ethical decision making.12

Asquith and Cheers (2001) asked a small sample of workers to record over a one month period how they resolve moral and ethical decision making. Practitioners' personal moral perspectives were found to be the main source of influence in ethical decision making, in lieu of formal ethical codes or organisational culture and policies. The authors found that most resolutions did not conform to accepted social work ethical practice principles. They observed that when workers are caught between conforming to what they (personally) perceive to be right, and making prescribed decisions that do not reflect their own sense of morality, personal moral frameworks become the moral authority (2001:24).

McAuliffe & Congress (2006) spoke with thirty Australian social workers about cognitive, emotional and physical impacts when they experience ethical dilemmas in their work. McAuliffe found that the majority of ethical dilemmas discussed by workers relate

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12 However, Osmo & Landau (2006) who used a closed survey method to engage Israeli workers about the question of preferred ethical frameworks discovered that utilitarian ideas (the ethical principle of utility, what is judged as the best ends) was more influential in specific practice contexts than personal or virtue ethics.
to “being caught between adhering to their personal or professional values, and complying with organisational mandates”. She observed that workers who were ‘team players’ rather than ‘sole workers’ were less likely to report serious stress rising from ethical dilemmas. This observation seems to suggest that workers whose personal values are commensurate with organisational values, or who have somehow aligned their personal moral frameworks with professional values, experience less stress in the workplace.

Holland & Kilpatrick (1991) conducted a study with twenty-seven experienced social workers in Atlanta USA, concerning ethical dilemmas. They found workers experienced considerable tension between “internalised and externalised authority” in the work context, suggesting these two sources for ethical decision making are often in conflict. One participant commented “acting independently only leads to further conflicts”. Another reflected, ‘I’ll still advocate for clients, but only within the extent the rules here allow’ (1991:141).

Lonne et al. (2004) used a mixed methods design to learn about ethical practice in the human services. Part of their study involved understanding workers preparedness for ethical practice through looking at university study, on-the-job training, induction, codes of ethics and policy as influences (2004: 358). However, experienced participants they interviewed suggested it is something other than these influences that prepare a worker for ethical practice. One commented “you can’t teach somebody ethical practice…”

The influence of formalised ethical norms in shaping workers ethical decision making, including those evident in professional ethical codes and organisational codes, has been cast into doubt in recent literature. Instead, the role of ‘personal morality’ and internally derived values are recognised as being a powerful influence in practice ethics.

1.4.2 Recognising ‘ethical practice’ as something other than technique
There are a number of different conceptual tools in the human services literature that have been developed to indicate ethical practice. Discussions of ethical practice are based
on the assumption that there are better, or good ways of practising that are distinctive from poor or conventional ways of practising. In recent literature, some ways of denoting ethical practice include workers having: *practice wisdom; mature professionalism; genuineness* and *authenticity*. Scholars using these terms, canvassed below, indicate that ‘ethical’ practice is something other than technical competence or customary professional accountability (Clark 2006).

After thirty years of teaching ethics to professionals, Nash (2002) has developed a strong dislike toward pre-packaged ethical processes. He believes that sorting out the most effective ethical response in any situation is to be done by a *discerning* professional, not a professional who has been indoctrinated via ethical codes or organisational norms (2002:42). Nash says that professionals working in fields of ethical conflict should be less concerned with giving the right answers, or with telling people how to apply principles in the given context. Rather, he believes ethical practice occurs when a worker is discerning about the range of the moral conflict, and is aware of the moral functions of their role (2002:12). Nash also discusses the importance of workers having a personal moral commitment (2002: 12,179).

The notion of *practice wisdom* has also been used in the literature to indicate ethical practice. Bound up in the notion of ‘practice wisdom’ is often listed an array of personal qualities; including being reflective, respectful and applying moral values (O’Sullivan 2005; Dybicz 2004; Klein & Bloom 1995). Another quality discussed is workers having wisdom based on ‘lived experience’; the idea a worker has grown their wisdom through trial and error in life circumstances (Healy 2005). Similar, is the notion that an ethical worker will be *critically reflective*, taking a stance of ‘knowing and reflecting in action’ which involves open-endedness, intuition, uncertainty and sometimes doubt (Parton 2000).

Gray & McDonald (2006) adopt the term *mature professionalism* to indicate ethical and desirable practice. Mature professionalism involves “*ethical reasoning* (based on) *moral sensitivity*... *critical reflection*... *sound awareness of all aspects of a problem and the*
ability to anticipate the consequences of possible decisions and actions” (p.16-17). These scholars contrast the ethics of mature professionalism with how ethics is conceived in neo-liberal professional culture. In this culture, dominated by evidence-based approaches, ethics has become interchangeable with notions like certainty, effectiveness and expertise. Gray & McDonald critique the idea that ethical practice is the same as using an empirical research base, or being accountable to expert knowledge. They insist that the ambiguity and uncertainty of social work requires an ethical approach that is more than professional competence. Similarly, Gray & Gibbons (2007:223) suggest that workers who don’t reflect on how their personal values affect their practice are engaged merely in a ‘rational-technical endeavour’ or in providing “cookbook solutions… (being unable) to accept and deal with uncertainty and ambiguity”. Fook’s (2002) criticism of the technorational practice approach can be observed in her subversive use of the term ‘expert’. She says the expert worker “subscribes to a value system which seems to transcend rule-bound thinking which is implicit in some professional codes of ethics. In a sense, the expert professional has the confidence to act in seemingly unprofessional ways, because they are acting according to a broader set of human and social values, without being stultified by professional boundaries (p.195)”.

The terms genuineness and worker authenticity are also used in some literature to designate the ethical worker. Maidment (2006) is interested in an alternative discourse on professionalism that involves authentic engagement between workers and clients; an engagement characterised by things including connectivity, trust, reciprocity and alliance. Maidment observes that the subtexts of helping work ethical codes reinforce distance and boundary setting. She advocates there be more emphasis in caring work “on the (worker – client) relationship, and managing that in a transparent, straightforward and accountable way, with recognition that what clients want is connection and authenticity” (2006: 120). Authenticity is sometimes used as a synonym for genuineness, for example, social work scholars Hepworth, Rooney & Larson (1997: 120) define authenticity as “the sharing of self by relating in a natural, sincere, spontaneous, open and genuine manner”. They describe the authentic worker will say things congruent with their personal thoughts and feelings.
In her qualitative study, Zubrzycki (2000:198) recognised some workers construct distinctive boundaries between the personal and professional selves. She suggests this separation between personal values and professional values can diminish a worker's ability to connect with clients. Floyd Taylor (2007) refers to this incongruence between personal and professional values as a form of ‘professional dissonance’. Drawing from the psychological cognitive theory of dissonance, she says a form of dissonance occurs in caring work when there is a conflict between values and job tasks. Differently from the passive concept of dissonance when workers espouse different ideas in practice from what they otherwise regard in their private life as important, MacIntyre (1999) has posed the idea of compartmentalisation. MacIntyre argues that in the contemporary age which is characterised by ethical emotivism; where people choose what values are important for themselves disconnected from tradition, the values that workers refer to in their workplace may have no connection with their personal aspiration and goals. Thus, there becomes what MacIntyre describes as a compartmentalisation of existence; when different spheres of life (for example work vs. family life) will be governed by distinct sets of ethical norms.

Scholars reviewed in this section are critical of ethical approaches based on an ‘expert’ or rational-technical approach; where an assumption is made that a worker can impose order on a messy ethical problem. In contrast, notions like practice wisdom, mature professionalism, being genuine and connected with clients are promoted as important characteristics in ethical practice. Here, the ethical worker is less sure of the ‘answer’ to any problem, and more convinced that ethical resolution will occur through dialogue and a process of moral reasoning. In other words, ‘ethical practice’ necessarily entails the opposite to being certain or assuming the stance of ‘expert’.

1.4.3 Teaching ethics to human services’ students and professionals
There is a small volume of scholarship available about how students of social work and welfare courses are taught about ethics, and even less literature which has evaluated how these students commit to ethical practice. Several trends are observable in this literature.
The first is that while practical ethical considerations and instruction about ethical implications when working with social inequality are taught well in tertiary human services courses, students are rarely taught about ethics as a general field (Gray & Gibbons 2007; Reamer 2001). Clifford & Burke (2005: 678) observe “social work has a strong tradition of teaching anti-oppressive practice, (however) the ethics of social work has been taught separately and in only a few sessions”. They note that key undergraduate texts used do not treat the teaching of ethics in separation to the idea of power and social divisions (p.681). Perhaps this turn of events has arisen from a belief that “students cannot and should not learn from sociologists what ethical theories are. What they should learn is...how the very private struggles of clients and practitioners are related to larger public issues and social structures” (Pescosilido 1991: 360). Gray and Gibbons (2007:235) suggest that most social work educators do not have an adequate knowledge of moral philosophy and that this lack hampers students understanding of ‘ethical practice’. In some nursing programs (discussed by Krawczyk 1997) and social work programs (discussed by Gray & Gibbons 2007; Kaplan 2006), this problem of students having a lack of understanding about moral theory is being challenged through engaging moral philosophy and ethics academics teach core units in ethics.

Another trend identified in the literature is for tertiary human services educators to use rote learning methods to teach ethics. Kaplan (2006:518) says that while ethics education in social work includes discussion about social work values, “too often this involves memorisation rather than analysis of conceptualisation of values”. While Asquith & Cheers (2001: 24) argue Australian social work courses “provide opportunities for social workers to widen their understanding of human morality, and to critically analyse enduring tensions between the ideals and realities of practice”, in practice the teaching of ethics is subsumed under the teaching of social justice and teaching of ‘the core values of the profession’ (Healy 2005:6). These courses focus less on moral and ethical theory and more on practice ethics; developing students’ moral reasoning skills via working through ethically contentious case studies or decision making trees (for eg. Weber

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13 In their respective research projects measuring how different methods of teaching ethics to students impacts on moral reasoning skill, both Krawczyk (1997) and Kaplan (2006) found that students who had completed a specific course unit in ethics (taught by a specialist in moral philosophy) scored higher.
2006:17-34). Via these strategies, there is the expectation that students will integrate codified rules and abstract principles in the field. However, Nash (2002) argues that the practice of ‘working through’ de-contextualised case studies, as a means of developing students’ competency in moral reasoning, will not necessarily develop a students’ moral sensitivity. Teaching moral-ethicability in this way, might promote the mistaken idea that moral-ethicability is to do with getting it ‘right’ and ‘wrong’; when students are graded on the ‘correctness’ of their response to ethical dilemmas in tertiary settings. However, ethics and morality are not about getting things ‘correct’ or ‘wrong’. Rather, moral and ethical decision making is about discerning and seeking good or better ways of human living.

Another observable trend in this literature is the predicament where teaching ‘critical thinking skills’ is considered synonymous with enhancing the moral reasoning of students (Kaplan 2006). While logic as a philosophical foundation for practice is important (Payne 1999:249), it is different to the journey towards having a personal moral commitment and understanding how others commit to a moral worldview. Arguably, teaching logic and critical analysis skills to tertiary students is very different to growing their moral and conceptual understanding. This issue is engaged with in the final chapter of the thesis.

There is some indication, according to Clifford & Burke (2005: 689), that human services courses in the future will train workers to be aware of various ethical traditions, and re-integrate what these scholars term ‘personal ethics’ in relation to anti-oppressive practice ethics. For academics already squeezing too much into stretched course curriculum, pressure to spend more time on general ethics might not be warmly regarded. However, practicing in the human services often involves ethical dilemmas. Hence it is extremely valuable for workers to recognise what is a moral-ethical dilemma, and be able to respond well. However, as this project makes plain, even experienced human service workers can have difficulty identifying the moral scope and function of their role.
1.5 Recognising and working with moral problems
1.5.1 The current state of play of ethics in human services work

Moral and ethical dimensions of human services work evoke strong reactions and different viewpoints. Abels (2001:4, in Harstell 2006) has remarked that ethics within the profession seems unsettled and are unsettling. This chapter has canvassed a range of material, and has demonstrated that the current state of play of ethics in human services is an unsettled one. Below I condense some key concepts and tensions that were reviewed in the chapter. In doing so, I have been intentional in choosing ideas that have relevance for the thesis:

- Traditional sources for guiding moral-ethical professional conduct, including ethical codes and deontological principles, are being criticised in the current post-modern and/or marketised welfare environment (Clifford & Burke 2005; Lonne et al. 2004; McBeath & Webb 2002; Briskman & Noble 1999). Increased attention is being given to personal moral-ethical frameworks influencing workers practice, and the idea of virtue, as a promising way forward for professional ethics. It has been found that workers derive their ethical authority from personal frameworks, and less from professional codes and formal principles (Hugman 2005, 2003; McBeath & Webb 2002; Asquith & Cheers 2001; Zubrzycki 2000).

- There is a tension existing in the current human services climate about how we can indicate ‘ethical practice’. On one hand, is the idea the ethical practitioner is an ‘expert’ worker who bases their practice on evidence (discussed by Gray & McDonald 2006). In distinction, some say the ethical practitioner is not concerned with getting things ‘right’, rather they are authentic, genuine, have life experience or have congruence between personal ideas and practice style (Gray & Gibbons 2007; Maidment 2006; Clark 2006, Dybicz 2004)

- There is a tendency among some caring professionals to treat ‘ethics’ as a marginal concern (Hugman 2005). There is a tendency in human service work to evade its moral function (Bisman 2004; Goldstein 1998). It has been recognised,
There needs to be greater respect for moral diversity and difference in the profession. It may be that social work actually has no need of a formal ethical perspective, because some prior unitary conception of the ‘good’ does not actually exist (McBeath & Webb 2002; Briskman & Noble 1999). On the contrary, it is argued virtue and ethical subjectivity cannot ‘stack up’ in terms of professional accountability (Banks 2006) and clarity in ethics needs to be resolved as well as possible (Clark 2006).

Little is known about how workers understand, and commit to moral-ethicality in everyday practice. More research needs to be done about the matter, and both workers and students in human services professions need to spend more time analysing the moral ambiguities of their authority and function (Clark 2006; Banks 2006; McAuliffe 2005; Walmsley 2004; Lonne et al. 2004; Freud & Krug 2002; Payne 1999).

Some positions, or claims, in this literature appear to be contradictory in relation to others. In particular, the idea that no real ‘good’ exists outside of subjective human knowing, clearly disputes the idea that a moral-ethical framework can be developed for the work that is foundational, independent of any individual workers’ participation in the field. Some scholars reviewed in the chapter are advocating for a new box of ethical tools to suit the current age, going as far as saying principles and codified rules must be forsaken. Others express more caution concerning intellectual fashions of the day, and retain some version of traditional moral-ethical frameworks. Another tension exists when indicating ‘ethical practice’; is ethical practice measured by how expert or ethically accountable a worker is? Or is ethical practice bound up with how authentic, connected or reflexive a worker is?
1.5.2 Recognising and responding to moral dimensions in practice

The key argument made in this thesis is that promoting good and desirable relationships for the purposes of violence prevention education is akin to promoting moral-ethical vision. When workers discuss good relationships, or the question of how people should be in their intimate relationships, they are walking into moral territory. However, as this chapter has highlighted, there is confusion in the broader human services field about when something is to be recognised as a moral or ethical issue. Indeed a problem for the broader field of human services work is the lack of recognition that moral norms and visions are promoted by workers (Bisman 2004). In the ‘post-modern’ climate there are not shared understandings of what a ‘value’ is, or what goods we might collectively refer to as ‘ethical’ or ‘moral’ goods (Bauman 1993).

However, grand statements remain in human services’ professional ethical codes and policy directives about moral visioning. In a number of professional ethical codes is stated the idea that workers should aim to maximise people’s ‘wellbeing’, and work with the ‘whole person’ (International Federation of Social Work 2004; Australian Association of Social Workers 1999). Hugman (2005:38) has observed these visionary statements are otherwise not explicated in codes or professional discourse. He asks, should workers assume ‘wellbeing’ means the absence of distress about basic life necessities, or should it be understood as an illustration of maximum personal fulfilment, as the term ‘wholeness’ suggests? Given the poor explication of the term ‘well-being’, should workers be excused when they pursue merely minimalist ethical goods? In other words, is it acceptable that workers concern themselves merely with stopping or minimising problems? Or, could they accommodate broader moral visions in their practice?

This first chapter has laid a theoretical framework for exploring the issue of workers preparedness to recognise and practice with moral issues in the thesis. In terms of the question what ethical and moral frameworks should influence workers decision making, there is tension in the literature. Some studies have found that workers’ personal morality is the most significant authority shaping ethical-type practice decisions (Asquith & Cheers 2001; Zubrzycki 2000). In these studies it has been found that formalised codes
and deontological principles are less important authorities guiding workers. Hugman (2005: 26) has asked whether formalised ethical codes may now be obsolete. If all of life is infused with morality, and making judgements based on questions of the ‘good’ is an everyday responsibility, why do workers need moral-ethicality explicat ed formally? In distinction, Clark (2006) has argued that human service workers operate day to day in an ethical ‘intermediate position’. This intermediate position lies on a spectrum between the view that professional ethical codes are unnecessary because humans are always bound up in questions of the ethical, and the idea that professional ethics is entirely distinct and separate from everyday ethics. In day to day practice, Clark posits that workers might slide along this spectrum; in some situations invoking ethical codes that have been formally explicat ed and at other times using implicit codes, or personal evaluations of the ‘good’. Contra this view, Banks (2001) observes two contradictory ideas in the literature. First; is the proposal that in becoming a member of a caring profession, an individual wholeheartedly takes on the values of the profession as part of their professional identity. Second, is the idea that professional role and personal identity should be separated; that working as part of a profession means personal views will be put aside. Banks argues neither of these positions can be plausible in the real world of practice (2001:139-44).

A task of this project was to learn more about moral-ethical sources and philosophies guiding workers in the field of relationship violence prevention. What are the most important values guiding workers? Do workers ‘wholeheartedly’ adopt the values of their workplace, and if not, how they accommodate their personal morality in the workplace? How do violence prevention workers blend different philosophical or moral frameworks in practice?

A further theme taken up in the thesis is the question of how to prepare workers who are to educate others about moral and ethical goods in human living. If we accept the arguments by some scholars in the field (Clifford & Burke 2005; Reamer 2001; Payne 1999), students in tertiary courses are being well educated in the area of critical analysis, and taught how to recognise and challenge social inequality. However, general ethics and moral philosophy are not covered well in these courses (Gray and Gibbons 2007). Issues
of spirituality and religion are also not taught well. Does having skills in anti-oppressive practice, or having values commensurate with social justice principles, necessarily mean workers are equipped to be educators about good and desirable living?

With regard to the question of how to grow workers’ ethical stance, this chapter has revealed a key problem. There is much disagreement about we might *recognise* ethical practice in the field. Specifically, there exists tension between the new public management or neo-liberal view of ethics, and ethical frameworks emanating from the virtue tradition. Gray and McDonald (2006) and Lonne et al. (2004) observe that in the neo-liberal human services environment, ethical practice has become synonymous with *expert* practice. In this conception workers grow their ethical capacity through having greater certainty about matters in their field, and adopt ‘values’ that are congruent with the organisational discourse where they work. In distinction, other literature emphasises the role of practice wisdom, moral character, maturity and authenticity in pursuing ethical practice (Clark 2006, Maidment 2006, Parton 2003; Dybiycz 2004). These scholars suggest that it is lived experience; how workers respond to and grow from life experiences which can enable ethical practice. In this conception, having certainty or assuming an expert stance, is antithetical to practicing ethically.

This chapter has laid a framework for pursuing issues of moral vision in the thesis. Many more questions than answers concerning the issue of working with moral dimensions in human service work have been raised. This predicament reflects the nature of morality and ethics generally; we do not have certainty about what is good and there are many different avenues taken when seeking the good. With this recognition I move on to describe the key problem focused on in this inquiry: promoting moral visions in violence prevention education.
Chapter 2. The promotion of desirable relationships in violence prevention education

2.1 Introduction
The field of primary violence prevention offers unique opportunities for exploring morality, because an activity of this field involves the promotion of desirable alternatives to the violence problem. In doing violence prevention education, at least according to the public health framework, educators are assumed to have the expertise about what is ‘healthy’ in relationships. In this field, workers are actively promoting good and desirable alternatives to using violence in relationships.

In this chapter the field of ‘primary relationship violence prevention’ is described with a particular focus on violence prevention education. I consider key theoretical models underpinning violence prevention education, the manner in which programs are delivered, and issues that have been recognised as problematic for the field. The public health approach to violence prevention is focused on throughout the chapter, as it is assumptions in this approach that this thesis departs from and critiques.

The final section of this chapter funnels the literature reviewed to make the case that promoting desirable alternatives to violence in relationships is a moral activity. While some scholars do recognise, and even emphasise, the need to focus on positive or desirable relationships as a prevention strategy, there has been little engagement about the question of which values should or could inform promotions of desirability in relationships in programs.

2.2 What is ‘relationship violence’?
The term ‘relationship violence’ is not often used in the Australian human services context. It does not suggest a specific type of violence dynamic that might be otherwise suggested when using other terms available, for example ‘domestic violence’. Based on a search of various Australian government and Clearinghouse websites, the main terms used in the Australian context when referring to interpersonal violence in relationships
include ‘domestic violence’, ‘sexual abuse’ ‘family violence’, and ‘child abuse and neglect’. However, there is criticism of mainstream terms, including the accusation that the term ‘domestic violence’ silences sexual forms of abuse, or that this term obscures the gendered nature of the problem violence in intimate relationships (McKie 2005). The terms ‘violence against women’ and ‘gendered violence’ are often used in lieu of ‘domestic violence’ in Australian feminist-inspired policy circles. These terms express an overtly linear picture of violence being done to women. Increasingly terms like ‘elder abuse’, ‘parental abuse’ and ‘adolescent violence’ (Krug et al 2002; Carp 2000; Downey 1997; Peek, Fischer & Kidwell 1985) are gaining currency. This scholarship makes visible a greater variety of role/ power dynamics in existence with violence in relationships. ‘Interpersonal violence’ is the umbrella term invoked by the World Health Organisation (WHO). This term accommodates sexual violence, domestic & family violence, child abuse & neglect, youth violence, and elder abuse (Butchart et al 2004; Krug et al 2002).

Evidently, different terminology is employed in the field, and even the term ‘violence’ remains a contested term (Arendt 1970). Different Australian states and territories favour different terms, for example what the state of NSW refers to as ‘child protection’, the state of QLD calls ‘child safety’. Additionally, it can be observed that government departments are mandated to work with different ‘types’ of violence, yet in the community sector, agencies can work across the violence prevention spectrum and respond to a range of violence ‘types’.

So, what do any one of these terms include and exclude with regard to the experience of violence in relationships? The apparent neatness of any of these terms belies the messiness and complexity, and indeed frequent co-occurrence of experiencing different ‘types’ of violence within families and communities (Tomison 2000b; Goldner 1999). It is recognised by scholars that choosing terms to speak of violence in relationships can be problematic (Chung, 2001; Mann, 2000; Ashcraft, 2000; Ferraro, 1996; Lucal, 1995; Loeske, 1992). Naming violence is a political act because terms signify and denote short cuts to the nature of the violence, and signify who is perpetrating or being victimised by
the violence. Violence terminology is therein an exclusionary act, conversely signifying what violence is not, and who is not being implicated in the experience of violence.

Scholarship authored by indigenous people has also noticed the political nature of naming violence. For example, Taylor, Cheers, Weetra & Gentle (2004) have criticised the common practice of interchanging the terms ‘domestic’ and ‘family’ violence in mainstream Australian policy and research. They argue this is a mistaken and flawed practice, and is informed by Western hegemonic ideas about the family and intimate relationships. Taylor et al. (2004) bring attention to a problem when Western conceptions of domestic violence (read: violence done by male to female partner in a marriage like relationship) is not the same phenomena as violence that occurs in (extended) indigenous family groups. Similarly, Waldergrave (1998) has brought attention to how power dynamics in New Zealand Maori families disrupt the hegemonic view of nuclear families in western (Pakeha) culture, arguing that in Maori families it is not necessarily parents of young children, or the father, who has most access to power in the family group. She discusses how in Maori families grandparents can have most access to power; therein grandparents potentially could reap most benefit from the mis-use of power. These scholars argue the term ‘family violence’ conjures up very different constructions in these cultural groups to mainstream and dominant meanings associated with the term ‘domestic violence’, and stress the limits of mainstream terms in accommodating the manifestation of violence in some homes. Non-indigenous practice scholarship (Bird 2004; Gilgun 2001; James, Seddon & Brown 2002) has also brought attention to the non-fit, and evident misunderstandings when workers adopt a ‘silo’ approach to violence, in distinction from clients with very different ways of understanding hurt and violence in their families. For example, clients do not always name their personal experiences as ‘violent’, and it has been documented that a profound sense of bonding in a relationship can coexist with coercion and abuse (Gilgun 2001; Gilligan 2001; Goldner, Penn, Sheinberg & Walker 1990). It can be demonstrated then, that the words we have are not always the words we need, in meeting with the experience of violence experienced by people in our community.

14 A ‘silo’ approach involves different sectors of an organisation working with different ‘types’ of violence.
In this thesis, the terms *primary relationship violence prevention* and *violence prevention education* refer to prevention initiatives targeting violence that occurs in families and in intimate partner relationships. I acknowledge the term ‘relationship violence’ isn’t used widely in Australian violence prevention circles. The term ‘relationship violence’ is a heuristic tool employed in the thesis to accommodate a range of violence ‘types’ experienced in families and intimate relationships. This term accommodates the range of prevention programs in which the project participants’ were involved.

### 2.3 The concept of primary relationship violence prevention

#### 2.3.1 The public health approach to relationship violence prevention

In contrast to the common sensibility that ‘prevention’ is any action taken to ward off an unwanted thing, the conceptualisation of how to go about *doing* relationship violence prevention is complex. Different social institutions, disciplines and political groups promote different ideas about what can be done to prevent violence. A number of theoretical tools have been used to communicate that contest can characterise relations between different political ‘camps’ in the violence prevention field. For example, critical scholars (Klein 2006; Straus 2006) discuss the role of *ideology* in recognising contesting ideas. Others (Carmody 2009; O’Neill 1998\(^{15}\)) have adopted the post-modern usage of *discourse* to forward the idea that there exist competing knowledge claims in the violence prevention field. They argue that competing discourses promote conflicting ‘truths’ about the nature of violence prevention. Carmody (2009, in press) argues that each form of prevention activity is underpinned by a set of beliefs and attitudes that reflect political knowledges and that “*prevention education is not a value free, objective truth*”.

Irrespective of the theoretical term used to represent how we might conceptualise violence prevention, it is evident that different approaches advocate different prevention pathways. The two key avenues in which violence prevention is approached is through the criminal justice system and through public health (McMahon 2000). Legal and crime prevention approaches stress the importance of deterrence, and advocate community

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\(^{15}\) O’Neil uses the tool discourse to make distinctions between different violence etiology approaches, not prevention discourses.
safety policies (Schewe 2002; Gilling 2001) as pathways to prevent violence. The public health prevention typology conceives that violence can be prevented across a continuum of primary, secondary and tertiary prevention pathways.

This thesis focuses on the public health approach to violence prevention. This focus occurs due to the public health approach assuming that if a primary prevention program is successful, then we can stop the violence problem before it occurs. The public health approach to violence contrasts a criminal justice approach in so far as it focuses on primary prevention, or ‘before the fact’ prevention, rather than on treatment (McMahon 2000:28).

The field of public health has developed a typology of prevention that designates different foci for different levels of prevention (Guterman 2004; Coker 2004; Krug et al. 2002; McMahon 2000; Albee & Ryan 1998). In a public health conception, the term primary prevention refers to a level of prevention which targets population groups regardless of their having developed or experienced an illness or problem, and ostensibly before the population has developed an unwanted problem. It is therein a ‘before the fact’ level of prevention. Secondary and tertiary levels of prevention in public health respectively intervene with groups/individuals at high risk or in the early stages of developing an unwanted problem (secondary prevention), and intervention with groups or individuals who already have experienced, or acutely experience, an unwanted problem (tertiary prevention). These levels of prevention are therein more discriminatory regarding whom is targeted for prevention, while the level of ‘primary prevention’ is more indiscriminate. The principle underlying the public health prevention typology is this: if we can stop the onset of a problem or condition at the level of primary prevention, people will not go on to develop or experience the problem, and will therein not become targets for secondary and tertiary forms of prevention (Guterman 2004; Wolfe & Jaffe 2003; Potter, Krider & McMahon 2000). Key elements of the public health prevention approach are: defining the problem needing to be prevented, identifying risk and protective factors, and developing and evaluating prevention strategies. Massing evidence about risk and protective factors for violence occurs because the public health movement
requires a strong empirical foundation to deem something to be successful (Hickman, Jaycox & Aronoff 2004; Guterman 2004). The public health approach also conceives that a lack of empirical ‘evidence’ concerning what is healthy or normal in relationships will thwart the success of prevention efforts (Whitaker et al. 2006).

*Primary* prevention in application to social and health problems has a dual function. Simultaneously, this activity seeks to stop the unfavoured conditions that lead to the problem development and promote beneficial or preferred ways of living. In his text *Primary Prevention: the Possible Science*, Bloom (1981) offered this description of primary prevention,

“*Primary prevention involves activities directed toward obviating potential harmful configurations of bio-social-physical events and simultaneously promoting beneficial configurations in any identifiable population/person at risk, or with potential, who is currently functioning in an adequate manner*” (p. 28).

In other words, for primary prevention to be possible there must be some level of preconceived understanding of what is desirable in the absence of the problem existing. A number of scholars applying the public health prevention typology to the issue of violence in relationships recognise this dual function of stopping undesired conditions, and promoting positive or desired alternatives exists in the work (Ryan, 2005; Guterman, 2004; Rosewater, 2003; Mulroney 2003; Gudenz & DePuy 2001; Indermaur et al. 1998). This dual promotion is expressed by the *US Family Violence Prevention Fund* (Rosewater 2003: ix), which will work to stop the problem of violence and “create norms of healthy relationships, (to help) establish positive identities”. Recognising there is a dual function in primary prevention activity is pivotal for this thesis argument, in so far as it can be recognised that promoting desirable alternatives to a problem in human living is indeed a moral activity.

To explore moral dimensions in primary relationship violence prevention, other assumptions underpinning the public health approach are worthy to engage with
critically. Of particular interest is the shift to conceiving ‘social problems prevention’ as akin to ‘health problem prevention’; the idea that social problems can be treated in the same manner as health problems. Since the early 1970’s, models used in public health to prevent illness or health problems have been appropriated by social scientists in relation to social problems (Bloom 1981). A social problem such as ‘poverty’ can now ostensibly be treated and prevented similarly to the problem mental illness (Albee & Ryan 1998: 444). The social science appropriation of the public health model is commensurate with modernist notions of ‘progress’. This appropriation includes what is an ideological assumption in public health; that humans can be made better, or reach their potential, with professional ‘expert’ help (Peterson & Lupton 1996: 134). The attraction with public health models is the documentation that they ‘work’. Historically public health models of prevention (primary, secondary and tertiary modes of prevention) have ameliorated health problems including small pox and polio. The ensuing appropriation of public health models by the social sciences has had a trickle down effect to public policy in countries including Australia, where many social problems are now viewed as appropriate for employing the public health prevention approach.

In tandem with, or perhaps because of, the social sciences appropriation of public health models, what is recognised as a ‘health problem’ has broadened. Since mid last century health has increasingly been conceived as a state of ‘whole-ness’, or what is referred to also as well-being, and not merely as the absence of disease (Grbich 2004; Wilkinson 1996; Whitbeck 1981). This view of health has led to many areas of personal and social life being re-defined as ‘health related’. In the era of the new public health, issues including social cohesion and sleep deprivation are claimed to be ‘health’ problems. Violence in interpersonal relationships has also been inscribed as a public health problem. In this broadened conception of health (indeed, what exists outside whole-ness?!) everyone is a victim, or potential victim of health problems. Public health prevention programmes are assumed to be suitable for the whole population, where the sick and well are caught up in the web of observation (Peterson & Lupton 1996:16). However, if, as according to public health discourse, a social problem is recognised as the underachieving of ‘wholeness’ (where wholeness is synonymous with health) where will the lines be
drawn about where this problem begins, and ends\(^{16}\) When we apply such a generalised and ‘utopian’ vision of health (Sax 1990) to the issue violence in relationships, how might we begin to distinguish between a ‘violent’ relationship and a ‘healthy relationship’?

In recent reports (Butchart et al 2004; Krug et al 2002) the World Health Organisation (WHO) has detailed what steps are necessary for stopping the problem of interpersonal violence, based on the public health framework of having primary, secondary and tertiary prevention targets. According to this quintessentially modernist framework, violence is a problem that can be measured and is predictable. It is not an experience in human living that is conceived as random or unfathomable. Rather, experts including epidemiologists and public health officials identify what are risks in association with violence. These risks then become the subject of primary prevention efforts in the confidence that the problem can be stopped. Most public health advocates hope for a world in which their prevention efforts will one day eliminate the need for criminal justice and other systemic responses to violence (Moore 1993: 35).

However, as observed by a number of social problems constructionists (Loeske 1999; Douglas 1992; Spector & Kitsuse 1973; Kitsuse & Cicourel 1963) things identified as ‘risks’ are also socio-cultural constructs. Things that have been inscribed as ‘risk’ factors for doing violence are, at least in part, political and ideological. In other words, knowledge about risk factors for violence is always value-laden and theory-laden. How we understand violence is never value-neutral. However, when workers in the violence prevention field take-up an evidence-based discourse, or the public health framework there will be temptation to mute alternative ways of seeing the problem of violence. This temptation; the temptation to be certain or expert, is significant in an era when professions like social work, community work, and counselling want to promote professional accountability and want to be able to document success (Gray & McDonald 2006).

\(^{16}\) While the subject matter of this thesis does not explicitly concern ‘wholeness’, there are parallels with use of the terms ‘healthy’ and unhealthy, ‘safe’ and ‘unsafe’ operating in the relationship violence field.
Despite what is perhaps a genuine desire to have and share knowledge as a means of preventing violence, violence prevention professionals do not necessarily have privileged knowledge about why violence occurs. Nor do they have access to the ‘truth’ about how to prevent violence in relationships. Their knowledge, at least in part, is the product of ideological claims made in the field. These claims are based on partial understandings of how to prevent violence in human relationships. It follows then, that expert claims about the conditions necessary for people having ‘healthy’ relationships are also partial.

Some scholars have expressed criticism about framing violence in intimate relationships as a public health problem. Public health ethicists Dawson and Verwiej (2007: 29) write “(domestic violence) is certainly a tragedy for everyone involved and we should certainly do all we can to reduce it, both as individuals and a society. However… it is not really clear that domestic violence should be considered primarily the responsibility of public health officials, or if we ask what is added by calling it a public health problem”. They say to frame domestic violence as a public health problem is to accept that the causes of violence are public, outside the behaviour and choices of perpetrators of violence. Moore (1993:44) similarly, but more explicitly makes this point in saying, “the public health approach wants to de-emphasize and make unnecessary those difficult judgements of moral accountability… They prefer to find the causes of violence in society than in the evil intentions of individual offenders.” In the effort to prevent and ameliorate violence, Moore sees the public health movement as apologists for human misbehaviour.

Dorothy Scott, an Australian child protection academic, who otherwise advocates a public health approach to child abuse and neglect, is critical of tools used in public health to measure and intervene with families living with violence. In response to the WHO Report on Violence & Health published in 2002, she was “left feeling disappointed by a culture bound discussion on prevention… the report assumes an implicit philosophical position that accepts the right of the State to intervene (and) infrastructure capable of intervening in ways that benefit the child…the reality is that the State has a poor record in performing child-rearing tasks at an optimal level” (2002:416). Scott communicates
reservations not only about how the WHO in this report defined child abuse, but also the vision promoted by the WHO about the best way to intervene in the problem of child abuse & neglect.

Discussing problems in public health philosophy might seem churlish when relationship violence is so obviously a problem, effecting millions of people. Evidently, the public health movement has been successful in attracting more interest and needed dollars to the prevention of interpersonal violence. It is promising also, that public health has made plain the need to ameliorate social causes of violence, including poverty and other forms of social inequity (Krug et al. 2002). Public health being ‘on board’ with interpersonal violence prevention is evidently a beneficial thing. However, there are problems, too, with the public health agenda in violence prevention. One problem in the public health approach to violence prevention, a focus in this project, is the insufficient attention given to the role of human agency. Human agents make choices in human relationships; they choose sometimes to use violence, or they choose to act in relationships in more desirable ways. This project is interested in what are moral dimensions when people make choices about non-violent and desirable relationships. Specifically, this project was interested in violence prevention workers’ personal moral worldview and practices when they promote desirable relationships in programs.

2.3.2 Primary relationship violence prevention: Program types

The keywords used when searching electronic databases for the purposes of this review included primary prevention or prevention, combined with any of the terms family / domestic / sexual violence, or child abuse. I was aware that non-public health publications may use different terminology. For example Memmott et al. (2001:74) use the term ‘early proactive’ in lieu of primary prevention. The material selected for the review was relevant to ‘before the fact’ kinds of prevention; a small volume of material when compared with the mass of literature available about secondary and tertiary prevention efforts. Using relevant findings from this search, I describe in the sections below the scope of primary relationship violence prevention activity; key theories in violence prevention; and problems that have been identified in this work.
The main strategies for performing primary prevention in public health are to alter the social and political environment, and using education to positively change the populations’ awareness and behaviour (Chung, O’Leary & Hand 2006; Albee & Ryan 1998). Examples of environmental-type primary prevention strategies in the area of family violence include combating gender discrimination via public policy development and creating safer communities for children (Hester & Westmarland 2005:15. The *WHO Guide to Implementing the World Report on Violence and Health* (Butchart et al 2004) made extensive recommendations with regard to environmental-type prevention activity that can support the amelioration of violence in interpersonal relationships; recommending that governments develop and implement policies that support gender equality, relieve burdens on families with small children, and to reduce citizen access to firearms.

In the Australian context, it is school-based violence prevention education programs that have been the focus of most evaluation efforts (VicHealth 2007). School based educational programs are the most commonly recognised mode of doing sexual violence prevention (Neame 2003), as well as domestic violence prevention (Mulroney 2003). Chung et al. (2006) have observed that Australian violence prevention education, including education given in schools, is the result of collaboration between women’s services, youth services and non-government health services. In Australia, the delivery of gender violence prevention education, in the form of awareness raising by feminists, pre-dates public health coming on board with interpersonal violence prevention (Neame 2003).

Primary prevention educational activity can occur on a universal level, for example, general population groups in schools, or with more selective groups, for example, young mothers coming to parenting programs. Gudenzi and DePuy (1997) distinguish between programmes targeting individuals (micro level), communities (meso-level) or nation groups (macro level). Macro level targeting includes policy reform and social marketing campaigns; including sensitisation campaigns promoted through media; and other
activities that seek to alter harmful or ‘negative’ social norms (Coker 2004; Wolfe & Jaffe 2003). Meso-level targeting includes activity such as raising awareness through art, public marches, and newspaper and media items. Home visiting for new mothers by community nurses would also feature at this level, given these programmes are taken up and implemented on a regional health service level. Also, community safety models, promoted and developed in many municipalities across Australia, could feature as examples of meso-level primary relationship violence prevention. Gudenzi and DePuy (1997) depict micro level activity including marriage preparation, and parenting preparation aimed at couples or individuals. Marriage preparation was not recognised as a mode of primary prevention in the Australian literature reviewed. However, in the present inquiry two participants discussed marriage preparation as a form of ‘primary’ violence prevention.

There is a distinction in the literature about whether violence prevention educational programs are ‘risk focused’ or ‘protective focused’. Educating about risk and how to avoid risk is a common strategy in domestic and sexual violence prevention educational programs. However, adopting this focus as a prevention strategy has been criticised on the basis that women or children are made responsible for managing their own risk (VicHealth 2007; Carmody 2005; Rosewater 2003; Carmody & Carrington 2000). In practice it would appear that violence prevention education programs appear to combine a risk and protective focus. Mulroney (2003:3) has observed that Australian domestic violence prevention programs targeting young people use a “broad educational approach” that employs didactic information giving and interactive exercises.

2.3.3 Theories underpinning primary relationship violence prevention activity

Theories used to guide primary prevention programs in the area of relationship violence include social learning theories, feminist theory, ecological and systems theories, and

17 The productivity of community safety models for preventing forms of violence that occur in the private world of families is not well developed in the research. In evaluating a community safety model implemented over a three year period, Bowen, Gwisda & Brown (2004) found that while crimes that occurred on the street were reduced, no change was effected regarding crimes that occurred in people’s homes.
deterrence based theories. While I discuss these separately below, it should be understood that theories overlap and are often combined in violence prevention programmes (Potter, Krider & McMahon 2000).

O’Neill (1998) and Mulroney (2003) have observed social learning theories dominate domestic violence prevention educative programs. Social learning theory equates with the ‘cycle of violence’ construct, where it is suggested that violence is transmitted between generations through modelling and witnessing violence. According to social learning theory, spreading solutions through education can counteract people using negative or wrong behaviours like violence. This theory suggests we can learn not to use violence when we are exposed to positive or acceptable norms and attitudes (Bandura 1973, Carden 1994, Coker 2004). This approach is construed as having the potential for success regardless of a participant having prior exposure to violence. While Bandura (1973, 1977) observed that violence is a more likely outcome when violent responses to stress and conflict were modelled in the family of origin, he proposed that continually unrewarding violent behaviour will increase the likelihood of non-violence. Prevention programs informed by social learning theory vary in application18, but tend to focus on the imparting of new skills, or reducing skill deficits, to provide people with greater repertoires of alternative, non-violent behaviours. Social learning approaches figure in programs like the Triple P parenting program used extensively across Australia, and many ‘healthy relationship’ type programs in schools. Consistent with a social learning philosophy, these programs are considered to have a greater chance of success if the program is ongoing and extensively implemented, and if the program is supported by messages consistent with modelling appropriate behaviour (Indermaur et al. 1998).

Varieties of feminism and pro-feminism have strongly influenced the fields of domestic and sexual violence prevention in Australia (Mason 2002; Watson 2001; Suchting 1999; Breckenridge & Laing 1999; Spongberg 1998). The role of second wave feminism in shaping Australia violence prevention policy has a distinctive history compared to the

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18 Related theories including cognitive behavioural theory and social cognitive models are also used in many educational type prevention program (Mulroney 2003).
USA or UK, a distinction attributable to a core influx of effective feminist bureaucrats in the 1980s shaping this policy area (Phillips 2006). There have been different conceptualisations of solutions to the problem ‘gendered violence’ developed by radical and liberal feminists in Australia. However, the early feminist movement to expose domestic violence and rape focused almost exclusively on women as victims19, and utilised a feminist anti-violence theory based on the premise of patriarchal power. In the Australian context, earlier campaigns to raise awareness about gendered violence and doing ‘violence prevention education’ was initiated through grassroots feminist efforts. In the current era it remains the case that primary violence prevention education programs emerge from partnerships between pro-feminist community organisations and youth and health services (Chung et al. 2006).

The women’s movement in Australia has had success in constructing violence in relationships as a gender/power problem; where men’s violence is viewed as a manifestation and means of enacting ‘hegemonic masculinity’ (Spongberg 1998:262; Connell 1995). The Keys Young National Report into domestic violence (1999) recommended that future funding for violence prevention be directed only to programs that articulate a feminist analysis of the causes and nature of domestic violence, where “violence in adult intimate relationships is (recognised as) an expression and mechanism of the oppression of women in broader society” (p.187). Despite the ‘best-practice’ rhetoric that often accompanies the feminist approach, Australian feminist criminologist Moira Carmody has remarked that earlier feminist discourse has demonstrated limited potential over the past 30 years to actually reduce violent behaviour (2006; 2005). She considers there is nothing positive to be said about the fixed feminist notion that all men are potentially violent and all women are potential victims of violence. Carmody says this particular feminist discourse “robs women of any agency or ability to exert power, express desire, take control, resist, prevent or avoid their victimisation” and that “violence prevention is a virtual impossibility within this theoretical framework” (2005: 468).

19 However recent domestic violence policy can also reflect a universal risk theory for women experiencing violence. The NSW Health Domestic Violence Policy (2002:2) states “because of the gendered nature of violence, the terms ‘victims’ and ‘women’ will be used interchangeably in the document”.

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Ecological theories are also prominent in Australian violence prevention education programs, perhaps as a result of public health coming on board with interpersonal violence prevention. Ecological theories broaden the terms of earlier systems theories, which viewed problems like violence to be a result of cybernetic processes whereby “no individual in the system has total power over the system of which he or she is part” (Bateson 1972: 438). Ecological theories are more expansive in looking for casual or underlying factors\textsuperscript{20}. In the ecological model, interpersonal violence is viewed as the outcome of interaction among many factors at the levels of the individual, relationships, community, and society. For example, dating violence might be conceived as a result of the interplay between complications associated with pregnancy and delivery (that is, risk factors for neurological damage) and problems experienced within the family, for example, poor parenting (Butchart et al 2004:4). Given the causes for a problem being manifest at a number of levels, the ecological approach argues that a ‘one-off inoculation’ approach to violence prevention is useless. Rather, to prevent violence and abuse it is considered important that a range of programs are instituted under a comprehensive strategy across the spheres of community, schools and family (US Advisory Board on Child Abuse and Neglect 1993:16, in Tomison 2002). Developing an ecological perspective of child maltreatment and domestic and family violence has led to the adoption of prevention strategies that focus on the ‘whole of community’ (Tomison 2002). Best practice using ecological theories include the situation of having a consistent, collaborative ‘whole of school’ approach to reducing violence (Imbesi 2008; Mulroney 2003). In the field of adult sexual violence prevention, Neame (2003) has also advocated an ecological approach. This approach will think beyond ‘at risk’ women, with a view to challenge dominant masculinities and other unhelpful cultural norms.

Another theoretical model distinguishable in the literature on primary relationship violence prevention is the criminological model of deterrence (Fagan 1989). The

\textsuperscript{20} For example, the prevention plan used in WHO Report on Violence & Health (2002) is based on ecological theory, specifically theory developed by Heise et al. (1998). It discusses four different spheres where prevention efforts must be targeted: individual (ontogenic), micro-system (family), exo-system (community) and macro-system (socio-cultural).
principle of deterrence is that knowing there will be punishment for criminal behaviour deters offenders from doing criminal behaviour. Deterrence can only take place if the potential perpetrator is aware of the sanction, considers the sanction will happen if one commits the crime, and regards it as costly. Deterrence-based approaches rely on fostering fear of punishment, such as loss of freedom, social esteem, or educational opportunity (Stewart 1999). However, the theory of deterrence can be applied beyond the legal system; because fear about potential loss of relationship with others, or fear of being stigmatised by others, could also be ‘deterrents’ for choosing to use violence.

2.3.4 Recognising problems in primary relationship violence prevention

The purpose of this section is not to exhaustively discuss problems in violence prevention education, but to canvass what the literature has recognised as key problems in this field. These problems have some relevance for my project, in so far as providing a backdrop for some of the issues raised by the project participants, discussed in chapters 5 and 6.

Memmott et al. (2006: 13) have argued that funding providers, service providers, and research evaluators are reluctant to be frank about the limitations of primary violence prevention programmes. They associate this reluctance with organisations having a poor appreciation of evaluation. It is a salient opinion in the literature that environmental and educational primary prevention activity targeting domestic and sexual violence has been poorly evaluated (VicHealth 2007; Whitaker et al. 2006; Memmott et al. 2006, 2001; Carmody 2009, 2003; Schewe & Bennett 2002; Krug et al. 2002). Relatively little is known about the effectiveness of current child abuse prevention initiatives. Tomison (2002, 2000a) says this is mainly because of the failure to conduct careful program evaluations. Conducting careful or standardised evaluation is hampered by problems including short follow up periods, high attrition rates and poor measurement tools (Whitaker et al. 2006). Tomison (2002) says also that poor evaluation is exacerbated also by the relatively low priority given to prevention programs by governments and other institutions. Evaluation is also effected by programmes lacking, or having minimal, articulated theoretical foundations (Indermaur et al. 1998). In the field of domestic violence prevention education Mulroney (2003:4) observes “despite the fact that a clear
articulation of the rationale and concepts sustaining the development of initiatives is crucial to success, prevention programs rarely make explicit the theory base underpinning their approach”. Without clearly articulated theoretical foundations, it is difficult to know the basis for what is being evaluated, and why a chosen evaluation strategy is feasible.

Another problem identified in the literature concerns the effectiveness of using a social learning approach to reduce potential violence. When evaluating program effectiveness most programmes have merely measured attitude change, and have not used longitudinal evaluation in measuring behavioural change (Whitaker et al 2006; Carmody 2006; Gudenzi & DePuy 2001). This is a problem in so far as the evidence suggests that changing attitudes does not necessarily lead to behaviour change (Ajzen & Fishbein 2005; Schewe 2002). Having said this, some studies have reported a positive intervention effect in terms of behaviour through young people’s involvement in social learning-type programmes (Wolfe et al. 2003). The promise of using a social learning approach to prevent violence is uncertain. The boldest statement that can be made about the effectiveness of doing social learning based prevention activity in schools and communities is that it may change people’s attitudes about violence (Hague 2001).

A further problem in primary relationship violence prevention is confusion about the exact problem that should be prevented. Several scholars have criticised prevention activity on the basis that the targeted problem behaviours are not made clear (Tomison 2000b; Guterman 2004; Ryan 2005). Guterman (2004:301) says that many prevention campaigns focus on severe manifestations of violence, and therein have contributed to a ‘you know it when you see it’ misperception of the problem. For example, the World Report on Violence and Health mentions only in passing that child neglect constitutes acts of omission as well as commission, and then largely ignores acts of omission in the discussion of fatal abuse, focusing only on child homicide (Scott 2002:415). The philosophical integrity of the WHO Report is decreased in its focusing on overt forms of violence, and failing to delineate the status of ‘normative’ violence, including the corporal punishment of children. Just as problematic, is when definitions of violence are
slippery. Ray (2000:145, in McKie 2005) proposes that, “violence refers to diverse behavioural forms and multiple levels of analysis. It may range from local and unregulated behaviour to orchestrated and controlled behaviour. Violence breaks through moral prohibitions and normative systems”. In this definition, what are ‘moral prohibitions’ and ‘normative systems’? How can different arms of the prevention system work together, and share a language, if terms remain unclear? Kelly (1999) argues that the stakes are high in failing to agree on definitions in the area of domestic and family violence, as this predicament benefits abusers and reinforces the ad hoc manner in which policies and prevention services respond. According to Guterman (2004) it remains a salient problem for the violence prevention field that there is no consensus about what constitutes ‘violence’ and abuse in relationships.

A final problem identified in violence prevention work concerns the training and preparation of violence prevention educators. In their review of eleven primary prevention programs in school settings, Whitaker et al (2006) found that while most programs stated workers had been trained, “little detail was provided on the content and process of the training and thus the proficiency of the ‘trained’ interventionist was unclear” (2006:159, emphasis in original). The authors note that no prevention education programmes formally assessed educator’s knowledge or skill. Ellis’ (2004) review of 38 violence prevention education programs in the UK similarly found that educators had not been trained specifically to do this work. Both reviews comment that training educators to work in this field is an issue that needs re-dress.

2.4 Focusing on the ‘positive’ as a strategy for violence prevention education

This chapter has given a snapshot of the field primary relationship violence prevention. It has been observed that the genesis of Australian domestic and sexual violence prevention education is with initiatives taken by women’s organisations, youth and health services. In the past decade this field has been bolstered through public health money and a social policy commitment to preventing interpersonal violence. Public health ‘coming on board’ with interpersonal violence prevention at the primary level has brought about renewed
enthusiasm and confidence that the violence problem can be stopped. Through ongoing rigorous and scientific processes of identifying risk factors for violence, the field of public health claims that interpersonal violence can be prevented. This claim has been taken up in Australia. A recent report published by VicHealth (2007:5) states, “the prevention of violence against women has an evidence base and a sound rationale for action... the prevention of violence against women is not an aspirational goal but, rather, is well within our reach”.

As observed earlier in the chapter, the public health approach to primary prevention has two functions (Bloom 1981). These are: putting in measures to reduce risks associated with violence, and secondly, to promote desirable alternatives to using violence in relationships. In this last section I review some scholarship that recognises this second function in prevention activity, as a means of bringing attention to some puzzling gaps in public health and social policy claims about how it is possible to prevent violence at the primary level.

Moira Carmody (2005; 2003) has been a firm advocate that alternatives to risk avoidance should characterise sexual violence prevention education. She advocates that ‘alternative ways’ of thinking should frame prevention research; including research into non-violent and desirable relationships. In recent publications, Carmody focuses on the link between ‘ethical subjectivity’, gender and sexual violence. She proposes that prevention education programs could provide a ‘positive analysis’ of intimate relationships; for programs to teach young people how to develop ethical non-violent relating practices, in lieu of teaching refusal skills or simply focusing on mere attitudinal change (2005: 478). In employing the strategy of focusing on ‘ethical’ ways of doing sexual relationships Carmody’s approach has been recognised as one of the most advanced approaches to prevention in Australia (Chung et al. 2006).

Professor Alan Hayes, Director of the Australian Institute of Family Studies has similarly advocated for there to be an increased focus on preferred ways of being in relationships in the field of child abuse and neglect. In an interview on Richard Glover’s Drive
program on ABC Radio 702, Hayes (2008) remarked there have been unintended consequences of the child protection field focusing on risk avoidance, in lieu of promoting positive relationships. In advocating for the field to take an about turn and emphasis positive ways of parenting children, Hayes illustrated an analogy with population growth studies. Previously this area of study has focused on problems associated with population growth, but has now changed the focus to the problems associated with population decline. Hayes remarked this kind of shift should take place in the field of child abuse prevention; for there to be an increased focus on desirable ways of parenting, and less focus on undesirable parenting as the strategy for doing prevention work.

In a similar vein, Prilleltensky & Prilleltensky (2006) discuss the value of doing wellness promotion separately from ‘prevention’ and ‘treatment’ work in the field of child welfare. They observe that only 1% of child welfare money is spent on ‘wellness promotion’, or prevention work, while 99% is spent on treatment, or ‘after the fact’ work. They advocate an ecological approach to enhancing “positive personal wellbeing” in prevention activity. In the area of preventing violence against women, Australian scholars Flood (2001) and Pease (1995) have advocated the promotion of ‘positive masculinities’ and for alternative, desirable constructions of masculinity to feature in educational and awareness raising programs. In a recent paper, Pease (2008) critically examines what it means to engage men when promoting desirable and non-violent gender relations. He observes that gender inequality may benefit and be a desirable vision for some men, hence care must be taken in prevention activity to encourage men to commit to “an ethical stance in relation to violence and abuse” (2008:13).

The field of sexuality and relationships education (formerly the field of ‘sex education’) appears to have taken up the strategy of focusing on desirable ways of negotiating sexual intimacy and is active in promoting ‘healthy sexuality’ (Perry 2006). In addition to providing information about risks associated with sexually transmitted disease and unwanted pregnancy, this field has for some time concentrated on promoting norms associated with ‘well-being’ in sexual relationships. However, perhaps as a result of the
political debate over what values should be promoted in school sex education, this field is more aware of moral dimensions when promoting desirable sexuality (Allen 2005; Lamb 199721; Thomson 1997), when compared with the violence prevention education field. Over time, the sex education field has struggled with moral issues underpinning what is promoted as acceptable sexual conduct when educating diverse cultural and faith groups. This struggle has involved misunderstanding and conflict between permissive and secular approaches to sex education, and religious and faith-based approaches to sexuality education (Blake & Katrak 2005:10). In their report to the UK National Children’s Bureau, Blake & Katrak (2005: 23) suggest that moral consensus will not be achieved in the sexuality education field. They consider it is preferable that different groups disagree with each other after having listened to different views, rather than misunderstand each other on the basis of not listening to others. It is my view that this level of insight about moral complexity is yet to be recognised in the violence prevention education field. The violence prevention education field is yet to recognise moral dimensions in the practice of promoting desirable and non-violent relationships.

2.5 Why should morality matter? Promoting desirable relationships in violence prevention education

This doctoral thesis can contribute to that body of scholarship which is advocating for an increased focus on desirable and ethical ways of being in relationships as a strategy for violence prevention. However, the starting point for this inquiry is a step back from taking a position that assumes an ethical perspective, as for example Carmody (2009) has done in her sexual ethics violence prevention program. This thesis takes issue with the fact that the field of violence prevention education hasn’t noticed that there are moral dimensions when workers promoting desirable alternatives to violence. The task of the project fieldwork was to explore the violence prevention landscape to find out if and in what ways moral dimensions are recognised when violence prevention workers promote desirable alternatives to violence.

21 Of interest, it is over a decade ago that Lamb (1997:301) said "sex educators must take as their goal the prevention of abuse, not by placing responsibility on girls to avoid victimisation but by teaching boys how to express themselves sexually in moral, that is, considerate and respectful ways."
In this chapter I have argued a ground for recognising that promoting desirable and ‘good’ relationships in violence prevention education does occur. It has been documented that a dual function operates in primary violence prevention education. First, educational programs use strategies that try to stop the violence problem. Secondly violence prevention education involves promoting desirable alternatives to the problem needing prevention. Promoting desirable relationships in the work seems to be based on the assumption that expert or professionals in the field indeed have the knowledge, attitudes and skills to promote desirability in relationships. It is frequently the case that violence prevention material will construct the stuff of healthy and desirable relationships. Perhaps this is in part a result of public health ‘coming on board’ with primary interpersonal violence prevention, with its assumption that it is possible to know via an evidence base what are the right conditions for ‘healthy’ and non-violent relationships to flourish.

In this inquiry, the practice of promoting desirable relationships in violence prevention education is viewed as a moral and ethical activity. In developing my argument, I tended to make a distinction between information-based judgements that are provided in the course of relationship violence prevention work, from judgements based on workers making moral claims. I consider that when violence prevention educators move beyond the discussion of legal or social justice issues, for example when educators discuss the legal age of consent or human rights principles relevant to gender, to discuss what is desirable in relationships, they have moved into morally contentious territory. Moral theorist Alisdair MacIntyre (2007:12) teases out this distinction in saying “moral elements in argument are always to be distinguished from the factual. Factual judgements are true or false… but moral judgements are neither true or false, and agreement in moral judgement is not to be secured via any rational method, for there are none. We use moral judgements not only to express our feelings and attitudes, but also precisely to produce such effects in others”. When a violence prevention educator begins

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22 A recent publication by the DVIRC organisation reads, “a healthy relationship is when: you have fun together; you both feel able to be yourself; you have a friendship not just a physical relationship, you can have different opinions without being pressured to change your minds, you both compromise and say sorry.”
to make moral claims that the good relationship is an ‘equal’ relationship, or one where you “can have different opinions or have fun together” (DVIRC publication), they are no longer making assessments on the basis of true and false. Indeed, the question of what is good in relationships is never a question of ‘fact’.

The contention of this thesis is that promoting ‘good’ and desirable relationships in violence prevention education is a moral problem because there is always a conflict of values involved when discerning what is good in human living. The reasons why the field of violence prevention education has not recognised the moral dimensions of promoting desirable relationships in the work are unknown. Perhaps this conversation is too risky, or perceived as unimportant for ‘the real work’ of preventing violence. Perhaps prevention programme development is driven solely by practice or funding concerns, and not from articulated theories or practice epistemologies. Whatever the case may be, the task of this inquiry was to explore if and how violence prevention educators recognise moral dimensions in their practice.
Chapter 3.  
Making meaning: Hermeneutical Phenomenology with a 
Critical Realist compass

3.1 Introduction
In this chapter I explain the theoretical and methodological underpinnings of the inquiry. Discussion of my field project design and data interpretation strategy is discussed in the following chapter, chapter 4. My dedicating a whole chapter to explaining the conceptual underpinnings of the inquiry occurs for two reasons. First; my project involved crafting an experimental phenomenological hermeneutical critical realist approach. Due to using an experimental theoretical and philosophical blending of phenomenological hermeneutics with critical realism, the distinctions and similarities between the two frameworks deserve rigorous explication. Second; I want to demonstrate clearly what phenomenological hermeneutics, qua the philosophies of Martin Heidegger and Hans-Georg Gadamer, and critical realism, qua scholarship by Margaret Archer, offered to the interpretation made in the thesis. This seems particularly important given the evaluative stance I have taken in the argument.

I am not aware of another piece of social research that has explicitly combined phenomenological hermeneutics with critical realism in the project methodology. Using this combination in my PhD inquiry, therein, has been a risk. In taking this risk I am encouraged by commentaries by Law (2004), and Denzin & Lincoln (2003) on practicing experimentalism in social research. Doing research on the ‘borderland’ between different theoretical paradigms for the purposes of better grasping the elusive realities that are the focus of research are applauded and encouraged by these scholars.

The chapter reviews phenomenological hermeneutics and critical realism, separately, before considering points of convergence between them in the final section. The intention is not to summarise in their entirety ideas developed by the key scholars used in the project methodology. I discuss only those ideas that have relevance for my thesis.
3.2 Phenomenological Hermeneutics: the approaches of Heidegger and Gadamer.

3.2.1 Introduction
In social research terms, phenomenological hermeneutics comes under the banner of ‘interpretivism’ (Crotty 1998, van Manen 1990). The interpretivist paradigm, or the Verstehen tradition, encompasses a number of approaches that have the central goal of seeking to understand and interpret the social world. As one approach within the interpretivist paradigm, phenomenology is a method of inquiry that aims to attain new descriptions of the experienced meaning, and lived experience of human subjects, via privileging the perspective of the subject (Barnacle 2001; van Manen 1990). Crotty (1996) said the aim of phenomenological research is to problematise normal experiences, with the aim to get a ‘fresh look’ so that phenomena, or a problem in lived experience, can be viewed in a new way. In phenomenology, human experience or what Gadamer (1976) called the ‘human lifeworld’, is treated as primary. In phenomenology there is a sustained effort to ensure that any theory or attempt used to explain a subject’s ‘lifeworld’ will not misrepresent what was communicated as being essential in experience.

Arrays of phenomenological approaches are available to the social researcher, including ‘phenomenological hermeneutics’. Blended with ‘hermeneutical’; a term derived from the Greek verb hermeneuein meaning to attribute expression and meaning, hermeneutical phenomenology becomes a journey of interpretation that is co-determined by the life-worlds of research participants and the inquirer (Sharkey 2001: 26; van Manen 1990). The description that emerges will be a fusion of horizons’ between the researcher’s worldview, participants’ worldview and relevant literary traditions.

The approach to phenomenological hermeneutics used in this inquiry is based on the philosophical writings of Martin Heidegger, and his student, Hans Georg Gadamer. The work of Charles Taylor (1989) was also influential in the project. Choosing these philosophers was not arbitrary. I considered Heidegger’s writing about the problems of existence itself core to his phenomenological hermeneutic, including his ideas regarding the authentic possibility and the ontic-ontological distinction (Moran 2000; Gadamer
1976), would enhance the critical interpretivist flavour of inquiry undertaken in the project. Gadamer’s development of Heidegger’s approach to phenomenology, also offered a useful way forward for accommodating the many different acts of interpretation that form the nexus of my research problem.

Developing and using a phenomenological hermeneutic methodology in this inquiry began with reading primary sources, Heidegger’s *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology* (1988), and parts of *Being & Time* (1962), in addition to essays by Gadamer in *Philosophical Hermeneutics* (1976). Taylor’s *Sources of the Self: the Making of Modern Identity* (1989) was also read. Beginning this way was difficult, and the question of how to apply Heidegger’s and Gadamer’s ideas didn’t develop until after wading into my data, and reading secondary sources (King 2001; Sharkey 2001; Willis 2001; Moran 2000; Crotty 1998; 1996; van Manen 1990). Unlike the cognitive approach to phenomenology developed by Husserl, which has been formatted into a step-by-step methodology for the social researcher (Moustakas 1994), no application to social research type-text exists for using Heidegger’s phenomenology. In searching the literature, I discovered that appropriations of Heidegger’s philosophy for the purposes of conducting social research have been diversely utilised. It was apparent that employing Heidegger’s or Gadamer’s approaches to phenomenological hermeneutics would not be like using a recipe. These scholars emphasised that methods in themselves don’t lead to understanding, or good interpretations, it is other factors that do (Sharkey 2001: 16). Below, I describe what factors in this tradition helped my meaning making in the project.

3.2.2 Why hermeneutics? Differentiating between Husserl’s and Heidegger’s approaches

‘Transcendental phenomenology’ and ‘phenomenological hermeneutics’ are two major phenomenological approaches used in social research (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell 2004). The approaches can be differentiated on the basis of having different primary theoretical

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23 For example, Gunner (2000) used Heidegger’s concepts ‘being’, ‘time’ and ‘the clearing’ when interpreting the lived experience of people with gambling addictions, while Cashin’s (2003) hermeneutic phenomenological study of the experience of parenting a child with autism used Heidegger’s stance that interpretation is working out the possibilities of *Dasein*, the issue of our *being* in the world.
sources; Husserl or Heidegger, and different proponents in the social research literature; Moustakas (1994), for transcendental phenomenology and van Manen (1990), for hermeneutical phenomenology. However, these two approaches are sometimes used in combination (eg. Willis 2001). Laverty (2003) has argued the two approaches have similar and complementary end-points in description for the purposes of social research. This may be so. However, my reading of primary and secondary sources amounted to a resolve that the difference in the philosophies of Husserl and Heidegger concerning phenomenology, when used for the purposes of social research, is striking. The key difference appears between Husserl’s cognitive phenomenological method, the process whereby a pre-suppositionless inquirer gains access to the essence of a thing, while Heidegger stressed we are “alongside the things we try to understand and are not separate from them” (1962:64). I will elaborate on this distinction.

German philosopher Edmund Husserl’s (1859-1938) background was in mathematics, and his phenomenological theory exhibits an interest in how the natural sciences can contribute to knowledge about non-naturalistic phenomena, via striving for a methodological approach based on ‘pure logic’ (Moran 2000, Moustakas 1994, Lubbe 1960). Husserl wanted a reliable method for gaining access to consciousness itself (King 2001:114). The end point of inquiry is that there are essences, a constant Eidos, or an invariant meaning with each phenomena (Husserl 1970:341). He devised a reductive method where the inquirer brackets things taken for granted, including the inquirer’s own assumptions and experiences. This is termed the ‘epoche’ process. Husserl recognised the difficulty in setting aside preconceived ideas, however, he saw this as necessary if the inquirer was to have ‘a clear intuiting’ of the phenomena (Moustakas 1994: 87).

In using Husserl’s phenomenological method, the inquirer will foreground the status of non-theoretical lived experiences. That is, the ‘raw’, pre-reflective stories told by participants would be seen as the necessary way in to doing a phenomenological interpretation of the problem. According to this method, statements and meanings provided by participants will be abstracted from individuals communicating them. Both the inquirer and participants will somehow ‘give up’ their being-in-the-world with the
phenomena being studied, so the essential features of the phenomena might be grasped. Barnacle (2001) observes in this approach, a distinction is therein set up between the practice and the theory of the lived experience, with a higher value being placed on ‘practice’ removed from a participants’ reflections on their practice.

The problems I saw with this approach to phenomenology, in terms of my inquiry, included the potential danger that my participants’ experiences should be understood as sites of some pure, unmediated knowledge. This approach is antithetical to adopting a constructionist epistemological approach; or the acceptance that all accounts of lived experience are essentially perspectival. In contrast to this separation of ‘pure’ lived experience vs. the objective intuiting of the experience, Heidegger argued we (the inquirer and the subject) are always already in the world and that our interactions with things is primarily purposeful. He did not, therein, imply an opposition between theory and practice in his phenomenological hermeneutic. For Heidegger, the phenomenological hermeneutic develops a conversational relation with the problem that is the focus in a study. I wanted this kind of conversation when making meaning of my data; to follow each participant conversation with me separately, and then look for thematic and typological patterns that joined separate participant conversations across the shared practice experience that constituted my project questions. Further, arriving at a description of the constant Eidos (Husserl 1970:341) seemed analogous with the idea a social researcher can comprehensively ‘catch’ the essential meaning of some particular phenomena across all time. In opposition to this idea, Heidegger recognised that human knowing is temporally bound24; a variety of interpretations are possible, and interpretations are necessarily bound by the time and context of the social inquiry.

3.2.3 The art of phenomenological hermeneutics
Heidegger contended that phenomenological interpretation is a working out of the possibilities of something we are already involved in, “when something in the world is encountered as such, the thing in question already has an involvement which is disclosed

24 Heidegger said things are only meaningful because humans are temporarily bound; we are finite (1999: 11-16).
in our understanding of the world, and this involvement is one which gets laid out by the interpretation” (1985:223). Similarly, Gadamer (1976) insisted that all forms of understanding obtain from a historical and contextual vantage point that assumes a tradition of understanding; that our being “prejudiced” by our historical and contextual traditions is the very thing that enables us to understand. The understanding is a predicament whereby our self-understanding of our present situation joins with the continuity of the past (Sharkey 2001:27).

The point of departure in a phenomenological hermeneutical inquiry begins with an inquirer having a “vague, average” apprehension of the problem to be studied (Heidegger 1988). Similarly, Gadamer (1976) says the inquirer will be ‘prejudiced’. The journey of the hermeneutic becomes testing and risking prejudices –in the face of historical and social traditions or in a dialogical engagement with others. What makes the journey difficult in phenomenology is the nature of the problems being investigated; these will be problems where the meanings are not simply accessible or apparent, which is arguably the case with most social phenomena. Because of the nature of these problems, “that they are usually half hidden, disguised, or forgotten, and the route is accordingly closed to us” (Heidegger 1988: 2), the promise of phenomenological hermeneutics comes into its own. It is a special approach suited to understanding complex or misunderstood social phenomena (King 2001:110) and social interactions that are imbued with layers of interpretation (Sharkey 2001).

Phenomenological hermeneutics eschews canonical statement about method. What the process will involve is a critical reflection that develops in the circular movement, or a ‘shuttling back and forth’ between the experiential structures of the research problem; including the lifeworld as told by participants, traditional historical and social knowing, and the inquirer’s worldview (Willis 2000; Sharkey 2001; Crotty 1996). The aversion to a methodical recipe in doing this process, should not, however lead to arbitrariness in interpretation. Gadamer (1976) says that “avoiding misunderstanding” of a phenomena might be achieved through scholarship –‘being faithful to the horizons of the texts in the field’, in addition to tact, judgement and taste (Sharkey 2001:16).
In *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology* (1988) Heidegger discusses three components in the phenomenological hermeneutic, which I canvass because they impacted on the conduct of my data analysis. First, Heidegger says there is a *phenomenological reduction*; in ‘a precise way’ turning away from a problem, to be led back to the problem in the hermeneutic process so there can be a new way of seeing the problem (Heidegger 1988:21). Gadamer (1976:152-153) says the goal of this reduction, “*is not really to reduce (a problem) to the unity of a principle, but rather to disclose the whole wealth of the phenomena in an unbiased way*”25. Achieving this phenomenological description requires of the researcher a slowing down, and a moving away from ordinary cultural and traditional prejudices or assumptions about the problem, to enable a fresh disclosing of the problem itself (Heidegger 1962; Willis 2001:3).

Heidegger also discussed the practice of *phenomenological construction* in the phenomenological hermeneutic (1988: 22-24). The *construction* involves a hermeneutic of action, an art form involving ‘free projection’, critical reflection, and an attitude of care on behalf of the researcher (Heidegger 1988:22; Moran 2000:226). A phenomenological relating to things assumes the inquirer being concerned in advance, so the *construction* is interpretative (Moran 2000: 229). The construction is the “*art form*” (Gadamer 1976), it is the back and forth or circular movement between the relevant texts, and the inquirer’s evolving stance.

Third in the phenomenological hermeneutic, is the process of *reductive construction*, or *de-struction* discussed by Heidegger (1988: 23). This is a critical process in which concepts are de-constructed down to the sources from which they were drawn. In my project hermeneutic, this process occurred in the field work itself; having asked participants to separate out their own convictions and ideas, from workplace cultural constructions. That is, I was already engaged in a phenomenological de-struction in the fieldwork stage of the project.

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25 ‘Unbias’ in Gadamer’s terms amounts to avoiding ‘blind’ or negative prejudice.
Commentaries on Heidegger and Gadamer’s phenomenological hermeneutical approaches bring attention to relational aspects. Moran (2000) discusses how the hermeneutical structure of questioning in Heidegger’s philosophy accepts that the questioner has a pre-understanding of the issue at hand. Heidegger said, “In working out the question, have we not ‘presupposed’ something which only the answer can bring?” (1962:27) From this point, the relationship between the “I” and the “other” becomes crucial to make meaning, and it is the relational ‘in-between’ that matters in the hermeneutic process (Barnacle 2001:8). Therein, in meeting with the problem, the inquirer adopts an ‘un-knowing stance’, “not because we remain unfamiliar, unaware or uninformed … (but in) attempting to remain as open as possible to whatever presents itself as a relational experience” (Spinelli 1997:8). It is the relational hermeneutic, the ‘relatedness backward and forward,’ between pre-understandings and what emerges in the inquiry, that discounts circular reasoning on behalf of the inquirer (Moran 2000: 237). The final understanding will be inclusive of the researchers and participants’ comprehensions, in addition to the inquirers critical engagement.

Another concept discussed by Heidegger in the process of phenomenological meaning making, is the ontic-ontological distinction. According to Heidegger, the ontic refers to things that exist. Heidegger used the word ontic constantly, and approximations of this term include what is real, or what is given, in experience (King 2001:46). In distinction, the ontological deals with what makes the ontic possible; what is the ground or source of the ontic? Heidegger (1997:7-15) claimed it is common in our technological age that we ignore the ontological or misunderstand it; we mistakenly believe the ground of objects to be other causal objects, or perhaps ourselves, as the instigators of what is real. As a corrective to this Heidegger’s phenomenological technique was concerned with doing deep exploration of what is the source, or the grounds, of what appears as given. Heidegger referred to this as the ontological (King 2001).

3.2.4 Moral ontology and the ‘authentic possibility’
Both methodological frameworks used in this thesis; phenomenology and critical realism, discuss ontologies of human existence (Archer, Collier & Porpora 2004; Crotty 1998;
Taylor 1989). A number of ontological assertions can be recognised in the ‘strong’ programme of hermeneutics (Smith 1997). Charles Taylor (1989:4-14) says that behind our moral and spiritual intuitions, is a moral ontology. He recognises this idea is controversial; but says there is a background we all assume and draw on in any claim to rightness. It is our moral ontology which we are forced to spell out when we are in the situation of defending our position as a right or good one. Taylor says that the moral ontology is given; our moral sentiments and reactions are affirmations of some understanding of what it is to be a person (1989:5). For many, this ‘background’, or moral ontology, remains unexplored. Taylor says (1989:9) exploring this background is frequently resisted, because of the lack of fit between how people represent their beliefs in public on one hand, and what they need to do to make sense of some of their moral reactions, on the other.

Another ontological issue that features in the thesis concerns a kind of thing that matters in human living: authenticity. Heidegger (1962) distinguished between authentic and inauthentic ways of being. He said no human dwells in ‘authenticity’ all the time; for most of the time humans are simply getting by, not dwelling on the significance of events around, or understanding them. However, Heidegger describes our personal concerns sometimes being brought into sharp relief, and we have a deep or sincere experience of mine-ness or fitting-ness with the relations around us (1962:9). Heidegger says here we experience authenticity.

Importantly for my use of this term in the project analysis, Heidegger also said that authenticity doesn’t simply happen, it is a choice. Humans choose to practice in certain ways, instead of others (Moran 2000:239). Hence, in describing the authentic possibility, or ‘being-truly-human’, Heidegger expresses an attitude of scepticism concerning the possibility of authenticity in everyday living. He writes that humans actually have a falling tendency (verfallen) toward in-authenticity, getting “bogged down in inauthentic tradition and habituation” (cited in Moran 2000: 226). Heidegger gives illustrations of humans having authentic motives, but inauthentic practices (1962:175). Heidegger suggests humans by default fall into in-authenticity; a practice of just getting by without
genuine engagement with others, despite our ontological capacity to relate with care and concern. In a related discussion, Taylor contends that human agency is conditioned not only by an orientation towards the good, but also by the possibility of moral growth and decline (1989:47).

3.2.5 Theoretical tools from hermeneutical phenomenology used in the project

The project went beyond the endeavour of describing ontic matters, for example, describing only the methods used by workers to construct good relationships in relationship violence prevention programmes. Instead, my phenomenological engagement penetrated more ‘deeply’ concerning the question of what beliefs make certain constructions of good relationships possible. I asked the question: what beliefs, ideas, and values held by my participants make certain constructions of good relationships possible in their practice?

In this inquiry an evaluative stance is taken regarding the question of what practice approach to violence prevention education might be considered more authentic. As has been reviewed in this chapter, a key task for Heidegger (1962) was to contrast in-authentic with authentic ways of being. The paradox described by Heidegger is that despite the possibility that humans can authentically engage in the world, we can fall into in-authentic or objectifying practices. Engagement with this paradox in the project manifested in my recognising that so-called ‘best practice’ is not necessarily good practice. Also, I was attentive to forms of ‘non-fittingness’ in participants accounts, and in-authentic expressions of care, in the hermeneutic engagement with interview text.

In Heidegger’s writing of the human ethos (1962) and Taylor’s (1989) writing on moral development is proposed the idea that the good life will be founded on continually learning, or cultivating a mode of attunement26 to the meaning of life. Indeed, the premise that the good life involves learning, and walking humbly in making sense of what is good, was already central to my worldview. This is the reason I do things like:

26 In his essay ‘The question concerning technology’ (1997) Heidegger argues that in order to free ourselves from the alienating influence of productionist technology, and to recover our rooted-ness in the world, we must cultivate a mode of attunement.
reading books, listening to others, listening to my children; to learn, unlearn, and learn again, about what it is to live a meaningful life. Hence, my inquiry is essentially a learning to bring different ways of thinking to bear on my own, and others’ lives. I wanted to research how workers conceive humans might learn about the ‘good’ potentialities for living, in the hope human service workers might be better able to articulate and practice their gifts, or strengths.

Because of these things, it could be said my use of phenomenology stands in contrast to what Crotty (1996) referred to as the trend of ‘empathetic phenomenology’ in social research. Rather than arriving at description based on the culmination of subjective accounts, which is the end point in empathetic uses of phenomenology, my approach was committed to penetrating beneath or behind my participant’s experiences, in the effort to undertake evaluative interpretation.

### 3.2.5 Summary: Limitations of phenomenological hermeneutics

Phenomenological hermeneutics enables an inquirer to accommodate different and layered acts of interpretation, in the process of making meaning of social practices. The ‘bridge building’ of the hermeneutic involves circular shuttling between the research participants, the ‘lifeworld’ of the inquirer, and relevant literary traditions, as a means of creating renewed, deeper and fresh understandings of a problem in human experience.

However, beyond these generalised descriptions of the hermeneutical process, proponents of this approach should still address the question of what is the basis for their critical interpretations. While Gadamer (1976) maintained that people’s horizons fuse and overlap, which enables an inquirer to notice patterns and mutual understandings, he largely fails to acknowledge how to assess difference and conflict in the fusion of people’s horizons (Moran 2000: 252; Bernstein 1985). If the phenomenological hermeneutic inquirer is to arrive at “what is feasible, what is possible, what is correct” (Gadamer, 1976: xxv), how should inquirers respond to uncertainty and confusion encountered in the horizons of text and different ‘lifeworlds’? How does the inquirer
wrestle with differences and conflict found in the fusion of horizons they study, and then
describe these differences in the written narrative?

In the project fieldwork, I wanted to learn about how desirable relationships are promoted
in practice, and how the good or desirable relationship is conceptualised by educators. I
wanted to engage critically with my findings. However, while it is accepted in
phenomenology that there are different structures to people’s experiences, few tools are
offered concerning how an inquirer might evaluate such differences. Given the purposes
of my inquiry, I needed a methodological approach that would help me do critical
evaluation. Critical realism provided a compass in this endeavour.

3.3 Critical realism as philosophical compass
3.3.1 Introduction
Critical realism has developed in the last 30 years, in adverse reaction to some of the
extreme claims and manifestations of both the post-modern agenda, and the positivist
empirical tradition (Potter & Lopez 2001). Critical realism is a distinct version of the
realist philosophy first proposed by Roy Bhaskar (1998; 1987; 1979), now taking
different forms in scholarship by many social scientists. In distinction from
phenomenology, which aims to elicit and interpret meanings, the point of critical realist
investigation is to build explanation and understanding about phenomena in the social
world. In distinction from crude realism, critical realism rejects the idea of a unified
human subject, and is anti-idealistic (Clegg 2006:316).

In building knowledge, critical realism contends that all knowledge is fallible, however,
not equally fallible. In the critical realist framework some knowledge will be assessed as
better than other knowledge. The principles that influence this reckoning in critical
realism are: ontological realism, epistemological relativism and judgemental rationality
(Danermark et al. 2002; Potter and Lopez 2001; Archer 1988). Ontological realism in
critical realist philosophy, posits the existence of a reality which is stratified,
differentiated, structured and changing. Stating reality is ‘stratified’ in the critical realist
project, is to reject relying on ‘surface sense data’, and assumes ‘ontological depth’ in the
process of understanding (Archer 1988: 196). The critical realist affirmation of
ontological realism means that asking questions about ‘reality’ does not involve solely in asking the question ‘whose reality?’, or the question ‘what reality exists in this or that discourse?’ Instead, a question like ‘does such and such version of the good in human living exist?’ is accepted as a legitimate question. This is because critical realism accepts that aspects of reality exist apart from our knowledge of reality (Archer et al 2004: 10).

The second principle, ‘epistemological relativism’ infers that our knowledge about this reality is always limited; that human knowledge is always socially constructed (Sayer 1992). However, as the term ‘judgemental rationality’ suggests, critical realism posits there are some theoretical and methodological tools that can be used to discriminate among different ideas’ ability to inform us about ‘reality’. Critical realism is ‘critical’ because any attempts to describe and explain the world are recognised as fallible.

Like most philosophical and theoretical traditions, critical realism contains a cluster of ideas that are more or less shared by its advocates. Nevertheless, critical realism is a broad church, and there appears to be tension and debates around several key issues. For example, critical realists diverge on what is considered to be ‘reality’ in the social and natural realms, and also debate the nature of the relationship between humans and social structures (Potter & Lopez 2001:15 -21, Archer 1988). A further unresolved issue in critical realism concerns the importance of empirical research for the purpose of developing knowledge (Wad 2000). Critical realism does not promote any particular method or practice for conducting social research, and the practicalities of what it means to do ‘critical realist research’ are still emerging (Archer 2006 personal correspondence; New 2001; Yeung 1997). However, there does appear to be a number of key philosophical principles driving critical realist investigations. My project makes use of only a few of these principles, and does not commit to doing a ‘critical realist investigation’.

3.3.2 Distancing from ‘typical’ versions of critical realist investigation?
Critical realism was not used in the project as a methodology in a strict sense. In particular, I wasn’t interested in identifying a range of causal mechanisms influencing workers constructions of good and desirable human relationships. Instead, I used critical
realism as a ‘philosophical compass’. Because of my untypical appropriation of this framework, I want to communicate clearly what features in mainstream critical realist-type investigations the project did not use.

Bhaskar’s pioneering of the philosophy critical realism was in the natural sciences; he was interested in developing a single appropriate framework that could study both the natural and social worlds. Bhaskar wanted to establish “the properties that societies and people must possess if they are to be possible objects of knowledge for us” (1998: 167). Great lengths are sought in many versions of critical realism to extrapolate objects in the social world for the purposes of investigation (see for examples, Kazi 2003; Sayer 1992; Yeung 1997).

If “most practicing critical realists understand the crucial importance of causal powers and generative mechanisms of objects, in their explanations” (Yeung 1997:56), it will be seen my study is not strictly a critical realist investigation. I wasn’t concerned with the range of ‘reality’ domains pertaining to prevention practice. I also wasn’t concerned with describing in depth influences shaping participants’ practice contexts. Further, I wasn’t attempting to measure or quantify the extent to which workers personal worldviews influence their practice. The intention of my study was modest in the search for influencing mechanisms. I was interested only in how workers’ personal worldviews influence, and make possible, certain constructions of good relationships. These worldviews, or individuals’ personal moralities, are viewed as an important part of the picture for understanding why certain versions of ‘good’ relationships are promoted in violence prevention education practice.

3.3.3 Mechanisms as influences

The activity of most critical realist research entails describing an effect or outcome of a phenomenon, but also involves explaining the inner workings of a phenomenon. Lawson

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27 According to Bhaskar (1978:56) objects of investigation will be teased out across the stratified levels of reality: the empirical, actual and real ontological domains, as well as transitive (experienced) and intransient (independent of human thought) domains.
writes; “The aim (of critical realist research) is not to cover a phenomenon under a generalisation, but to identify a factor responsible for it, that helped produce, or at least facilitated it” (1998: 156). The ‘factors’ responsible or influential in producing outcomes are referred to as ‘mechanisms’ in critical realist research. The process of identifying ‘generative mechanisms’ in critical realist investigations can take on almost mathematical proportions across different ‘domains’ of reality. For example, in using a critical realist approach to evaluate a sexual offenders programme Kazi (2003:808) commits to developing an “explanatory account (that investigates) the mechanism-context-outcome configurations, to explain how the programme causal mechanism interacted with other causal mechanisms, in the circumstances of the clients, and the context where programmes were delivered”.

Differently from the investigation by Kazi (2003), my project did not seek to describe or understand practices in violence prevention education as a whole. I was more concerned with trying to describe and interpret how desirable or ‘good’ relationships are constructed in this work. In looking at these, I assumed that workers’ personal beliefs and ideas do influence their practice28. Sayer (2000:18) observes in the critical realist framework, “(human) reasons can also be viewed as causes, in that they prompt us to do things, think differently, etc.”

Explaining a phenomenon and then trying to understand how it has emerged is an acceptable route in a critical realist investigation, “one can assume the existence of a certain mechanism and try to find out how this mechanism manifests empirically” (Danermark et al. 2002: 59). In this investigation I assumed that personal beliefs do influence a workers practice. I endeavoured to find out how these beliefs appear to produce (Bhaskar 1986:11), influence, generate, or facilitate (Lawson 1998; Pawson & Tilley 1997) how the ‘good’ relationship is promoted by individual workers in practice.

I hasten to emphasise that promoting ‘good’ relationships in violence prevention education, like any social practice, is the outcome of complex factors including social and

28 A correlation between a workers personal worldview, and how they practice, is generally accepted in the tradition of human services work literature (Hugman 2005, 2003; McAuliffe 2005; Houston 2003; McBeath & Webb 2002; Freud & Krug 2002; Asquith & Cheers 2001; Zubrzycki 2000).
cultural factors. While the social world is constructed in a large part by meanings, motivations and reasons that people give to their behaviour, these things don’t exhaust the fabric of mechanisms in the social world (Layder 1998:143).

3.3.4 Using critical realism as a philosophical ‘compass’

Because I was not interested in the complex enterprise of finding causal ‘mechanisms’ situated across several ‘reality’ domains that inform workers constructions of good relationships, the questions of how and why I was using the critical realism paradigm evaded me earlier in the project. The critical realist-influenced research studies I had reviewed had not blended a phenomenological hermeneutical in their methodology. In the wake of realising my project aims seemed different to many other critical realist investigations, I struggled with the question of why the philosophy of critical realism felt akin to a framework home. Yielding no answers in my dilemma, I wrote to Margaret Archer about combining critical realism with phenomenology in social research. She responded:

“I see what you are asking, which is an interesting question. Really it amounts to asking if there is a critical realist methodology, as well as a philosophy of science and theoretical framework for approaching an issue - which combine phenomenology. I guess there has been quite a lot of methodological debate and contributions on this… Several of us have done qualitative (interview based) studies, whose theoretical orientation is critical realism. However, when it comes to the methodology (as opposed to its interpretation), I honestly do wonder if there is anything particularly distinctive about how we do it, as opposed to the areas we explore and the reasons for doing so (personal correspondence, June 2006).

This response was experienced by me as a ‘green light’ to go ahead with using critical realism as a philosophical compass, joined with phenomenological hermeneutics as a methodology. In her email, Archer indicates that interpretation in a critical realist

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29 However, in his study of moral worldviews of contemporary Americans critical realist Porpora (2001) heavily uses empirical findings to influence his interpretations. His write up blends the principle of ontological reality, different ‘rich description’ participant viewpoints, and evaluative commentary informed by relevant literature.
investigation will have some ontological commitment; or that the investigator will take a
certain stance in interpretation. My motivation for doing this project evolves from a
commitment to seeking what is moral, ethical or good in human practice. This
commitment indeed shaped the interpretative practices throughout the project. I speak
more about the interpretative stance I used in the following sections.

3.3.5 Ontology: Accepting metaphysical realism
In comparison to many other approaches in social research, critical realism makes strong
claims at the ontological level. The main ontological claim concerns the independent
existence of reality, including the reality of social forms that can arise independently of
our ability to ‘know’ them.

Some critical realist scholars have taken up the challenge of writing about transcendent
forms of reality, arguing transcendental things can be considered suitable subject matter
in the humanities. Archer, Collier & Porpora (2004: 11) observe that positivism moved
metaphysical questions out of bounds for the social sciences, and that post-modernism
has continued to de-privilege metaphysical issues. These scholars want to rescue matters
of transcendence from the maze of epistemology. They argue that despite the difficulty of
‘knowing’ about transcendent issues (human judgements are socially constructed, and
experience is always interpreted), transcendent phenomena may belong to ‘reality’ and
can be approached as such. Scepticism or disbelief about transcendence must be
interrogated in the same vein as belief often is (Archer et al 2004:5). In deference to those
who might say ‘there is no such thing as love, because we all have different experiences
of love’ these scholars would contend this perspective, too, is an interpretation. This
particular interpretation doesn’t rule out the possibility that love can have ‘real’
properties.

This line of argument, developed in Archer’s writing, had the following influence on my
project: I accept different social and cultural groups, and different individuals, hold
contrasting views about what is good in relationships, “plurality is a descriptive fact”
(Archer et al 2004:11). However, this being the case does not imply that ‘good’
relationships are just a social construction. Perhaps the ‘good’ has ‘real’ characteristics. Perhaps behind the different phrases used in prevention educational programmes to refer to what is desirable (safe, healthy, positive, respectful relationships), there are transcendent qualities that are ‘real’ and good. It could be argued that the fact violence prevention education programmes do promote desirability in relationships, is testimony to an ontology of the ‘good’. This ontological ground may involve transcendent qualities. Or, it might be a reality born of traditions of practice (Gadamer 1976). It may also be the case that the ontology of a ‘good’ relationship resides, and is recognised only through human experience. Here, seeking the grounds for an ontology of ‘the good’ in relationships would need to accommodate inter-subjectivity (Cruikshank 2004).

In writing this thesis I do not pretend to be in the position where I can adjudicate what is a ‘good’ relationship. Nor do I pretend to be in a position where I can judge what moral-ethical authorities are best to instruct workers in what is ‘good’. What I do commit to, is the idea that it is worthy to engage critically with different ideas about what ‘good’ relationships involve, and ideas about how people might learn to live well in their relationships. The thesis engages critically with the experience of participants interviewed in relation to these significant questions. In terms of the issue ‘ontology’, my joining with participants’ worldviews in the project analysis involved my conceiving that the ‘good’ in relationships may be a different thing to how it was described. I critically explore the question of morality in relationships; the question ‘what makes good relationships, good?’

3.3.6 Archer: Human agency and the role of individual in shaping social practice

In designing this inquiry, I assumed that violence prevention educators have significant agency in their practice. Specifically, I assumed they have some capacity to choose how to present or speak of the ‘good’ in relationships in practice. In this section I discuss the theoretical premises for this assumption, strengthened by the work of Archer (2000). I know well from being involved in critical social science circles for over a decade (where post-modern theory stands tall) that focusing on individual agency when understanding and critiquing a social practice is somewhat unusual. It is through arriving at critical
realist theory, and moving away from the post-structural emphasis on language to understand social phenomena, that prompted my seeing the benefit of focusing individual’s beliefs and practices in social theorising.

The picture illustrated in Margaret Archer’s *Being Human* (2000) is one which enchants humankind; a picture of real people in the real world who have the capacity to wrestle, dismiss, actively take on or contemplate social phenomena. Archer is critical of reductionist tendencies in social theory whereby the ‘parts’ (society) are said to dominate the people, *downward conflation*, or alternatively, people are said to orchestrate the parts, *upward conflation* (2000: 3-7). To achieve a non-reductionist stance, Archer sees that social structures, ‘culture’ and human agency should not be considered as distinct phenomena, but as a ‘morphogenic sequence’ in which structure and culture condition agency, and agency elaborates on the structure it confronts. There is an interplay between structure and agency (2000:306).

To salvage a workable notion of human agency, Archer critiques the tendency in social theory to dissolve the human subject entirely. Much of her critique in *Being Human* (2000) is levelled at the post-modern genre in social theory. With regard to human agency, Archer (2000:19) reviews a number of post-modern and post-structural theorists as being intentionally silent.

‘A self does not amount to much’ (Lyotard 1994),

‘Identities become merely points of temporary attachment to the subject positions which discursive practices construct’ (Stuart Hall 1996),

‘Socialisation...goes all the way down’ (Rorty, 1989),

‘Man would be erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea’ (Foucault 1970).

Jane Flax (1990:32) has written ‘In fact, Man is a social, historical, or linguistic artifact ... Man is forever caught in the web of fictive meaning, in chains of signification, in which the subject is merely another position in language.’

The accusation made by Archer is that post-modern accounts of human agency are too thin, because they don’t recognise the significance of human selves and our practices in
shaping the social world (Clegg 2005: 150). Archer has written, “if there is no antecedent self, one cannot become ‘someone’ but only ‘something’ and this again collapses back into a passive process of socialisation and subjugation” (2000:33). In the post-structural tradition the ontological claim remains at the discursive levels and maintains the non-knowability of the pre-discursive self (Clegg 2006:314). Post-structural inquiry is often mired at the discursive domain in the attempt to understand human practice.\(^{30}\)

In distinction, Archer argues that our sense of self is “prior and primitive to our sociality” (2000: 121). Being Human’s account of humans having a continuous self, distinct from object and other subjects, does not refute that people are social selves, but as social selves we are dependent on the ‘prior emergence of a continuous sense of self which continually informs us that the things that happen to us, and the things we make happen, all pertain to the self-same human … co-dependent with the emergence of a personal identity’ (2000: 254-5). Three elements about human agency are defended:

1. Humans possess powers that can be causally efficacious,
2. We live in a social world that has properties that can constrain, or enable, action. These are temporally prior to the human agent conceiving of an action, relatively autonomous from how the agent takes them to be, and can influence the achievement of the agent.
3. The human agent adopts a ‘stance’ toward their social context.\(^{31}\) (Archer 2003:14).

Archer acknowledges that human’s capacity for agency varies “with the stringency of constraints and the strength of enablements”. However, she insists we have influence over our circumstances via reflexive deliberation (2003: 7). In a pithy retort to post-modern lingo Archer notes “constraints require something to constrain, and enablements something to enable” (2003:4).

\(^{30}\) What Archer (2000) has called ‘society’s being’; the being which is discursively formed, and consequently having no real agency.

\(^{31}\) Similar to these ideas, Taylor (1989: 34) writes that “(humans) are selves, only that certain issues matter for us”. We make interpretations by articulating a contrast between what makes a difference to us. According to Taylor, the identity of a person makes sense only by virtue of the capacity humans have to distinguish what matters; the fact we can distinguish between the significant and the trivial, the fulfilling and the vacuous.
In distinction from a ‘thin’ approach to human agency, Archer is interested in the properties and powers humans possess, that social structures, and social forms, otherwise do not have. Among these include thinking, deliberating, believing, intending and loving (2003:2). The human practice of reflexivity, according to Archer, is one of the most important personal emergent properties human’s have. She advances ‘the inner conversation’; the rich internal dialogue all humans experience about events going on around us, as a key form of human reflexivity. While this conversation is argued as being genuinely interior, not ‘written’ by external discourses, it remains a social theoretical concern because the internal commentary is interwoven with social responses themselves; our internal commentary is part of the action. Archer says this internal conversation makes life always a predicament and not a spectacle because we are already having an internal dialogue concerning our circumstances before, during and after they happen (2000: 193). While this project didn’t use the concept ‘inner conversation’, instead using the idea ‘moral-ethical worldview’ which was accessed through dialogue with participants, Archer’s theory that individual’s internal or personal beliefs become ‘part of the action’ in influencing the social practice, was adopted in my inquiry. If we are to understand social practices, Archer says “we can begin with either agential reasons or social causes, but that at best each story will be filled in from the other side. Because realism does not accept a division between ‘reasons’ and ‘causes’… there is only one story to tell” (2000:13).

Archer’s re-vindication of the capacity of human agency strengthened the project design. I accepted that my participants: reflect on their practice, prioritise their concerns, make discretionary judgements and evaluations concerning what is good in relationships, and practice deliberately in response to these things. I accepted also that a worker’s practice is influenced by the social context; and that different humans possess the ability to “react back powerfully” to greater or lesser extents (Lemert 2002:132)32. However, in this study, it was the exchange or relationship between the private worldview of participants, and practice style, which is focused on. Engaging actors worldviews is an important trajectory

32 This project’s participants, experienced professionals, had much discretion in their work environments.
for social research, because our beliefs are not just a window on the world, rather they help “determine our being-in-the-world” (Archer 2000:318).

3.3.7 Using critical realism as a philosophical compass: summary
The project used critical realist philosophy as a methodological compass. One key principle drawn from critical realism was committing to ontology as an inspiration when thinking about my research questions and research findings. Correspondent with this inspiration, I adopted the position that interpreted experiences do not equate with the efficacy of a fact. It may be the case that understandings human agents have of their social world are incorrect, or, in the least, limited. A problem outlined in the final section of this chapter of relevance here, is to use a ‘phenomenological hermeneutic circle’ which draws attention to the central importance of meanings, while sustaining the possibility of critique in the process of interpretation.

Another principle drawn from particularly Archer’s (2000) version of critical realism was paying attention to the role that human agency has in shaping social practice. In this inquiry I viewed that the participants’ beliefs, ideas and reasons are influential mechanisms in violence prevention practice. Conceptually, I was interested in the interplay between participants’ beliefs and practice style, or “disentangling the interplay between a social practice and agency” (Archer 2000:307). While an individual’s beliefs are not the ultimate constituent of social practice, describing an individual’s beliefs is an important task because beliefs and ideas can change the real world. The social world is open to change because it is 'peopled' by agents who possess a critical reflexivity and creativity toward the world in which they live.

3.4 Conclusion: On blending a version of critical realism with hermeneutical phenomenology
In the chapter I have discussed the framework of phenomenological hermeneutics in addition to critical realism, as distinct philosophical approaches. In combining these approaches for the purpose of interpreting my project findings, I have taken a risk. That is, using critical realism as a ‘compass’ joined with phenomenology is an experimental approach in social research terms. Below I acknowledge some key differences between
these philosophical frameworks. Then I suggest some similarities, or in the very least, points of convergence between these frameworks that assisted the efficacy of utilising a phenomenological hermeneutic with a critical realist compass.

The philosophy of Heidegger plainly conveys that the point of phenomenological inquiry is to find ontological truths, and not to develop knowledge per se about the world. Specifically, his philosophy advocates undertaking an existential analysis of what it means to be human, and retrieve and describe the ontological grounds (or essences) of human experience (Moran 2000: 197). For Heidegger, phenomenology was a way of making everyday preconceptions problematic through questioning; what is a problem as such with regard to its ontological grounds? Then, what is the meaning of this problem, having been grounded in its essential structures? A phenomenological hermeneutical framework in this sense is distinguishable from realism, in drawing attention to the way in which our consciousness of the world is mediated and transformed by ontological potentialities for interpretative practices.

Despite attractive features in phenomenological hermeneutics which assisted the project, using only phenomenology in the project methodology was a prospect I was uncomfortable with. It would have been deeply frustrating for a person like me who wants social change in the area of ethics in human services work to stop at the point of making phenomenological hermeneutical description. In this project, I wanted to emphasise differences in participants’ practice experiences and beliefs, and critically assess the relationship between beliefs and practice. Moran (2000: 218) has similarly acknowledged ‘deeply frustrating’ elements of phenomenological inquiry, saying that essential concepts, as an end point, get in the way of expressing meanings in different ways.

In critical realism, knowledge is generated through identifying factors that influence certain outcomes (Lawson 1998). A critical realist takes up the task of evaluating findings, or engages critically with different perspectives that emerge, based on the principles of ontological realism, epistemological relativism and critical evaluation. I
recognise the uncomfortable fit in converging features from critical realism with phenomenology. While Heidegger communicates some basis for distinguishing between different accounts of the truth character of being, via his writing on the ‘authentic possibility’, his phenomenological approach was not concerned with developing knowledge or explanation about social practices.

Despite this evident contrast between phenomenology and the aims of critical realism, there are points of similarity with the two frameworks. These similarities were considered adequately sufficient to use phenomenology with critical realism in the project, while still maintaining methodological integrity. Important similarities include;

- The idea that the researcher doesn’t rely on surface reality (Archer 2000) or the ontic (Heidegger 1962) when engaging human experience. Instead, the researcher should seek depth description of the world (critical realism), or the ontological; the grounds that makes the ontic possible (Heidegger). While depth or stratified reality, and ‘the ontological’ are differently expressed and understood in these philosophies, they are similar in that they both have an agenda set firmly in the orbit of ontology. In other words, they are realist in orientation.

- Both frameworks share the idea that social phenomena are concept-dependent (Sayer 2000:18). Hence, human experience is viewed as the important locus for deriving meaningful data in social research, advocated both in phenomenology generally (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell 2004, Moutsakas 1994; van Manen 1990), and some critical realist research (Archer 2003, Porpora 2001). Critical realism also takes the position that social inquiry does not stop at the experience of the subject, because the real is irreducible to human experience (Clegg 2006: 316).

- The acceptance that analysis, or making meaning of information, is primarily interpretative is expressed both in phenomenological hermeneutical inquiry and in the critical realist approach to qualitative research. It is accepted in critical realism (Archer 2003) and the ‘strong hermeneutical’ approaches of Heidegger, Gadamer
The pragmatics of how I used a phenomenological hermeneutical critical realist blending in making meaning of findings is described in the next chapter.
Chapter 4.
Fieldwork Design and Interpretation Strategy

4.1 Fieldwork design and implementation

4.1.1 General background for the Field Study

The explicit quest in entering my fieldwork was to learn how ‘good’ or desirable relationships are constructed and promoted in violence prevention education. I wanted to learn also, about guiding moral-ethical frameworks shaping these constructions, as communicated by workers in this field. These things joined in synthesis; how the good relationship is promoted in prevention education, and moral-ethical worldviews that shape individual workers practice, is the key issue explored in the project interpretations.

This inquiry has involved a fresh exploration of what is to me a familiar culture. In some ways I might be considered an ‘insider’; having worked for three years in a Health-funded role that focused on developing and facilitating primary prevention initiatives in the areas of family violence and child protection. My familiarity with the practices and culture of the field violence prevention education significantly impacted on the project design and analysis. This familiarity helped me gain access to the field. Because of my previous experience, I didn’t consider it necessary to find an informant, or insider, to teach me the language and culture of the field (Fontana & Frey 2003:77). My previous work experience also enabled me to make a number of ‘short cuts’, or informed judgements, throughout the interpretative process.

4.1.2 Description of the field site and the project sample

Chapter 2 provided a comprehensive description of the field primary prevention targeting relationship violence. In this field workers write or facilitate programs that aim to prevent future violence from occurring in relationships. The population groups targeted are ‘before the fact’ of violence, that is, community and family groups who haven’t necessarily experienced violence. Primary prevention initiatives in the area of relationship violence most commonly involve education-type interventions (VicHealth 2007; Mulroney 2003). Educative interventions most commonly employ a social
learning theory approach, where ‘solutions’ to the problem of violence are taught, in the belief this will counteract people choosing to use violence (Coker 2004). In the Australian domestic and family violence prevention fields, feminist, social-systems and deterrence based theories are also influential in violence prevention education programs.

There are no statistics available that can inform us how many professionals in Australia are employed to do primary prevention work targeting violence in relationships. The difficulty with obtaining an accurate picture of this workforce would include the issue of drawing parameters around the concept ‘prevention’. Some workers evidently associate the term ‘prevention’ with their work across the primary - secondary - tertiary spectrum, however a strict public health conception would consider only universal, ‘before the fact’ populations as suitable targets for primary prevention activity (Butchart et al 2004; Guterman 2004; Albee & Ryan 1998).

In this field inquiry, the target population was human service workers doing primary relationship violence prevention activity. Recruiting a sample of this population was achieved. While some participants discussed secondary and tertiary prevention practice in interviews (working with victims and perpetrators of violence), in my data analysis I focused only on elements in participants’ practice relevant to promoting desirable alternatives to violence in relationships.

The participants in this study all met three important criteria. One; they could discuss their personal experience when working in violence prevention. Two; they had agreed to discuss the key issue in the study, how desirable or good relationships are promoted in their practice. Thirdly; they could discuss the culture of an Australian primary violence prevention field, including an ability to discuss the content of at least one primary prevention program or strategy.

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33 Finding a language to describe these criteria occurred during the writing of my inquiry, and not before advertising the project. The inspiration for these criteria comes from Archer, Collier & Porpora’s (2004:1-14) discussion of what might properly be taken into account when researching human experience. This includes: the subjective account (of the person doing the experiencing), the object of the experience, and content of the experience.
4.1.3 Recruitment and description of the participants

After gaining ethics clearance (discussed further below), participants were recruited for the study via advertising through a number of Australian Clearinghouse online news and events lists. The Clearinghouses that advertised my recruitment notice were those I considered most relevant for my sampling aims; to recruit Australian workers doing primary prevention in an area of relationship violence. Advertising this way would enable potential participants to self-select or volunteer their involvement, as well as allow me to access the relevant population for the study aims. The Clearinghouses who published my recruitment advertisement were the Australian Domestic & Family Violence Clearinghouse, the National Child Protection Clearinghouse, and the Australian Centre for the Study of Sexual Assault. The advertisement was run in these publications between February and May 2006 (see Appendix A for sample advertisement).

In social research terms, my sample was accessed via purposive and snowball methods. ‘Purposive’ sampling has been recognised as probably the most important method of non-probability sampling, in its potential for accessing relevant participants for a study (Bryman 2004; Groenewald 2004). ‘Snowball’ sampling, while not initially intended as a method of recruitment in this study, is recognised in the social research literature as a way of expanding a sample via recruitment through already established participants (Bryman 2004).

Sixteen relationship violence prevention workers responded to this advertising, and an information sheet about the project was emailed to all these people (see Appendix B to view the information sheet). On reviewing the information sheet, four initial respondents contacted me to say their work was not relevant to ‘primary prevention’ work. On this basis they withdrew their interest in participating in the study. A further two participants were recruited to the study along the ‘grapevine’; through knowing one of the other participants who had already committed to being involved in the project. Hence, fourteen participants were recruited to the study and interviewed.
However, during the data analysis I decided to remove the experiences of two interviewees from the study; Ben and Miriam. Ben’s experience was removed very early in working with my field data. The reason for removing this was due to the poor quality of the transcript. The phone interview with Ben had been difficult because I was unable to hear him clearly. This affected my ability to ask questions, and do the phenomenological-type digging that I was able to with the other participants. I made the decision that it would be disingenuous to analyse Ben’s practice experience in the same way as the others, given that all question domains were not covered in this interview.

Miriam’s practice experience was removed quite late in the analysis phase. However, I had been aware throughout the data analysis that the content of Miriam’s work was different from others; in the sense that neither of her work roles involved ‘before the fact’ prevention. This issue became increasingly problematic when I was looking for patterns and contrasts in my data. Miriam had practiced with family groups and couples, who had experienced violence. It was on this basis she identified with the criteria of having experience with promoting desirable and non-violent relationships in practice. At the time of interview Miriam was employed in a strategic departmental position, focusing on the area of quality management in violence prevention. While I had initially accepted this as an ‘environmental’ form of primary prevention work, it became clearer to me this role wasn’t about primary prevention. It had a tertiary prevention focus. I decided to remove Miriam’s experience because it didn’t meet the criteria of relevant practice content, therein again it would be disingenuous for me to compare her practice style with others. Finally, then, the experience of twelve participants were engaged in this inquiry.

Certain demographic and descriptive details of my twelve participants are found in Table 4.1 including: gender, degree/s obtained by each participant; years worked in the human services field; and practice specifics about the practice area in which participants work. All the names used in the table and throughout the thesis to refer to the project participants are pseudonyms, in keeping with my project’s confidentiality commitments.

34 Both names are pseudonyms.
There were seven females and five males in the final sample. Nine participants were from the Australian state of New South Wales, while the other three were from Western Australia, Queensland and Victoria respectively. Four participants were from regional areas, the others were from metropolitan areas.

Of the twelve participants involved in my study, all had completed a degree relevant to human service work. Eight participants had two or more professional qualifications. The criteria that participants’ have ‘experience’ working in the violence prevention field is evident in Table 4.1. Six participants in this study had been working in the human services for over 20 years. The other participants had been between 5 years and 20 years experience working in the violence prevention field.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Degree/ s completed</th>
<th>Gender F/ M</th>
<th>Years experience in the field</th>
<th>Current (or recent) experience relevant to relationship violence prevention</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| John   | B. Social Work                                           | M           | 10                           | - Child protection caseload  
- Consultation for health staff concerning child protection issues  
- Facilitate Primary prevention programmes in schools and to community groups                                                                                     |
| Erin   | B. Law  
Grad Dip. (Management)                              | F           | 24                           | - Advocacy at state & local levels for female victims of violence  
- Writing & delivering educational prevention programmes for community and other professionals                                                                 |
| Ruth   | B. Nursing  
B. Social Ecology  
Grad Dip. (Women’s Health)                              | F           | 25                           | - Child protection caseload  
- Facilitate prevention programmes for community groups                                                                                                          |
| Stefan | B. Social Work  
Grad. Dip (Civil Celebrancy)                           | M           | 30+                          | - Training and supervision of professionals working to prevent violence  
- Private practice working with couples                                                                                                                                |
| David  | B. Social Work  
B. Social Ecology                                          | M           | 8                            | - child protection caseload  
- delivering prevention programmes to community groups                                                                                                               |
| Adrian | B. Social Sciences  
M. A. (Cultural Psychologies)                          | M           | 20+                          | - supervising workers delivering violence prevention programmes  
- programme development                                                                                                                                                    |
| Linda  | B. Social Science                                        | F           | 12                           | - child protection caseload  
- facilitate educational prevention programmes in schools                                                                                                               |
| Fran   | B. Social Work                                           | F           | 5                            | - Advocacy role working with victims of domestic violence  
- Writing and delivering domestic violence primary prevention programmes in highschools                                                                                   |
| Shari  | Ph.D. (Sociology)  
M.A.                                           | F           | 15 +                         | - Advocacy at state & local levels for female victims of violence  
- Working with community groups specific to preventing violence against women                                                                                         |
| Hannah | B. Social Work  
Grad Dip. (Information management)                   | F           | 12+                          | - Writing materials (pamphlets, web-design) specific to domestic violence prevention                                                                                     |
| Dan    | B. Theology  
M. A. (Counselling)                                      | M           | 22                           | - Therapeutic work with families and couples experiencing difficulty  
- facilitating perpetrator programmes for men who have used violence  
- marriage preparation counselling                                                                                                                                       |
| Tina   | B. A. (Psych)                                            | F           | 20+                          | -Writing and delivering train-the-trainer education for a primary prevention programme specific to young people and sexual violence                                                                 |

Table 4.1 Participant Profiles: Degrees obtained, years experience, and relevant practice in the field
4.1.4 Data sources and collection strategies

Because I wanted to retrieve detailed descriptions of my participants’ practice experiences, I considered in-depth interviewing would be the most suitable method for data collection. In-depth interviews are not undertaken to gain a representative illustration of a problem, rather they enable ‘rich’ descriptions of a problem to be elicited (Geertz 1973). While group interviews, or focus groups, may also allow depth descriptions of a problem to be gleaned, they are not well suited to sensitive research topics (Travers 2006; Fontana & Frey 2003). I considered that questions about personal practice styles, and moral-ethical authorities guiding individuals practice, were indeed sensitive issues better suited to an in-depth interview method.

Twelve interviews were conducted for the purposes of the study. Creswell (1998:65) considers that ‘ten or more in-depth interviews’ are ideal in phenomenological-type research, to enable description of the problem being investigated to emerge, that will accommodate a range of responses. The meaning of the phrase ‘in-depth interview’ is unclear in the social research methods literature. Does this phrase hark back to the days of well funded ethnographic inquiry, possibly referring to interviews spanning days on end (van Maanen 1988:53), or will a 20 minute conversation suffice? My sense was that a 20 minute conversation wouldn’t suffice, and when organising interviews I asked my participants to block out at least one hour. The face to face interviews, conducted with nine participants, ranged from between 85 -120 minutes. The three phone interviews were shorter, ranging from between 45 – 60 minutes. Emails complimented one phone interview; where I sent an email to clarify a point discussed in the interview, and received a response.

My fieldwork experience taught me that phone interviews are not ideal to retrieve depth descriptions of practice experience. I spent less time rapport building in my phone interviews, which would account somewhat for these interviews being shorter. There was less opportunity to get a feel for the ‘whole’ in the phone interviews; that is, the gestalt of the participants’ practice experience. However, phone contact with participants in Western Australia and Victoria, and one regional area in New South
Wales, was conditioned by the restriction on funding monies available in my PhD candidature. Hence, the reason for conducting three phone interviews was due to feasibility limitations.

When organising the details for conducting the interviews I asked each participant to suggest a place we could meet that would be private, that would allow me to digitally record the interview with minimal background noise. Eight of the nine interviews conducted face to face were carried out in a private space in the participants’ place of work, while the other face to face interview took place at the participants’ home office. The phone interviews took place during work hours at times convenient for each participant. All twelve interviews were digitally recorded, and any email correspondence was accommodated in the relevant interview transcript. Twenty-five hours of transcript was derived from doing my interviews, a data volume sufficient, and workable, for a project of this nature.

In addition to the data elicited in my interviews, ‘memoing’ was another data source in the study. Memos are notes taken during or immediately after interviews, recording what the researcher hears, sees, experiences and thinks in relation to the field process. Memos are primarily conceptual notes researchers make to themselves, and are powerful sense-making tools (Miles & Huberman 1994: 72). My memos were written in a ‘project diary’ while sitting in the car or train after interviews, and at other ‘a-ha’ moments, in the course of my field work. My memos generally related to some patterned significance that was occurring in the fieldwork process, which I referred to throughout my analysis phase. For example, on occasion during interviews I had noted things in the margin like “x is very keen discussing this…smiling… speaking slowly to bring attention… comes back to this point often”. Memos helped me remember significances in interview dialogue during the analysis phases.

4.1.5 The politics of insider/outsider interviewing
The fact that many participants had significant experience in the human services field, was an issue I wrestled with during my fieldwork. Perhaps because I had introduced
myself as being previously an ‘insider’ to the work culture, many participants sought to establish some understanding of my attitude and politics when beginning our interview, for example; where I had worked, and why my work experience had led me to doing this research project.

On occasion, I was frustrated that a participants’ desire to speak of their wealth of experience, got in the way of my getting around to asking the more reflective or ‘digging’ questions about their experience. On other occasions, the disparity between a participant’s, and my own level of experience in the human services, manifested in my having self-doubt about doing the ‘riskier’ probing around moral-ethical frameworks shaping practice. I pushed through this self-doubt, however, and all participants were engaged across the key research question domains. Nevertheless, these issues relating to presentation of self (Fontana & Frey 2003) impacted on the interview experience.

I reaped varying levels of depth responses to questions asked in the interviews. Generally speaking, participants were easily able to describe how desirable relationships are constructed in their work. This included discussing how programmes promote ‘healthy’, ‘respectful’ or desirable relationships, and the strategies they use to introduce and explore desirable relationships in the programmes. The trickier issues to ‘get at’ in the interviews were around the question of moral-ethical authorities shaping practice; the beliefs, values and practice epistemologies shaping workers constructions of ‘good’ relationships. It was apparent some of my participants had not greatly reflected on these issues in their work, or perhaps, were not expecting me to dwell on these matters to the extent I wanted to in interviews. On the contrary, other participants clearly articulated the use of certain moral-ethical frameworks, or guiding practice epistemologies, in their work.

These reflective observations, to be developed more fully in the next chapters, demonstrate how research interviewing is “shot through with power relations and personal cross-purposes” (Clifford 1986, in van Maanen 1988). The cross-purposes between me, former prevention worker come learner and research interrogator, and my
participants, who sincerely wanted to share their passions and frustrations about violence prevention work, were issues I creatively responded to in each interview.

4.1.6 Questions asked in the field and questions explored in the inquiry

Miles and Huberman (1994: 23) claim good research will make the choice of field research questions explicit in relation to the conceptual framework. There are two important things to notice in this statement. The first is that questions asked in the field phase of an inquiry, can be different to the overall questions. The second is; there must be a relationship between these two groups of questions. The relationship between the questions explored in the inquiry, and the questions I posed in the field, was not linear. In fact, the research questions asked in my interviews were developed prior to having a clear sense of what conceptual issues could be engaged. In other words, I entered the field knowing my project would explore constructions of desirable relationships in primary relationship violence prevention work. However, it wasn’t until after I had asked these questions in the field that I could surmise how broadly my project could reach on a conceptual level. This is less an example of a ‘methodological cart’ coming before a ‘philosophical horse’. Instead, this predicament was the result of using a hermeneutical, iterative approach in the study.

The following question domains were engaged in each field interview. These questions were first trialled in 2 pilot interviews, conducted with workers who I knew through previous employment networks. In the field a semi-structured phenomenological approach guided my use of questions. I adapted the phrasing of questions in response to what individual participant’s discussed.
Question domains explored in field interviews

1. What specific programs or policy areas have you worked in that are concerned with the primary prevention of violence in relationships?

2. Explicitly, how did programmes construct ‘good relationships’? What strategies and phrases are used to construct good relationships? How do you think clients learn about the ‘good’ relationship?

3. What are your personal beliefs and values about what makes relationships good/healthy/desirable? Where did these ideas come from? How do your personal views influence your practice?

4. What characteristics will the ideal prevention worker have? How can human service workers learn to practice well in this field?

Participants were given a copy of these question domains prior to being interviewed (see Appendix B). A small number of participants brought prepared responses into the interview. However, I discouraged participants from drawing too heavily from these prior-to-interview reflections to questions, because it was important that interviewees engaged with me, the researcher, because I was the research ‘instrument’ in this project (discussed later in this chapter).

The feeling I arrived at during the fieldwork was that each interview traversed three phases. During the first phase I was gaining rapport, and I knew that little information gleaned in this beginning part of each interview would achieve data analysis significance. The importance of this information was my getting a feel for the lived world of the participant – including their perceived mandate for why they do the work they do. Hence, it assisted with my arriving at a gestalt of the individual worker in terms of their approach to prevention work. In the second phase, participants told me about their experience of delivering prevention programmes. Here, I was very directive in my probes to steer conversations to this issue: how good or desirable relationships are promoted in the violence prevention programmes the participant was involved. I used phrases like “I want you to go back to that point when you discussed…”, or “I wonder if you can tease out that idea of ‘healthy’ relationships…”
The third phase in interviews was experienced by me as very different across interviews. With about half of my participants, this was a lengthy phase, lasting for twenty minutes to an hour. These participants really wanted to engage with my questioning about why they construct desirable relationships in certain ways. In this third phase, other participants referred back to matters canvassed in the second phase of the interview: the strategies they use to promote desirability in their practice.

These interview phases did not occur in a linear fashion. In two interviews, the ‘third phase’ occurred at the beginning of the interview. These two participants were attracted to the more conceptual aspects of my study; moral-ethical frameworks used in relationship violence prevention work. The different patterns I noticed in how participants’ responded to questions in interviews was not considered problematic. I had communicated at the beginning of interviews there was no ‘right’ way of responding to questions, because I assumed there would be many differences of opinion. The fact that some of my participants didn’t engage at length around questions of moral-ethical frameworks - they instead focused on practice pragmatics- I considered a significant finding in itself.

Some in-depth and phenomenological interviewing styles involve a dialogue, or a sharing of information between researcher and participant (Fontana & Frey 2003). On a few occasions I shared anecdotes from my practice experience in the field, with a view to opening up, or focusing, discussion. However, I was largely silent on the matter of my own convictions around the issue of moral-ethicality when promoting ‘good’ relationships. This is because I didn’t want to prematurely shut down conversation, or set up a framework for that area of conversation that might have been irrelevant to my participants’ practice or worldview. Having said this, it would be naïve for me to think I didn’t impact on this area of conversation in interviews. I know well from my experience in the human services that the words we use, and how we respond to people, are extremely powerful in shaping conversations. However, I made every effort in interviews to understand my participants’ practice from their vantage point, via using
their language and frequently checking back with them about what was significant in their practice experience and worldview.

### 4.1.7 Ethical considerations in the field

Ethics approval for my field study was obtained from the *University of Western Sydney Ethics Committee*, prior to my commencing my fieldwork. Because my field research involved speaking with individual professionals employed in human services organisations, a number of important issues needed to be considered. In response to this, every effort was made in the thesis writing process to protect the personal identity, and organisational identity, of my participants.

The study made use of informed consent (see Appendix B). Prior to and during my interviews, I spoke with each participant about the project purpose, and communicated clearly that their input to the research would be de-identified. In signing a consent form my participants agreed to: participating in the research which included being recorded via a digital recorder; the right to stop their interview at any time; the procedures I was using to promote confidentiality; and, my using the findings in research authored by me. Each participant received contact information about the Chair of my university *Ethics Committee*, and told they could contact this person if they have questions about the project. Two experienced transcribers were employed to transcribe in full nine of the interviews. I transcribed the remaining interviews. My transcribers understood and consented to the confidentiality requirements in the study. Data storage methods for interview materials involved downloading each interview onto a sound file and compact disk. I stored these and my consent forms in a safe place.

Beyond these standard ethical considerations in a qualitative study of this nature, my concern to be ‘ethical’ in the project went further. For me, being moral-ethical in a research project that is using others’ convictions and experiences as the basis for discussion, requires that I be modest in attitude. In repetitive readings of my data, and when writing and re-writing my interpretations, I tried to represent participant experiences genuinely. I grew respect for each participant’s commitment to violence
prevention work, regardless of whether I considered their practice style appealing. This modest attitude, however, did not mean I minimised my critical engagement with the findings. Instead, I practised modesty because I am one person trying to make meaning of the world. I accept Law’s observation about social inquiry, “we’re unavoidably involved in the modern reflexive and self-reflexive project of monitoring, sense-making and control. But since we participate in this project, we’re also necessarily caught up in its uncertainty, its incompleteness, its plurality, a sense of fragmentation” (1994:9).

4. 2. Interpretation strategy
4.2.1 Role of the researcher

In phenomenological hermeneutic inquiry, the human Weltanschauung (worldview), or ‘lifeworld’ of the researcher is conceived as the pivotal tool which enables meaning to be made. Heidegger wrote “inquiry is the behaviour of the questioner” (1962:24). Gadamer said being “prejudiced” by our historical and contextual traditions is the very thing that enables us to comprehend events in human living (1976). The way I understood my role when making meaning of my data findings was succinctly: I am the research instrument. In contrast to an epistemological position that seeks to explain the world ‘out there’, separate to human experience of it, I accepted that my own experience and worldview shaped the very things I was seeking to explore. My ‘prejudice’ in the project exploration, had been shaped by my socialisation into, and experience in, human services work. My prejudice, and worldview, had been grown through working in the relationship violence prevention field. It was these experiences that implicated my beginning the research journey. Hence, it was my ‘prejudices’ that invited the inquiry being done.

However, while my personal prejudices informed the project beginnings, any circular reasoning on my behalf during the analysis or, finding answers that merely suited my lifeworld, was discounted through prolonged engagement with participant experiences (interview transcripts) and relevant literature. Repeated entering and exiting of the hermeneutic circle (Packer 1989), which comprised interview data and relevant literature, grew my prejudices throughout the project. Because of this process, what is
finally written up in the thesis is genuinely a culmination of ‘fusing horizons’ (Gadamer 1976).

Similar to the idea of horizons being in fusion, Archer describes a ‘double hermeneutic’ operating in the analysis of qualitative data. Archer (2003; 2000) has theorised that human agency; bound up with an individual’s worldview, should be understood as having a real impact on practices in the social world. This seeing that humans are robust, creative and are part of the causal influence in why things work out the way they do in the world, was evident in my approach to data interpretation. I accepted a double hermeneutic was operating; I was working with my own interpretations of the subject matter, and my participants’ interpretations of the subject matter. With respect to the first phase of the hermeneutic, Archer writes, “as researchers we are always and ineluctably engaged in another interpretative act…we all lack the epistemic vantage point from which to be a ‘pure visitor’” (2004:156).

With regard to the second phase of the hermeneutic – the participants –, it was evident they had sometimes reflected upon, and in some way interpreted their work experiences. At other times, it was evident that interviewees were ‘thinking on the spot’, or giving unreflective responses.

A ‘double’ hermeneutical approach to interpretation contrasts the idea in positivist, and some versions of interpretivist inquiry, that the researcher does all the interpreting, and the subject in the study is somehow silent and static. This recognition is significant because some versions of phenomenological-type inquiry commit to the idea a researcher somehow accesses pre-reflective lived experience, in order to genuinely provide descriptions of lived experience. For example, van Manen conceives “phenomenology is the study of the lifeworld – this is the world as we immediately experience it pre-reflectively rather than as we conceptualize, categorize or reflect on it” (1990: 9, my emphasis). Similarly, Willis (1999:93) indicated that getting back to a fresh description in phenomenological practice involves the generation of “so called

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35 This term is also used in phenomenological analysis, for example Smith, Jarmon & Osbourne (1997).
"immediate" knowledge of some thing or event, (through) seeking to "bracket out" received views and namings”.

The implications for how phenomenology as a research practice is understood according to these views, includes a higher value being placed on pre-reflective type experiences, above experiences that have been engaged with reflexively. Based on Heidegger’s approach to phenomenology, which accepts an inquirer is already embroiled in the matters that are the subject of the research, and Archer’s premise that an agents’ beliefs become part of the action, I rejected the notion that ‘pre-reflective’ ideas should be privileged. When phenomenologically probing my participants in interviews about their experience of constructing good relationships in their work, I accepted ‘reflective’ type responses. In interviews I went to some length to draw out ‘fresh’ and untried ideas, via asking questions that might be perceived as risky or thought provoking. However, I accepted and worked with whatever responses were given.

Already embroiled in the living of the research problem, my role as the researcher was to use a systematic hermeneutical approach to make sense of the many and layered meanings that were excavated throughout the project. In particular, I strove to uncover meanings that were below the surface of my participants’ descriptions of their practice, with the intention to provide fresh and renewed insights to the research problems.

4.2.2 Conceptualising the different parts of the whole analysis

The aims of this project were to describe workers practice style when they promote good and desirable relationships in violence prevention practice, and to provide explanation about the influence of workers personal beliefs in shaping practice style. Conceptually, my aim was to examine the interplay between workers personal moral-ethical worldview and practice style, and provide interpretative commentary about this interplay.

In this project, I made meaning of how the project participants’ worldviews influence their practice style through hermeneutical engagement with a platter of findings and
interpretations evident in the literature on ethics in human services work. These ideas have been discussed in the first chapters of the thesis and in my own data interpretations I make plain which of these ideas are fused. The final discussions of the thesis serve to extend or challenge ideas about ethical practice, and ethical visioning, discussed or indicated by scholars writing in the tradition of ethics in human services work. My final discussions are evaluative, and aim to show that moral-ethical visioning, and what is conceived as ‘good’ practice, needs re-dress in violence prevention education practice.

An important aim of the inquiry was to provide commentary about the interplay between individual participants’ moral-ethical worldview, and how desirable relationships are promoted in the individuals’ practice. I hasten to observe I did not conceive that one’s beliefs and reasoning causes their individual practice style. It is accepted in critical realism, and adaptive theory, that reality is too complex to make this level of induction, and that researchers should avoid reducing reality to simple causal equations (Danermark et al. 2002; Lawson 1998; Layder 1998). Violence prevention education practices are emergent from a complex mix of things including: policy, organisational culture, programme content, individual workers’ professional and social identity, and other serendipitous issues. However, this inquiry adopted the position there is value in describing individual workers beliefs in order to better understand relationship violence prevention practice. Participants’ beliefs and ideas are ‘part of the action’ in prevention practice.

4.2.3 Demonstrating trustworthiness and credibility in the project design

In communicating a study like this one, it is important to discuss issues of trustworthiness and credibility. Koch (1994) said to demonstrate trustworthiness in social research, it is important to make the analysis process as transparent as possible so the reader can follow the thoughts and actions of the researcher. There were a number of strategies implemented to strengthen the trustworthiness and credibility of the project interpretations. The most obvious of these was using the strategy of persistent engagement; continually checking, questioning, and using theory to interpret findings
(Kvale 1996:241). In their introduction to *Critical Moments in Qualitative Research*, Byrne-Armstrong, Higgs & Horsfall (2001) similarly discuss the need for in-depth *planning, careful attention to the phenomena* under study, and productive *useful results* as a means of demonstrating trustworthiness in social inquiry.

The strategy of *prolonged engagement* with field text has also been recognised as a way of achieving credibility in qualitative research (Morrow 2005; Polit & Hungler 1999). My engagement with interview text was prolonged, lasting 24 months between field interviews and writing a final draft of my interpretative findings. I believe the prolonged time ‘sitting with’ or immersing in the interview text enhanced the credibility of the interpretations made. Over many months, I was able to recognise new and different ‘dimensions’ in participants’ accounts. I resisted one dimensional, or simple intuitive understanding of participants’ told worldview.

Hermeneutical phenomenology relies on the self-awareness of the researcher to record their influence (Patton 2002). Similarly, van Manen (2006) says phenomenological inquiry involves the researcher examining every notion in terms of its assumptions, and recognising ones own experience in the examination. In the thesis, it will be plain that I have represented my personal research horizon. I have discussed at some length how I committed to using an experimental method. Throughout the thesis I raise issues emergent from my own ‘prejudice’ concerning the issue of moral visioning in violence prevention education. The thesis is the product of a hermeneutical back and forth between my personal research horizon, the interview text, and the key literary traditions.

### 4.2.4 Analysis and Interpretation strategy

Distinct phases were recognised in the data analysis/interpretation stages of my project.

| 1. Category construction and distinguishing ‘surface’ from ‘depth’ data |
| 2. Phenomenological reduction and crafting description of the key project issue. |
| 3. Crafting hermeneutic descriptions of participant’s moral-ethical worldviews |
| 4. Synthesis and crafting of the final interpretations. |
4.2.4.1 Category construction and distinguishing ‘surface’ from ‘depth’ data

Categories, or codes, in qualitative research help the researcher organise their data for the purposes of identifying and developing themes. Categories are meant to stimulate theorisation and conceptualisation in research. A good category can enable the researcher to capture the richness of a phenomenon (Boyatzis 1998:1). In the initial period of acquainting myself with my data via repeated reading of transcripts I devised seven categories based on inductive (text derived) and deductive (interview structure derived) processes. This was eventually narrowed down to four general categories that best accommodated the range of data suiting my research aims.

The four general categories were developed in a purposeful way, based on *a priori* and inductive or data-driven processes. Data was categorised based on repeated readings, and several rounds of extracting (cutting out and pasting) data chunks from interviews relevant to my research problems, and making meaning of these statements in relation to others. This process seems similar to what Moustakas refers to as *horizontalisation* in data analysis (1994:95); “*gleaning significant statements from data that pertain to the scope of the problem being investigated*”.

During the category construction phase, I made distinctions between data which pertained to *how* the good relationship is promoted, from data that pertained to participants’ personal beliefs and practice philosophy. Both philosophical frameworks used in the project make a conceptual distinction between the *how* and the *why*. The following table communicates these distinctions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phenomenological construct (Heidegger)</th>
<th>Critical realist construct</th>
<th>Application of these constructs to my category distinctions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The ontic (the experience itself)</td>
<td>The actual event</td>
<td>Category 1: How desirable relationships are constructed in programmes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The ontological (the grounds for the ontic)</td>
<td>Stratified reality; developing depth descriptions of actual events through identifying mechanisms</td>
<td>Category 2: Beliefs about how people learn to live/practice in relationships. Category 3: Moral-ethical frameworks guiding constructions of good relationships. Category 4: Perspectives about work mandate: the ideal prevention worker.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 4.2 Conceptual distinctions in the data*
Distinctions in data significances had already been evident in the way I structured my interview questions. I had begun interviews by asking my participants about *how* they do their work, using phenomenological questioning techniques to ‘get at’ how desirable relationships are constructed in practice. Then I had moved onto *why* questions; why do you do practice or promote desirability in certain ways?

Having made this distinction with data categories, I began a two pronged approach working with interview text. I used a more formal phenomenological approach when working with data grouped under category one: the problem of *how* good relationships are constructed in practice. With the data grouped under categories 2-4, I used a hermeneutical approach. The two different analytic/interpretative modes are described below.

4.2.4.2 Phenomenological reduction and crafting descriptions of core practice styles. This first phase of selecting and organising data into categories was already influenced by what Heidegger called phenomenological *re-duction* (1988:22). Here, the inquirer keeps returning *only* to the problem or issue under investigation – ‘the thing itself’, in a careful way. In working with data concerning how the good relationship is promoted, a wide berth was used to select relevant statements from transcripts. Following this data extraction, three steps were used to build phenomenological descriptions of participants practice style: individual case synopsis, between case synopsis and asking of the data several ‘insider questions’.

**Individual case synopsis: questions asked**

1. “What events and experiences are told by the participant that is relevant to the project problem?” This stage involved culling all data irrelevant to my project problems.

2. “What words, phrases or concepts does this person use to describe good/healthy/desirable relationships?”

3. “What did I notice about the person’s persona or behaviour when they talked with me about their work?” In trying to remain genuine to the experience as told my participants, I read over whole transcripts repeatedly in order to develop my holistic sense of the person’s experience – the ‘gestalt’ (Hycner 1999).
Between case synopsis: Recognising patterns and differences

This was a process of looking across cases in the phenomenological investigation; looking at the various personal meanings across cases, and collapsing what initially appeared as differences in order to find core themes, essences, and resonances (Willis 1999; Fisher & Wertz 2002: 281; Crotty 1996). The purpose of looking across cases was to find patterns and differences in the data which would enable my writing up a composite summary.

‘Insider’ questions

- Facilitation style: Is the worker ‘with’ (dialogue), or talking ‘at’ (makes statements) clients?
- Defining the good: Is the worker prescriptive when describing the ‘good’ relationship? Or are they using a non-prescriptive approach?
- Attitude to risk or uncertainty in the work: is the worker tolerant, or fairly controlling?

Through these analysis steps, three ‘core practice styles’ when promoting good relationships were identified. These three practice styles are allegorically named: the experts, the experimenters and the revolutionaries. I chose these allegorical names to communicate essences in each ‘core practice style’ grouping. Law (2004) has applauded using allegory and metaphors to contain and communicate complex or ‘slippery’ social phenomena, and it was in this vein I developed allegorical naming of participant practice styles.

4.2.4.3 Crafting hermeneutic descriptions of participants’ personal morality

When recruiting participants to the project, I expressly communicated that I wanted to learn about personal beliefs influential in their practice. A range of questions about personal moral-ethical beliefs were asked in all interviews. Responses were varied, and ranged from issues of personal experiences of violence, to existential musings about people’s capacity to use and become aware of violence, to diatribes about what philosophies or political persuasion workers in this field must accept if they are to be successful in their prevention efforts.

My role as the researcher was to organise interview data in a way that might show links, patterns and contrasts across the sample. To begin this process, I collectively named that data organised in categories 2-4, as categories of ‘personal moral
worldview’. These categories were viewed as orienting concepts. Layder (1998:108-13) says *orienting concepts* are: a provisional and directive means of ordering research data, enable an inquirer to impose meaningful patterns on data, refer to aspects of human behaviour, and are suggestive of further theorising, when the inquirer will make links with extant concepts in relevant literature.

The three categories of ‘personal moral worldview’ the project analyse are:

1. Beliefs about universal human potential to use, and become aware of, both ethical and violent behaviours in relationships,
2. Moral-ethical frameworks that serve as authorities in practice,
3. Beliefs about what makes an ‘ideal’ violence prevention worker: what beliefs, values, skills and stances such workers should have.

The mode for developing themes within each category involved moving back and forth between selected interview text, my notes and relevant literature. In the spirit of the hermeneutic circle, I gleaned key phrases from the interview text (sorted non-exclusively under categories) in no particular order to create themes. Packer (1989:102) says of the hermeneutic circle that there are many ways to enter the circle and these points of entry facilitate different interpretation and understandings. It was from my doing a number of entries, exits and re-entries to the circle, that themes were devised within the three categories of personal morality.

Two themes were developed in the first personal morality category; human **potential** to use violence, or not, in relationships, and human **awareness** about harm and good in relationships. Conversations relevant to these two themes occurred in all interviews. In analysing the interview data I asked these questions: ‘what groups is this worker targeting, or really concerned about, in their prevention work?’ and ‘does this worker think people can discern what is good, or discern what is wrong, in relationships?’ The importance of these questions, and the ideas participants had expressed in relation to them, resounded more and more in the data analysis, because these matters have significance for the project as a whole. Clearly, if a participant believed humans don’t
know how to recognise a ‘good’ relationship and therein must be taught how to do this recognition: this would impact on their work. Or, if workers believed the potential for having good relationships can be thwarted via traumatic life experiences, this might impact on their work.

A more structured process was used when developing themes for the category ‘guiding moral and philosophical frameworks’. In interviews I had asked participants to identify what philosophies or beliefs shape their violence prevention practice. In different forms they were asked the question ‘what makes desirable relationships, desirable?’ In representing these findings I wanted to make connections with ideas in moral philosophy. To undertake this task, I listed different moral traditions (deontology, utilitarianism, virtue and new virtue approaches to ethics, feminist ethics, post-modern ethics, religious and spiritual ethics), and noted key principles and concepts within each tradition, as described in reviews of moral philosophy by MacIntyre (2002) and La Follette (2000). Using this list, I coded relevant sections of interview transcripts; sections where issues of personal morality were presented. This process enabled me to identify a ‘best fit’ between participant’s worldview and guiding moral-ethical tradition.

I recognise there are limitations with using this strategy. Moral theory is developed at a level of abstraction, where a text might categorise such and such idea for example as ‘utilitarian’. However, the everyday process of making moral and ethical decisions is messy and complex. For example, we might blend utilitarian aims while also demonstrating love when disciplining children. MacIntyre (2007:10) has observed that the catalogue of moral traditions do tell us how wide and heterogenous moral sources are, but also hide the complexity of how people make sense of morality. Evidently, in this inquiry, the beliefs and commitments that presented themselves in participants’ accounts did not fit neatly into one moral or ethical tradition. Participants were influenced by a range of moral-ethical authorities, and sometimes appeared to combine different moral ideas in practice. These combinations are described in chapter 6.
Themes were developed for the third personal morality category ‘beliefs about what makes an ‘ideal’ violence prevention worker’ through repeated readings and organisation of ideas. In analysing this data I noticed key ideas, patterns and differences across cases. There was much similarity of opinion expressed about the issue of the ‘ideal’ worker, and in my write up of these findings I paid attention to key differences.

4.2.4.4 Synthesis and crafting of the final interpretations

With a wealth of interpreted data about participants’ practice style and beliefs, the final stage of my analysis sought to examine the interplay between a workers practice style and their told beliefs or practice philosophy. Here, my guiding question was: ‘what moral-ethical beliefs or political orientations make some practice styles possible when promoting good relationships, and not others?’ In my final analysis I was also asking: ‘does this participant recognise the moral complexity of promoting desirable relationships in violence prevention education’?

The synthesis strategy used at this final stage rested on an adaptive approach. According to Layder (1998:166) adaptive theorising in social research rests on there being an interaction between ‘prior’ theoretical materials (for example ‘best practice’ literature in the human services), and emergent data from a current research project. There is a dialectical interplay when the inquirer engages her project data with existing theoretical concepts and ideas, where the outcome is an ‘adaptive’ argument.

Developing discussion about the interplay between participants practice styles and personal beliefs and commitments involved drawing out key issues that had presented themselves throughout all of the analysis phases. An example of identifying key issues for a participant is given below with regard to participant Adrian.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Moral-ethical belief categories:</th>
<th>Beliefs about how people learn to practice in relationships</th>
<th>Guiding moral-ethical authorities</th>
<th>Beliefs about what makes workers skilled or ideal in this field</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Adrian’s personal beliefs     | -There is a universal potential to use violence, non-deterministic  
- People become aware of violence through ‘relational recognition’ | - Post-structuralist ideas, relational ethics  
- Christianity | - Disposition and life experience  
- Capacity to live with uncertainty, “practicing in the grey areas”. |
Characteristic of the hermeneutical approach, I was not using a recipe for method when examining the interplay between participants core practice style and their personal beliefs. Rather it was a circular, time prolonged, emergent process of distilling different belief/practice orientations in the sample. This process was a distinct example of ‘fusing horizons’; bringing together what presented in participants’ told experiences with my own prejudices as a means of creating a fresh account of a social practice.

In the end, four conventions of the belief/core practice interplay were recognised among the participants. These conventions are:

1. Not recognising the moral dimensions of promoting desirable relationships
2. Avoiding moral and ethical complexity
3. Practicing moral-ethical visioning, and
4. Inconsistency between personal morality and practice style.

Weed (2005) has commented that reducing qualitative findings in the final stages necessarily results in the loss of much richness of the findings. This is a limitation of this thesis. It is possible that interesting ideas in the participant accounts may capture the interest of readers, however are not developed in the thesis. The confines of the thesis do not allow for a comprehensive exploration of all the issues that presented in my interviews. The aim of my analysis and writing process was to craft a compelling account of my research findings that might be useful, rigorous, credible and change-provoking.
Chapter 5.
The experts, the experimenters and the revolutionaries promoting ‘good’ relationships

5.1 Core structures in worker’s practice
This chapter gives phenomenological descriptions of how desirable relationships are promoted in violence prevention education. The empirical focus in this chapter is my interview data. The descriptions given in the chapter are based on what presented as important, relevant to promoting desirable relationships, in the reduction, de-struction and construction (Heidegger 1988) phases of working with the data. In the chapter, phrases used by the participants are presented within the body of the text. These phrases are both italicised and in quotation marks.

In this study, some participant’s prevention work is with individuals or family groups, while others did prevention work with larger population groups; for example, facilitating an education programme with one grade in a high-school, or publishing educative materials for the general Australian female population. Given these different prevention contexts, participants spent varying levels of time with clients, which potentially impacts on the kind of relationship the worker develops with clients. Despite these differences, and for the purposes of my research, I focused on the fact that the participants share an intentional horizon; they all are promoting desirable alternatives to violence in their prevention work. How these workers promote desirable relationships, within this shared horizon, is described in this chapter.

In this chapter, participants’ accounts of their practice have been organised into one of three metaphorical groupings; the experts, the experimenters, and the revolutionaries. These groupings signify three different core practice styles recognisable when workers promote desirable relationships in violence prevention education.

The participants’ grouped as the experts adopt a knowing stance in prevention practice and use a social learning approach which is typical to the way primary relationship violence prevention activity is described in much prevention literature (Mulroney 2003;
Wolfe & Jaffe 2003; Albee & Ryan 1998; O’Neill 1998). Client groups are taught about risks associated with the problem violence so they might learn to identify risk factors in their own relationships. On this basis, this approach says people will act to reduce their risk.

The experimenter’s core practice style combined a typical social learning approach, similar to the expert’s approach, with what they described as new or innovative features. These features included increased dialogue with client groups, and focusing on the ‘positive’ in relationships.

Participants grouped as the revolutionaries drew from an eclectic fusion of theories and ideas in their prevention practice. These theories and ideas were derived from disciplines including psychology, social theory and theology. These workers’ practice style had an improvisatory quality. They rejected a practice style that is pre-packaged, formulaic or didactic.

5.2 The ‘Experts’
5.2.1 Introducing the Experts

Fran has a social work degree and has worked in the domestic violence sector for 5 years. In the past 2 years, she began facilitating domestic violence prevention sessions with high-school groups. Fran knew from working in the sector there was a need for these sessions; teachers had told her “nothing” was being taught in the local schools about “healthy relationships”. Hence, Fran and a social work colleague “got together and devised up a little program to go into schools to get kids talking about having healthy relationships”. To construct the program, they looked at existing Australian programmes that had similar aims. They also used knowledge from their work experiences to develop the program.

Erin has legal and management degrees. She works in the community to prevent the problem of violence against women. She has written and facilitated school based
primary prevention programmes, in addition to education programmes for professional
groups, for over a decade.

Ruth is a child and family nurse who also has a degree in social science. Ruth makes a
distinction between her prevention work “as in no go tell”, and child protection work
“child protection wrongs”. Ruth’s prevention work involves working with primary
school and pre-school groups. She also runs supported playgroups for young mothers,
which she perceives as early intervention work.

Linda has a social science degree and has worked in the family violence sector for 15
years. She has developed and facilitated a domestic violence prevention programme in
local high-schools run over a number of years. Linda has trained a number of workers
in how to facilitate this program.

Shari has two postgraduate qualifications in sociology and has worked at the
community level to prevent violence against women for over ten years. The
“proactive” part of Shari’s work is facilitating training sessions for adults, and young
people in schools. These sessions involve “educating them and training them on
domestic violence and giving them all the information and resources”. Her purpose in
this training work is “to create capacity in a group …equipping and …empowering
people with knowledge” so that further violence against women might be prevented.

John is a social worker who has worked in the field of child protection for over 10
years. He has done violence prevention education with two population groups; in high-
schools and with pre-school aged children. John was responsible for writing the pre-
school programme, but not the high-school programme and indicated using two very
different practice styles with the two different programs. Given this, John’s experience
is described in both the expert group, and the experimental group.
5.2.2 The Experts Constructing Desirable Relationships in their work

“So we put up a case study saying Bob and Jan had a massive argument about money, then Jan hit Bob and blah blah blah. And we say to the kids ‘come up with your own way of resolving this issue that might be healthier, and would make you happier, that wouldn’t result in fighting and hitting’”. -Fran

Case studies, role plays and exercises based on video materials are the key educational strategies used by Fran, Linda, Shari, John and Erin in their prevention work. The third person accounts of living in violent relationships that are told via these strategies are utilised as a means of teaching client groups about what not to do, and what is preferable, in relationships. Case studies, role plays and video excerpts are hence social learning strategies; the key idea operating is that client groups will be able to identify preferred ways of being in relationships, once they have been exposed to violent and non-violent examples.

Before the young people are engaged in these interactive exercises, information has been provided about violence. Linda has “clarified exactly what domestic violence is, defined it very specifically”. John describes the legal ramifications and trauma-related consequences of using violence. Fran, Linda and Shari give out information handouts published by violence prevention organisations like the DVIRC, and CASA36; these publications are widely used in the Australian domestic violence sector. According to Shari, these publications contain “a lot of in depth information about what is a healthy relationship, and a violent relationship.” The publications are “based on research that …is commonly used in the area of domestic violence”, including research about the gendered nature of violence, and the liberal feminist idea that a healthy relationship is an ‘equal’ one.

Fran, Linda and Shari have found the strategy of first providing information about the consequences of violence, and then engaging young people in discussion based

36 Domestic Violence Information Resource Centre, and Centre Against Sexual Assault (Victoria).
activities is successful. Fran said “kids can suggest some reasonable and mature ways that Bob and Jan (above quotation) can manage their conflict”, including ways they can compromise about money. Fran went on to say, “the kids were really good, I’d say they responded perfectly. I guess they came up with the answers we thought”. Through using a strategy where kids brainstorm respectful and violent behaviours, Linda said; “what you find is everyone can say what the respectful stuff is, which is generally the combination of everyone having their own ideas and the handouts they have been given”. Erin asks the young people in her programmes what they think a “healthy” relationship is. “We do this through brainstorming it on a whiteboard. Communication. Being fair. Not being violent. They’ll be able to identify those things”.

Linda explained that kids using the information given to them at the beginning of the session–via handouts and overheads – to guide their answers to questions asked later in the session, is the key learning tool; “they are getting the handouts and reading it off. We don’t have an issue with that because they are reading it and writing it down, which means it has gone in there somewhere. They might think they are cheating, but at least they have read it and then are reading it out! So there is a little bit of manipulation but it’s not bad. I think that is just part of learning”. Similarly, Shari explained, “we have gone through some of the ideas … talking about what we want a healthy relationship to be and then what they don’t want it to be. So it’s supposed to be a very interactive kind of thing where the participants come out with a lot of their own ideas, but they use the booklets”. Linda and Shari conveyed it was important that the young people in programmes learn the script provided on these publications.

However, in what might seem a contradiction, Linda, Erin, Fran, and Shari all stated that the young people and adults they work with are the “real experts” about their own relationships. A component of the programmes will involve engaging the groups own ideas in the matter of a healthy relationship. However, because of time restrictions (Erin and Linda), or funding commitments (Fran and Shari), this type of discussion will be contained. It is less of a priority than “talking about unhealthy behaviours, and

37 Which may indicate they have ambivalence about imparting ‘expert’ knowledge sometimes.
indicators of controlling behaviour...the need for them to recognise abusive behaviour”. Shari illustrated this tension between giving information and engaging different viewpoints, when discussing a situation that had ‘got out of hand’ with a group of adults. During the group conversation about ‘healthy’ ways of negotiating sexual intimacy, there was a momentum in the room toward the idea “you can’t give and take when the male feels he has to have it, the woman has to give it. It depends on her situation. It isn’t just give and take”. Aware of the time restrictions, Shari stopped the conversation and remonstrated to the group that a healthy relationship “is one where partners are equal”, and despite difficulties in relationships “that is important to strive toward ideals”. Giving this kind of message Shari regards as an important function of her prevention work. Similarly, Linda conveyed that talking at the young people, for at least part of the program, is an important strategy for the purposes of prevention education; “here, we are not trying to brainwash anyone, we just talk about the facts ...It’s a prevention strategy, everything we use has a factual basis.”

Ruth’s prevention work is with children and often parents. The key message she wants to communicate is ‘safety’ in relationship and a key feature of her work is educating parents about child safety, via giving information and modelling “positive communication” styles. Further, Ruth is keen that children learn “they have a right to feel safe”.

5.2.3 Choosing words to signify desirable relationships

There were different ideas communicated by the experts about the value of using ‘positive terminology’ to describe their primary prevention work. When communicating with schools about her program Linda finds it useful to use positive terminology, “we use the term positive relationship. And, respectful relationships”. Ruth has a “keen interest in changing language for the positive” in the work, to “not focus on the doom and gloom”. Shari uses “positive” descriptions of her work, because negative terms like ‘domestic violence’ cause divisions; “there were some religious leaders and community leaders in (one) group...We didn’t say we wanted to train them, we said we would like to work with them in spreading the message of family harmony.”
We wanted to use a more positive term rather than going with the domestic violence one. If you use the word domestic violence, they’re not going to look at us”. Describing her work as promoting “family harmony” and “healthy relationships” is therein strategic; using a positive frame increases the accessibility of her work for cultural communities that don’t readily use the term ‘violence’ to describe family life.

In contrast, Erin sees that it is a misrepresentation to describe her work in positive terms. Receiving invitations from school’s to run “anti-violence” programmes does not prompt Erin to focus on desirable relationships; “because I always say to them, ‘What do you mean by ‘anti-violence’?’ And it usually comes back to violence, particularly bullying which is a big one that comes up in (the kids’) peer groups”. Erin is less interested in prescribing behaviours of an ideal relationship, she is more interested that young people learn how to ‘fight fairly’; “How do you fight fairly? Obviously here’s the difference between males and females—males are physically stronger, so if they wanted to win every argument with a fist fight they could do it. But what are the things you might keep in mind to fairly fight?”

Promoting “healthy” relationships is the pervasive phrase used by those experts working in high-schools. Fran uses this term because it is an objective, or un-controversial term, “after talking to people that seemed to be the word that people tend to use most, I guess. And it’s the most objective word that I could sort of use. Yes, having healthy and happy relationships“38. “Safety” is a key ‘positive’ term used by Ruth in her work with children. Ruth also discussed the politics of choosing terms in relation to a violence prevention primary school initiative she developed some years ago, when she had used the word ‘good’. “I had wanted to use that word, in the sense, ‘what makes you feel good in relationships?’ But, the Department of Education said I should use the word ‘special’ instead, so I went with that”.

38 This idea of remaining objective was also discussed by Miriam, who was interviewed but doesn’t appear as a participant in the thesis. She said, “I wouldn’t use the word ‘loving’ in my practice, its not the standard... Its better to take the emotion out of it, be one step removed... You can describe a caring relationship, but to describe a loving one, we might need to discuss something personal”. 140
5.2.4 The core experience of the ‘Experts’

The *experts* seem comfortable with using a techno-rational approach in their prevention practice. In a techno-rational approach, problems are treated as already well defined entities which can be classified and dealt with using prescribed means\(^{39}\) (Schon 1987, in Fargion 2006: 256). The information given in programmes by the experts is assumed to be like fact – they are providing sound information about healthy relationships, and not moral claims and assertions. The *experts* generally seemed comfortable with positioning themselves as authorities in relation to how violence manifests in relationships, and they appeared to accept uncritically they are expert, too, in the matter of ‘healthy’ relationships. For example, Shari is able to give “*in-depth information about healthy relationships*”. Fran communicated that she is in a position to judge young people’s ideas about healthy relationships, being pleased “*they came up with the same answers*” as she has about this matter. Ruth, Linda and Erin all used the phrase “*giving answers*” as being part of their prevention work. The strategy for defining a ‘healthy’ relationship used a *via negativa\(^ {40}\)* or deficit approach; where the good relationship was described through focusing on what it is *not*. For example, John said, “*I guess the way we show equal voices is to show unequal voices*”. Erin said, “*we use the words negotiating, compromise, discussing, no pushing, no shoving, no hitting, being fair. It is often words that are not doing*”. In her prevention work Ruth asks children, “*what does it feel like when you are unsafe?*” Erin indicated a deficit strategy is used because there is not sufficient expertise about good relationships, “*we don’t talk a lot about what is OK. And I know when you’re doing positive reinforcement you ignore that negative behaviour and concentrate on the positive behaviour, but it’s hard because we don’t have the language around what is good*”.

The *experts* were aware of the limitations that come with doing primary prevention work in the community, in “*not having much time*”, or “*just skimming the surface*”. Despite the fact they have limited time with groups, this group of workers expressed

\(^{39}\) MacIntyre (2007:88) is critical of the notion professional expertise. He observes ‘expertise’ requires for its vindication a justified stock of law-like generalisations with strong predictive power.

\(^{40}\) *Via negativa* is a philosophical approach used in theology to describe the character of God; where because there are no categories by which to define God, God is described through focusing on the absence of God (Allen 1985:142).
hope that giving information about both ‘healthy’ and violent relationships, was a worthwhile endeavour.

### 5.3 The Experimenters

#### 5.3.1 Introducing the Experimenters

**Tina** is a psychologist who has worked with young people for over 20 years. For the past ten years, Tina has extensively adapted what was an existing prevention programme targeting date rape. She trains other human service professionals to deliver this programme, and remains involved in delivering this program in schools. The programme aims to enhance young people’s skills in negotiating sexual intimacy.

**David** is completing a social work degree to compliment his previous social sciences degree. He has worked in the relationship violence prevention field for 8 years. He discussed involvement in two different primary prevention initiatives. In the first of these, David was the key project worker responsible for developing a regional sexual violence prevention strategy. David has also facilitated a school-based domestic violence prevention program with young men.

**Hannah** has a social work degree, and an information management degree. She has worked in the domestic violence sector for 12 years. Hannah is involved in publishing domestic violence prevention materials, for the general population and for violence prevention organisations.

**John** is a social worker who has worked in the field of child protection for over 10 years. He has co-written a number of educative prevention programmes targeting preschool and primary school aged children.

#### 5.3.2 Practising primary prevention ‘differently’

“We’ve been doing this stuff for so bloody long and still stuff happens, so if I can do something new, and try some new ideas, I will”. - Tina
Tina, Hannah, David and John all described their approach to doing relationship violence prevention as untypical, describing their work as either “new”, “different”, or “not saying the same old things”. They described a point in time when they consciously decided to approach this work differently. For all of these workers, this difference involved placing a greater emphasis in the programme on what people want to have in their relationships, and less emphasis instructing people about what constitutes healthy ways of relating.

Tina’s point of departure in changing her date rape prevention program was “the feedback from the kids was if I can’t do this, and I can’t do that, well, what can I do? What came out was that whole thing of: so what else can we do?” On the basis of this feedback, Tina decided to less “focus on the rape side of things” and “adapt it, to the question what happens before that?” Tina believes young people’s real interest is learning and talking about what they can do, and “not being taught what not to do”.

David was recruited to develop a sexual violence prevention strategy for his local area. During this project, David began to conceptualise the issue of sexual violence prevention differently; “How can we stop incidents of sexual violence happening? That was the beginning point, but for me it turned around to how can we build sexual health? They were the two core themes that the prevention initiative flipped around - like the other side of the same coin”. David radically changed the language in this strategy, preferring to use the terms ‘promoting sexual health’ and ‘ethical relationships’. David’s conviction about using gender inclusive language and a strengths based approach, has occurred through being influenced by Moira Carmody (2005, 2003) writing on ‘sexual ethics’ in violence prevention, and by Australian academics Michael Flood and Alan Jenkins (1990) who write about engaging with men and “talk about how we can teach young men to behave respectfully”.

In recent publication materials, Hannah has moved away from the “mainstream feminist approach” in describing domestic violence, and how we can prevent this problem: “In our old pamphlets there used to be things like ‘men feel they can dominate women and blah-blah-blah … That early model used to be about
consciousness-raising, educating women that they weren’t the only ones. It was about the position of women”. In recent years, Hannah has adopted the perspective that this mainstream approach isn’t right because it doesn’t connect with people’s personal experience in their relationships; “Before the language was driven by what people in the field would define, and categorise as domestic violence. It wasn’t really driven by how people understand life, using everyday language. Because when someone’s worried, stressed, upset about their relationship, they’re not in a place to be interested in hearing about being part of a major social problem about men and women… They’re more ready to engage at their emotional level about what’s going on … and gradually going “oh this is not ok the way I’m being treated”. In Hannah’s opinion, teaching women about the broader problem domestic violence is not going to help in the initial stages; “It’s a more gradual process. I really feel that other information is not right at that point”.

In his early years of doing ‘child protection’ work in preschools, John was met “with a lot of angst”, and doors being closed, due to the communities fears about talking with children about abuse. Because of this, he is committed to starting with the “positive instead of the negative” in reaching the community. John describes his work with children in pre-schools as having a “child well-being” focus, with less focus on risk, or a “focus on abuse and all the yucky stuff”. In defending his approach to doing prevention work, John said “doing a lesson on saying nice things to each other still has benefit, it still is doing good work”.

5.3.3 The experimenters constructing desirable relationships in their work

While the experimenters described their practice style as “new” or “different”, my observations is that this practice style combines a deficit social learning approach, similar to the experts, with some strengths based ideas. For example, Tina uses the strategy of role plays, where kids “act out healthy and unhealthy” ways of relating, and shows videos that give examples of “guys forcing sex and examples where there is negotiation”. These are typical social learning strategies; providing examples of
violence and non-violence in the hope young people learn to identify preferred behaviours.

Blending typical and ‘new’ approaches in this work seemed evident in David’s account. While he is convinced of the benefits of using positive terminology like ‘sexual ethics’, in his consultations with other workers in the field, he discovered this approach was too unfamiliar, and inhibited conversation. David said he didn’t “get down to that conversation” in community consultations about what makes sexual relationships ethical, the focus was more on why violence happens and how to ameliorate risk factors. Hence, the “starting place” for this prevention strategy came down to “that idea sexual assault is a misuse of power in relationships … most everything in the Strategy was framed in terms of power relationships and men’s responsibility”.

Hannah too focuses on changing language as a means of re-orienting primary relationship violence prevention. She is not interested in “saying the same old things because people aren’t going to listen”, she is giving more space in publications to “things that should be ok (in relationships)… we use words like ‘how are you being treated in relationships’ rather than ‘domestic violence’”. Hannah said, “our latest pamphlet is called ‘Are you happy?’ It’s a general look at how you feel in your relationship, starting with the idea that they might feel a little uncomfortable, and they’re not sure why…” Hannah is increasingly using the idea of desirable relationships, to invite people into thinking about their own relationships, rather than focusing on violent and abusive behaviours. Phrases in recent publications that signify desirable relationships include “things like ‘do you feel free? ‘Do you feel equal?’ Do you feel safe?’ The function of these questions is that victims or potential victims of violence might “identify there is then something wrong in their relationship.” Hannah wants to re-orient the practice of primary prevention of domestic violence so it will “start where people are at”, and “try to engage with rather than putting out the more theoretical information”.

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Engaging with people ‘where they are at’ was characteristic in John’s practice. He uses a range of child-friendly metaphors and activities to promote the idea of well-being “developing positive self-esteem”, and ‘praise’; “learning how to say nice things to each other”. The key idea operating for John is that kids connect physically and emotionally with the educational material. He employs strategies involving singing, dancing, and drawing in the hope kids experience well-being in the very programme, so he can name this and develop their future potential to identify ‘good’ feelings. John said, “If children feel better about themselves, then it’s going to increase their resilience. It’s just going to end up with better outcomes. So not only are they going to be feeling better about themselves but then it also means that if bad things do come along, they’re going to deal with them. That’s what we hope”.

5.3.4 Blending old and new approaches
While Tina, John, Hannah and David experience their practice in primary relationship violence prevention as untypical or unusual in the field, a social-learning approach remains a strong feature in their practice.

The experimenters stressed their educative approach involves “starting with where people are at” and being flexible in group dialogue. However, communicating certain fixed ideas during programs is also valued by these workers. This can be recognised in Hannah’s description, below, regarding a thwarted attempt to deliver prevention education in a Muslim high-school, “(the school) had said we can only discuss the prevention material in the context of marriage…But that would be a challenge to try and work with the uncomfortableness of only providing information about marriage. A real challenge…there’s always a fine line between changing your message completely and selling out the message, or whether at least you are giving people the information they need to have”.

David also discussed having expectations about what groups will learn and take away from prevention programmes. He described doing an activity with a group of young men where, following a conversation about the harmful consequences if using violence,
he asked them to situate themselves on a non-violent – violence spectrum in relation to preference. David expected they would position themselves at the extreme end of ‘non-violence’ in terms of preference. However, the young men didn’t choose this “obvious and logical” position. Instead, “they chose somewhere in the middle (between violence and non-violence)…other than the specific point of non-violence, they wanted to hold on to the possibility of using violence”. From this encounter, David has been challenged about the limited efficacy that short term social learning approaches have in altering people’s attitudes. He has been challenged also, in making assumptions about what is ‘obvious’ or ‘logical’ when people encounter choices in human relationships.

The experimenters were more reflective than workers in the expert group about the impact of using certain language to signify desirable relationships. Hannah has done community consultations about language, using the term ‘respect’ in pamphlets because these consultations found this term resonates well with people’s experiences of positive relationships. She avoids the term ‘healthy relationships’ “because it sounds sort of weird… ‘healthy relationships’ sound like it’s some sort of wholemeal thing”.  

Hannah is careful in selecting language because “there’s not a lot we can say with absolute certainty about how relationships should be”. David, too, avoids terms that objectify a desirable relationship, preferring to use the terms “responsibility” and, not “mis-using power.” John discussed the challenge in describing to children the characteristics of a “safe adult”. He said “we are using really tricky terms that even adults can’t really figure out”. Significantly for this project, John observed that the violence prevention field is most comfortable using language that is appropriated from the law, which is formal and there has been agreement on. He went on to say that “in this work we are very blurry about the excellent or what is ideal”.

Hannah, David and Tina expressed some discomfort, and awareness that mainstream workers might have problems with their different approaches to prevention work. Tina said, “some people were very sceptical about the program because they saw it as

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41 This activity is described by Jenkins (1990). A worker will ask positional questions like ‘would you like to have a relationship where there is equality or would you like your partner to be a little bit afraid of you?’ as a means of inviting men into responsibility.
steering away from that idea violence is the fault of the perpetrator”. Tina said she goes to lengths to explain this isn’t the case. In developing a ‘new’ way of approaching sexual assault prevention David undertook much “self-questioning… am I doing the right…is this right? Is this really silly?” He discussed a reticence about having a conversation with colleagues about what is an ethical relationship, saying this conversation falls outside what is considered “the work”. Hannah, too, has experienced reluctance in the domestic violence field about discussing her political position. While she sees a shift in feminism grappling with more individual complexities in experiencing domestic violence, she considers “it’s always to difficult to speak out about that because there is still a level of policing that goes on about what you can or can’t say”.

5.3.5 The core experience of the experimenters
While the experimenters use pre-defined constructions of violent and desirable relationships in their prevention work, they place emphasis on dialogue with client groups to better enable constructing shared understandings of desirable relationships. The experimenters are cautious with their use of language to describe healthy relationships. David, John and Hannah expressed a keen awareness there are not shared conceptions of what is a ‘good’ relationship, both within the human services, and in the broader community. Because of this, they communicated a modesty about their choice of language, and in what they will emphasise as important or true, when working with others.

5.4 The Revolutionaries
5.4.1 Introducing the revolutionaries
Dan has a Masters of Counselling degree, and a Bachelor of Theology. He has facilitated groups for men who have used violence, and worked in a therapeutic role with couples and families, for over sixteen years. Before this work, his role as a protestant minister included doing marriage preparation work with couples.
Stefan is a social worker who has worked in the social welfare field for over 25 years. His current role involves recruiting, supervising and training child protection workers. Stefan is also a licensed civil celebrant, and runs a private practice working with couples.

Adrian has a Masters in cultural psychology. He has worked in the social welfare field for over 20 years. Most of his career has involved working with young people ‘at risk’ (of homelessness, unemployment, and violence). He has facilitated a number of prevention programmes for young people at risk, both in the community and in schools. He coordinates a youth work service and supervises new workers facilitating violence prevention programmes in schools.

5.4.2 The revolutionaries constructing good relationships
The revolutionaries construct “good”, “respectful” or “satisfactory” relationships through dialogue with clients. Dan said, “the work is helping people find the language, it is very client driven. It’s very individual for people… the words have to live, they have to have meaning… I don’t use a fixed language because good relationships come in different forms”. Stefan draws “from many different modalities in this work”. However, he said, “The frame I use over and over is I start by asking the people I work with ‘what would life be like if it was really satisfactory, what are the elements of that?’… ‘What would life be like for the kids, for the adults?’” His therapeutic and educative approach aims to “create some stories” in response to these questions, so that the concept of a ‘satisfactory relationship’ resonates with the clients’ experience. Similarly, Adrian’s approach involves “create(ing) room to have the conversation” about responsible uses of power in relationships. For Adrian, this conversation is the core strategy in relationship violence prevention education. He gives the young people coming to the program a lot of airplay; “and I use the differences from the floor… I let things go and build the momentum …so we get to have the conversation”. Adrian sees his role in this conversation as ‘deconstructing’ the words young people use; “Like, say if it’s ‘respect’. A lot of the words that are used are thrown around and perceived as nouns when they’re verbs. Respect, regard, transparency, confidentiality, all these
notions that we can state as words. So, I ask the group “if I see respect, what am I going to see? What am I going to see when respect is happening?” Adrian doesn’t use a script, with each group he responds differently.

Adrian and Dan said it is important in their prevention work to define violence clearly. Adrian said this is “ethical” because it tells the group where he is coming from. Dan wants to be as transparent as possible in communicating to men his position that “violence is not ok”. However, “this as a starting point rather than a fixed point… becoming a datum then to discuss how we want to think about respectful relationships, and to talk about how the men want to move toward that in their lives”. Dan said facilitating these conversations is difficult, requiring a skilled and subtle poise, “we want to be very respectful with the men we are working with. Dealing with shameful material without shaming them”.

The revolutionaries assume opinions, and experiences of, a ‘respectful’ or ‘satisfactory’ relationship will be different for different people. Adrian commented “we will be located at different places on the gradient between healthy and unhealthy relationships”. Furthermore, they don’t position themselves as experts, or even as having the ability to define the characteristics of ‘good relationship’. Adrian said “the closest I come to in giving an analysis of power, is fine-tuning how power is operating… for example, (asking) how you can respond in respectful ways, rather than being drawn into what maybe power wants you to do for it”. Dan described a good relationship as being “something that is inherently nebulous”. Stefan refrained from defining a ‘satisfactory’ relationship, other than saying, “satisfaction I don’t see as a huge ideal, it’s just that life’s OK, like it’s worth waking up in the morning”.

While all the revolutionaries core practice style was similar, they communicated having different positions about the problem of good relationships have an ontological or transcendental basis. Dan wants to “have conversations out of which truth emerges. This is a co-created reality”. Stefan also hinted that the good in relationships has a real basis in saying, “satisfaction can be felt, it can be achieved”. Differently, Adrian is
influenced by narrative and post-structural ideas. He is more interested in exploring and changing people’s language as a prevention strategy and would not commit to saying desirability exists outside of how people talk about it, or communicate their experience of it.

5.4.3 Rejecting mainstream approaches to prevention practice

“A healthy relationship was knowing what the roles are, knowing who had the power, knowing what the answers were, and both people passing these ideas onto their progeny. Looking back at it I can only describe it in Bowen’s term, ‘undifferentiated ego mass’. Fixed. It was a very closed universe”. - Dan

Dan, Stefan and Adrian have conscientiously developed their approach to working with people over time. They all spoke of moving away from simple, or black and white ways of understanding people, in their work. Dan (above quote) remembers early in his ministry career facilitating a program that gave Christian couples a recipe to having a ‘good’ relationship; “This program was a process of socialisation into ‘this is what a good Christian couple looks like’…It used Genesis chapter 2 ‘leave your family’ and so on… It used a very ideological frame with lots of gender roles and assumptions of power in that”. Dan had been socialised in his ministry training that this is the way you ‘do’ marriage preparation work, telling others how to be. While a part of Dan went along with this approach to the work, there was an emergent part of Dan saying “I am not really sure that way works at all”. He became increasingly aware that people’s experiences did not match what was taught in the programme. Adrian, also, observed that human service workers are socialised into the idea they can identify solutions to peoples problems. He has heard many conversations in the work when workers have communicated simplistic solutions to problems; “like she should stop hitting her children, they should be taken away… she needs to just leave him. These things don’t work for people”. Stefan is concerned that workers “continue to react to that moment of violence” – putting resources and energy only into “that 1% or 5% of the time when they are hitting each other”. Over time, his practice focus is on “the other 90% of the time” when people are trying to seek out a relationship.
Because of what they have witnessed in the human service field, the revolutionaries were derisive about ‘pre-packaged’ and didactic ways of working with people. Dan said “the idea of saying ‘don’t do that, do this instead’ doesn’t relate to my practice. I think that whole primary prevention language and the prescriptive idea of ‘do this instead’ actually carries the same categories of power and control men use”. He went on to say, “it’s kind of that middle class thing for workers – ‘we’re above you! ‘we know how relationships work and we can tell you what to do!’”

Adrian said that most prevention programmes tend to give clear and unambiguous statements about healthy and unhealthy relationships. He said most programmes “presume they (the young people) don’t know” what is important in their own relationships. He said the tension in using material from existing programmes is giving “the young people a sense of what might be possible in other ways of relating”, without imposing this material as an authority.

### 5.4.4 The core experience of the Revolutionaries

The revolutionaries construct desirable relationships through having conversations with clients; both in group contexts and in their work with family groups. While Dan and Adrian define what constitutes violence in relationship, this is a “starting point rather than a fixed point” to begin conversations about how clients can move toward having respectful relationships. Hence, their practice style avoids making prescriptions of what is a desirable relationship, and communicates a modesty in terms of knowing what might be experienced as ‘satisfactory’ or good by others. The revolutionaries communicated a trusting attitude that clients have the capacity, and will discern the elements of a desirable relationship both in and outside the programme.
5.5 Summary: Authentic and in-authentic practice styles

In the chapter was provided phenomenological descriptions of participants’ practice style when they promote desirable relationships in prevention practice. Three ‘core practice styles’ were recognised; those of the experts, the experimenters and the revolutionaries.

Those participants who use an expert practice style used little dialogue or engagement with clients in education programmes. Their work aim is to get the anti-violence message across. There was a high level of prescription in the experts practice. They objectify characteristics of desirable relationships; for example state that a desirable relationship is equal, or fair, suggesting these are factual goods similar to the ‘facts’ of violent behaviours, or the content of legal statutes. Another strategy employed by the experts is constructing healthy relationships using a deficit approach; in the effort to be clear about what is a healthy relationship bringing attention to what a desirable relationship is not. Demonstrating expertise and clarity about factual and moral issues is important in the practice style of the experts.

The experimenters used some less prescriptive methods in education programmes. While they continue to be influenced by a typical social learning approach, and focus on risk amelioration to varying degrees in their practice, they also try to engage and accommodate clients’ opinions about relationships. The experimenters tended toward using a strengths based approach; making efforts to find ‘positive’ language. When discussing ‘healthy’ relationships, the experimenters attitude toward their role seems positioned somewhere between possessing confidence they are getting expert information across, and having modesty – perhaps even uncertainty – that this knowledge has a sound basis.

The revolutionaries avoided prescriptive or didactic approaches in their prevention practice. While they are clear about the facts of violence, including when behaviours must be recognised as violent or abusive, these participants viewed that clients are only challenged to learn about desirable relationships through dialogue.
The promise of human agency, or that individual workers have the capacity to choose certain ways of constructing good relationships over and above other ways, was borne out in this inquiry. While this issue wasn’t dwelt on in the chapter, it was evident that workers had much discretion in practice. Most participants were the programme writers, or the primary worker writing prevention publications (Hannah). Those facilitating existing programmes, John and Adrian, discussed having discretion to adapt this programme content, in a way that better suited their personal practice epistemologies. While worker discretion was conditioned by funding concerns, time spent with client groups, and other organisational constraints, the promise of choice when constructing desirable relationship was always present. Hence, it is credible for this project to make interpretative inquiry into individual workers beliefs and agency in practice.

Below I make evaluative comment about the core practice styles described in the chapter, using Heidegger’s (1962) notion of authentic practice. Heidegger said that no-one dwells in authenticity all the time, in other words no one person is ‘authentic’. What he did claim was that we fall into ‘in-authenticity’ –the habitual, getting “bogged down in inauthentic tradition and habituation” (cited in Moran 2000: 226). While Heidegger’s notion of authenticity has been critiqued, the accommodation of a relationship between freedom, constraint and ethics suggested in Heidegger’s use of this term (King 2001) resonated with how I interpreted the practice styles of the project participants. Like Heidegger’s evaluative use of the term authenticity (1962: 149-168), in this project a distinction was made between prevention education practice styles that objectified humans in their interpersonal relationships, and practice approaches that were non-objectifying and relational in making sense of human relationships. Making this distinction was informed by Heidegger’s description that in-authentic practice is seeing others in an objectifying, and non-relational way. An example of this in human services might be a worker picking up a client’s file, and on the basis of reading the file come to some conclusion about the client’s problem and the intervention this client ‘needs’. In this scenario, the worker has objectified the client and the client’s problem -
they have become an entity that can be assessed in a non-relational way. Contrasting this in-authentic approach to others, Heidegger sees that authentic living involves knowing about others in terms of character, people’s selves. An authentic practice is a being with, rather than a talking at others. To take up the file scenario, an authentic practice might involve a worker choosing not to read a client file until they have engaged with the person. In developing an understanding of the person the worker would rely less on information in the file, or on information from psychological testing and the like, and rely more on the person’s told experience in understanding the situation. Heidegger laboured the point that humans fall into or choose to dwell in in-authenticity, or authenticity, in living. These ideas are summarised simply below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conceptualising others</th>
<th>Authentic human practice</th>
<th>In-authentic human practice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Knowing about humans in terms of character</td>
<td>Knowing about human as ‘objects’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social relationships</td>
<td>Non-objectifying; idea of being with, or together in relationships</td>
<td>Non-relational conceptions of others. Shows itself as causal; ‘this thing causes that thing’.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 5.1 Authentic and Inauthentic approaches to practice*

Below is another diagram that meshes Heidegger’s ideas about authentic practice with my interpretation of participants’ core practice styles. In this diagram, participants have been situated along a continuum in terms of in-authenticity – authenticity. Situating participants’ practices styles along the ‘authenticity’ spectrum is not to judge the personhood of any participant. It does, however, communicate a judgement in relation to their practice style.
Diagram 5.1 A spectrum of inauthentic and authentic practices

This diagram communicates what I see as potential for the participants in this inquiry to practice authentically. For those workers situated on the left hand side of the diagram, I am suggesting the possibility for practicing ‘authentically’ is diminished. These workers, the experts, adopted a didactic social learning approach. The giving of this information – imparted by them the professional – was believed to cause or effect clients learning about what is violent and safe in relationships. The experts described their practice as “covering the topic” and “giving people all the information they need to have”. At the other extreme, in the green column, is positioned the revolutionaries. These workers adopt a non-objectifying stance in constructing ‘good’ relationships. For them, ‘the good’ in relationships is to be arrived at inter-subjectively.
It will be noticed in the diagram that workers within each grouping are not neatly aligned down the column. This positioning represents different communicated practice styles in terms of using objectifying vs. non-objectifying approaches when promoting good relationships, within each group. For example, in the orange column, workers Linda, Fran and Shari are situated at the far left, in relation to other expert workers who are situated closer to the purple margin. In relation to my findings about the question of how the good was promoted in practice, Linda, Fran and Shari communicated most strongly the tendency to objectify a good relationship. Also, they communicated the highest level of confidence in terms of possessing an expertise to teach clients about the stuff of ‘healthy relationships’. They communicated their practice knowledge as based on “facts”, and “all the research”. While experts Ruth and Erin, too, employed a typical social learning approach, and clearly identified as being in a position to educate clients about ‘healthy’ relationships, they were more circumspect in their attitude. For example, Erin refrains from detailing healthy relationships, because “we don’t know how to talk about the good”. Erin’s uncertainty and reflexivity in this matter justifies her being diagrammatically situated between the orange and purple columns.

The experimenters are situated in the middle of the continuum. They used a blend of mainstream and experimental approaches when constructing ‘healthy’ relationships. With the exception of Tina –whose use of social learning principles to educate about characteristics of healthy/violent relationships seemed more similar to approaches used by the experts – these participants communicated modesty about the potential to teach others about ‘healthy’ relationships. This modest attitude in how to “reach people where they are at” was most noticeable in Hannah and David’s accounts, situated near the purple/green column overlap in the diagram.

More extremely situated, the revolutionaries practice style when promoting desirable relationships involves dialogue with clients. Their approach is characterised by a trusting attitude; trusting that clients have the capacity to discern what is ‘good’ in relationships. The revolutionaries expressed the opinion that mainstream social learning or didactic approaches to doing primary relationship violence prevention do
not ‘work’. The practice style of the revolutionaries resonates with what Heidegger (1962) described as authenticity; in terms of learning to live well through relationship with others, and practising our living in a non-objectifying way.

The practice style of the revolutionaries can be distinguished from a typical social learning approach to violence prevention because the answer to the question what is desirable in interpersonal relationships was not assumed. The revolutionaries perceived the question of good relationships as a problem of ethics; an issue where people have different views about what is good. On this basis, these workers use an approach based on connectivity and dialogue. This approach was termed “engaging with where people are at”, “dealing with shameful material without shaming people” or, seeing “the whole person”. In contrast, the experts and, at times, the experimenters envisioned that desirability in relationships can be taught using a social learning approach. In my view, the experts approach to primary prevention practice seems to fit with Heidegger’s observation that humans often have authentic motives, however, use inauthentic practices (1962:175).

Finally, I want to briefly address the issue of making a distinction between a workers practice style and the program a worker uses. This inquiry did not analyse the content of the programmes discussed by participants. However, there was a predicament which demonstrates the importance of making a distinction between practice style and program type, and the importance of focusing on more than program content when researching violence prevention education. This predicament is: that three participants interviewed had facilitated the same violence prevention education program in their respective work settings. However, these three participants were found to have very different practice styles. When delivering the same program, Adrian uses a revolutionary practice style, Tina an experimental practice style and John an expert practice style. This predicament suggests that there are things other than program content that can influence practice style in violence prevention practice. The next chapter expounds what is another influence in violence prevention education; workers personal beliefs about relationships.
Chapter 6.
Personal moralities:
Human potential, moral authority, and becoming an ‘ideal’ worker

6.1 Introduction
The aim of this project was to describe how good or desirable relationships are promoted in violence prevention work, and to develop knowledge about how workers personal beliefs might influence these promotions. In the previous chapter, I provided interpretative descriptions of how desirable alternatives to violence are constructed, identifying three core practice styles in this project sample used to promote the good relationship. This chapter moves onto describe participants’ moral-ethical worldviews, and beliefs about issues of significance in violence prevention education. Like the previous chapter, the focus of this chapter is my empirical data. Participants’ statements are included within the body of each section, and are recognisable by being italicised and in quotation marks.

As discussed in chapter 4, it was not until after my field work was completed that I could recognise how far the projects’ interpretative analysis might reach. In response to the range of questions asked about personal beliefs in interviews, participants discussed a number of significant moral-ethical type issues, and demonstrated diverse and contrasting commitments to these issues. Aspects of participants’ personal morality; their commitments and beliefs about depth issues relevant to the issue human relationships are described in the chapter.

The first section of the chapter develops two themes. The first is human potential to use violence, or not, in relationships. The second theme concerns awareness to discern the good, and harm, in relationships. Communicated in the chapter is that participants had a permeating hope that humans want to have ‘good’, and satisfactory, relationships. However, diverse opinions were expressed about the potential for humans using...
violence and harm in relationships. Diverse opinions were communicated also about how humans recognise ‘good’ intimate and familial relationships.

The second section in the chapter describes moral-ethical authorities that guide participants’ practice. Most often, it was found participants blend principles from different moral and ethical traditions for the purposes of prevention work. As will be discussed, some participants experienced tension when fusing ideas and beliefs from different moral authorities.

The third section of the chapter describes what participants had to say of the ‘ideal’ prevention worker; the question of necessary knowledge, skills, attributes and attitudes workers need in the field of primary relationship violence prevention. While participants shared opinions concerning these things, there were some significant points of difference.

6.2 Human potential and human awareness

6.2.1 Introduction
Do all humans, or only some, have the potential to have good relationships?
Do all humans, or only some, have the potential to use violence?
Are humans essentially capable of discerning harm and the good in their relationships?

The data gleaned in response to these questions in interviews led to the development of two themes. These themes are; Potentiality and Awareness. It will be noticed in the section, that participant’s responses focused on potential and awareness about violence and harm, and less so about the ‘good’ in relationships.

Within the theme ‘potentiality’ three orientations were identified. These were: taking the position that all humans have the potential to be abusive (universal potential); refraining from a commitment regarding human potential in relationships (un-committed); and the position that some population groups will be more likely to use violence (selective potential).
Within the theme ‘awareness’ three orientations were also identified. These were: belief that people discern what is violent at a basic or sub-conscious level (intuitive recognition); belief people must be taught how to discern at risk or violent behaviours (learning and rationality); and belief that people intuitively discern wrong in relationships, but see knowing these things involves dialogue and language.

6.2.2 Potentiality
Three workers come together to devise a relationship violence prevention program to be facilitated in a local high-school. One worker is a committed evangelical Christian, and holds the view that humans are inherently sinful, and hence inevitably ‘stuff up’ in relationships in terms of failing to love and care for others. Another worker believes that humans are ultimately good, and upholds the humanist principle that via rationality and positive modelling, people can continue to practice better in their relationships. The third worker is committed to post-structural ideas, and sees that people choose between various discursive constructions about ‘good’ relationships. While this worker doesn’t commit to ontological properties about the human potential for good, he views that violence is ‘all around’ us; humans are already in relationship where there is misuse of power.

How do these different assumptions about the human potential for good relationships affect the prevention message in the program?

The purpose of this scenario is to invite readers to consider that individual worker’s approach to working out the good in relationships can be very different. The three prototypes in this scenario bore similarities to participants in this project.

6.2.2.1 We all have the potential to use violence
Four participants in this inquiry expressly spoke of the universal capacity for humans to use violence, or do harm, in relationships. That is, their beginning assumption in the work is that for every client they speak with, this person will have already used, or will in future use, practices that have the effect of hurting or harming others. Erin said, “everybody has disagreements in their relationships… some families have a lot of
rough and tumble, including what you or I might call abuse…Conflict like this in families is normal and is… to be expected.” Erin was not advocating violence, or what she described as “dangerous” behaviour, in having this belief. She did, however, want to convey that she assumes the young people she works with are already witnessing or are involved with the ‘rough and tumble’ or family relationships. Erin said it was important in this respect to work with “the realities of people’s lives”.

In speaking about how he differs from a colleague about the matter of human potential for good relationships, John said “in terms of that underlying idea, well we have different views about the risk of violence in relationships… I don’t work a lot from that idea people are going to be good. I’d say everyone is going to be abusive in their relationship, you know, at some level…” Adrian said of his practice, “I want to paint a picture that is broader than just ‘certain types of people are abusive’. I wanted people to realize that anybody can be abusive, anybody and everybody have the capacity to abuse in some way”. Finally, Dan said it is important in his work there is recognition “that we all carry the same tendency toward power and control”. This is a key principle Dan overtly expresses in his therapeutic work, “for people to know that and be conscious that power is always present. (I want) people to be aware of their power, know how to use it respectfully”.

Erin, John, Adrian and Dan communicated different origins for their views about the universal potential for humans using violence. Erin’s views have developed over decades of working with people, and witnessing “a huge range in terms of what levels of violence people accept”. Her views have also been shaped by personal experience of violence. John, Adrian and Dan’s ideas in this matter all have some connection with Christianity –a moral-ethical influence discussed in a later section. Aside from this common origin, this belief functions differently in their practices. John’s view that “all of us will be abusive in our relationships at some level” sits alongside high ideals about ‘good’ relationships. John said, “I don’t hold that view that as long as it’s not hurting anyone, a relationship is ok…Some workers almost push the idea that the healthy relationship is one in which both people can be exactly who they want to be, and do
whatever they want, almost in a selfish way… My beliefs are more that for a relationship to work both people need to be putting into the relationship… which involves sacrifice”.

Adrian said that “mainstream prevention can’t handle a number of concepts” including the fact that many clients in education programmes have already experienced violence. He said there are general assumptions made in prevention work that clients view relationships the same way workers do “it is assumed they are closer to our thinking, to workers’ ideals about what’s healthy. But, people may be further away, more disconnected to our position about what is a healthy relationship than we realize. And, we can be expecting them to make a big quantum leap when we make these judgements that they should ‘just be able to do this’, they ‘should just be able to do that’. We’re not looking at what things may have gone on already in people’s lives…” Dan said of prevention education “nothing is tidy like those ideals… instead, I want for people to embrace their humanity”.

6.2.2.2 Potential for Violence? Un-committed standpoints
Three participants: David, Stefan and Fran were uncommitted on the issue of the human potential to use violence in relationships. For David and Stefan, this lack of commitment seemed commensurate with their communicated practice philosophies. However, Fran had not reflected a great deal on this issue. While she explicitly discussed problems with the second wave feminist notion that all men are potentially violent, and has been active in ‘outing’ violence in lesbian relationships, Fran was un-committal about the idea of human potential for violence. Fran said, “I suppose I just see that violence is not necessary. Seeing that abuse doesn’t occur in all relationships shows me there might be other ways”.

David is committed to using post-structural ideas in practice, and hence would not be drawn on making what he saw was an essentialist stand regarding human nature. He said, “the way I see it, is that violence is a part of our world and we stand in different relationships to it, some of us more closely and some of us more distantly. We witness it on television or in the media, or we see it happening around us, it happens in our
families. It rolls backwards and forwards in its closeness or distance from us”. David is careful in his use of language. He will not call people ‘violent’, but will refer to people ‘using violence’. David was critical of the tendency to categorise people who are at risk of using violence, “the usual ‘at risk’ contenders. Yeah, I think there’s quite a strong invitation to do that labelling in this work. I prefer working from the other end…and talk about preferred alternatives to violence in relationships.”

Stefan’s un-committal stance concerning the human potential to use violence has been shaped by his Taoist beliefs. Stefan is “not comfortable with a frame that says we have good and we have bad—that segmenting view of life. I prefer the yin/yang perspective: there is a hill with dark and light”. Stefan actively rejected a Christian ‘segmenting’ view of good and bad, in terms of human nature, many years ago. Instead, he is keen that people not be trapped in the past. Stefan wants people to be connected with their present; the possibilities of satisfaction and connection in terms of relationship available in the here and now. While Stefan is rarely surprised about what humans are capable of in terms of abuse and violence in relationship, he is “not in a position to demarcate people”, and would not be drawn on the issue of human potential for violence.

6.2.2.3 Some people will use violence, others wont
The remaining participants42 spoke about the necessity to target certain population groups in prevention work because of the increased risk these groups will use violence. Ruth said that some families should be targeted for prevention because of previous experience of violence. She said, “some families may always be abusive to their children, they haven’t learned how to have healthy relationships… they have some dysfunctional learnings”.

Linda and Shari spoke of the need to target those in the community who hold patriarchal or culturally inappropriate views about gender and power. While they did not commit to essentialist views about the universal potential for men to use violence,

42 ‘Hannah’ doesn’t appear in any thematic grouping here, as insufficient data was obtained about this issue in our interview.
they spoke about the need to challenge young men, or male religious/ cultural leaders.

Shari has broadly recognised the difficulties for migrant and refugee women who live with domestic violence. She spoke of the value of targeting male “religious and community leaders... the ones who say ‘it takes two hands to clap’ or ‘it doesn’t happen in our community... they need to understand and have the information’”. Linda, while accommodating the need to educate young people generally in her region, spoke specifically about the need to target young men, “It is important that young men understand if they have sex with someone who is drunk it is actually a crime.” She also spoke specifically about the need to be careful when recruiting male facilitators in this work, “men who can negotiate and show positive qualities, all those kind of things... we are always carefully selecting the men”.

Tina spoke about the controversy in the field of sexual assault about the question of agency when young men perpetrate sexual violence. Tina said the reason some young men use violence is because they haven’t been taught how to behave and “don’t know how else to behave”. Tina recognised her view “may be a little controversial... the view that the young person doesn’t know what they are doing”. While she acknowledges that some people who rape are intentional, her view of young people is “the majority of young people don’t go into social situations wanting to do harm to anybody...but just don’t know what to do. Don’t know how to stop. Don’t believe they can stop”.

Selecting and naming certain population groups as more likely contenders for using violence; families who have already experienced violence, men as a group, young people who have had insufficient pro-social learning experiences, should not be mistaken for saying these groups are essentially violent. It is significant however, that Linda, Shari, Ruth & Tina communicated prevention efforts need to target certain groups. In contrast to the participants in the previous sections, they did not believe that ‘all people have the potential for violence’. 
6.2.3 Awareness

The theme ‘awareness’ accommodates how participants perceived clients identify, or discern, violence or abuse in their relationships. There were three different patterns noticed within this theme; one, the belief that people intuit violence; two, that people learn to identify violence via instruction and rational thinking, and; three, via conversation or what I term ‘relational representation’, an awareness of violence is realised. Through identifying these different sub-themes it can be seen that while all participants educate clients about violence in their work, they attribute different meanings to the function and potential success of educational activity, in increasing people’s awareness of violence.

6.2.3.1 Intuitive recognition

Dan and Linda spoke about humans possessing the capacity to intuit violence. When I asked Dan about how humans discern when they are hurting someone he said, “I think we have very clear capacities and capabilities intra-psychically. We just know that stuff, it is actually just there. The problem with violence is we turn that off. And culturally we turn it off. But it is possible to simply attend to it, and its there”.

While Linda did not speak at length about her worldview in this matter, she has never worked with a young person “who could not tell the difference between respectful and abusive behaviour…even when we have worked in rough areas in the community…people feel when they have crossed a line”.

Dan named several things that can get in the way of people attending to, or listening to, their essential capacity to discern violence. He said that in the moment of using violence men are “in a manner dissociating…guys have a clear sense of when their partner feels violated, but they like to cloud it. I believe strongly that discerning what is violence, is a capacity that we all have, but this capacity, to put it mildly, is underutilised”.

In distinction from Linda, Dan said that this discernment capacity should have implications for how prevention work is done, that “giving answers doesn’t work” in
prevention programmes. He has noticed this paradox in violence prevention work: that when people are in relationship pain, or have questions about relationships, they will ask professionals for answers. However, “these kind of questions can only be answered by the person themselves, and not by a professional”. Dan said attending to this internal capacity for awareness is “an ethical responsibility of all humans”.

6.2.3.2 Learning and rationality
Participants Ruth, Erin, Shari, Hannah and Fran spoke about the need to give people information as the means of promoting awareness of violence. For these participants, “teaching people the skills” (Ruth), and “educating them…to help them recognise what is a healthy relationship” (Hannah) are the key attributes in developing people’s awareness of violence and abuse. Education and information is needed because “there are a lot of people out there who don’t actually recognize abuse in their own relationships” (Fran). In other words, these participants didn’t describe people as possessing an inherent capacity to discern when they are being violated, or are violating another, they must be taught to discern these things.

For these participants, verbs like ‘feeling’ and ‘intuiting’ were absent when they spoke about client’s becoming aware of violence. Instead, they spoke about awareness being developed rationally. For example, Shari described using a ‘checklist’ strategy to educate groups about healthy relationships, “You can look at a number of things: a healthy relationship is one where you could be yourself with each other, you don’t have to be something else or what the other person would expect, mutual trust, openness …and I’m not saying that they have to put a big tick against each point, but running through that check list will give them an idea of how their own relationship is going”. In her work with young people Erin and her colleague describe “indicators of controlling behaviour… behaviours that can escalate…cycles of violence… indicators along the way. We want them to learn to recognise abusive behaviour”. Further, Erin said she is doing this work “because something needs to be fixed up… we are not doing it because something needs to be reinforced as good”. For these workers, people do not possess some internal capacity to be aware, or able to discern violence. Hence, it is important to create awareness via rational instruction.
6.2.3.3 Relational recognition
The final sub-theme identified in this category was the idea that humans are inherently aware of violating behaviours, however conversation and relational recognition is needed for true awareness to come into existence. This concept was expressed by Tina in the following, “I think there are a lot of young people who know and feel how to negotiate respectfully in relationships…but the issue is that’s never been made public. This stuff has never been talked about. So (in the program) the penny drops because young people knew this stuff, it’s just never been put out there. Now it has”. Tina, David, Adrian, John, Linda and Stefan all committed to the practice of ‘relational recognition’ in developing people’s awareness of violence. That is, they are having conversation with clients as a means of bringing into the open people’s “feeling” and prior “knowing” in terms of violence awareness.

There was, however, a spectrum within this sub-theme in terms of the extent these participants conceive clients’ possess a discerning capacity. For example, Linda said she comes “from a firm belief that people will only find the answers for themselves in this area… I can’t give the answers. I can only pose the questions and get the discussion out there.” However, Linda couples her belief people can find their own answers, with executing a range of rational-teaching strategies to develop clients’ capacities for discernment. At the other end of this spectrum, Stefan’s intervention is “about stepping into the process of transition people are already experiencing… (working with) their values and experiences, where they have come from”. In a similar vein, John uses bear cards with children to help them find the language for “what they can feel” is a safe relationship. Hence, John and Stefan said it is through conversations with people that awareness becomes knowing. The awareness is conceived as already there in people’s disposition, however needing to be brought out through conversation or symbols.

Perhaps at the extreme within the sub-theme of relational recognition, David described the structure of his own awareness as being relational. When asked how he discerns between a violent practice, and a non-violent practice, David said “I guess it is
subjective considerations of the use of power in relationships. It’s relative. It’s subjective. And experience, that’s reasonably high up, up there as a benchmark for identifying stuff”. David avoids “putting down a prescription” of what violent behaviours are. For these participants, awareness of violent and non-violence is developed through conversation. A purpose of these conversations is indeed ‘helping people find the language’, as Adrian said “getting people to talk about what for them is a healthy relationship… it’s a discovery in our conversations”.

6.2.4 Commentary: human potential for having ‘good’ relationships

The opinions expressed in this study concerning the question of human potential to use violence in relationships were varied. In my view, a finding that is particularly interesting is some participants expressing the opinion that all humans have the potential to be violent in relationships. Given the volume of empirical evidence which argues that certain population groups must be targeted in prevention efforts given their greater propensity for using violence\footnote{Distinct population groups that have been identified as being ‘at risk’ for using violence in the empirical literature includes: men who benefit from patriarchal social norms (McKie 2005; Kelly 1998; Dobash & Dobash 1998); people who have been exposed to violence or have been raised in a ‘toxic’ social environment (Gilligan 2001; Garbarino 1995; Bandura 1977); people having early attachment and current mental health problems, or have biomedical tendencies toward violence (Dutton 2002; Niehoff 1999; Bowlby 1984); and people stigmatised or affected through inequalities bound up with class, race and socio-economic status (O’Donnell, Smith & Madison 2002; Hood 1998; Payne 1990)\}, it is interesting that several participants upheld the view that all of us can be abusive and have the potential to be violent. Upholding this view in the face of empirical evidence which has documented that some groups and not others are ‘at risk’ for using violence indicates that workers can be informed by standpoints other than empiricism or an ‘evidence-base’. This study found that existential and metaphysical ideas concerning what it is to be human in relationships are still on the table for some workers doing violence prevention education.

6.3 Philosophies and moral-ethical frameworks guiding practice

6.3.1 Introduction

Principles concerning how we should act in relationships feature in all moral and ethical traditions. In this project the participants were asked to describe what philosophies, or moral-ethical beliefs influence their practice message about desirable
relationships. I wanted to know what moral-ethical frames help them justify decisions and choices while promoting the good in relationships. In following this line of inquiry I sought to understand participants normative ethical approach; their ideas about how we should be in our relationships, as differentiated from what they have observed in clients relationships (Elliot 2007:122). As will be shown in this section, some participants clearly articulated preferred philosophies or beliefs shaping their ideas, while others struggled to name a framework or belief that guides their ideas about how we should be in relationships.

The interpretative organisation of findings provided below was developed through repeated readings of transcripts, to build a picture of what moral-ethical frameworks or philosophies seemed most influential for each participant in their prevention work. In building this picture, I searched for key phrases and ideas communicated by participants, together with reflecting on the ‘whole’ or gestalt of the interview experience via reading my memo diary. Then, I examined and coded participant phrases and notes made about participants approach in relation to moral and ethical traditions described in chapter 1. These traditions included not only the most pervasive ethical approaches recognised as shaping human services work (deontological, utilitarian or consequentialist approaches, and the virtue tradition), but also approaches that are recognised as less influential (feminist, post-modern, non-Western and religious ethical traditional).

During the hermeneutic process, attention was given to participants’ using multiple approaches, or principles, in their ethical discernment. It is recognised in the human services literature that workers commonly ‘blend’ different ethical ideas and principles in their practice (Banks 2001; Beauchamp & Childress 2001; Zubrzycki 2000). However, given there is also controversy about whether it is possible to ‘blend’ or reconcile principles from different moral traditions (for example, MacIntyre (1998/2007: 257-9), I gave particular attention to how participants integrated principles that emanate from what I recognised as different moral-ethical traditions.
Below, participants are grouped under a moral ethical tradition, or category, that I considered ‘best fit’ in terms of their communicated preferred moral-ethical approach. The exception in this organisation is with the first category ‘rights’. All participants communicated some level of commitment to the ethical theory of rights. It was also evident that participants’ practice is sometimes utilitarian; summing up group discussion with reference to the notion of best ends. This is unsurprising given the culture of human services work currently has emphasis on effective outcomes (Lonne et al. 2004).

6.3.2 The ethical theory of ‘rights’
Most participants mentioned some commitment to the ethical concept of ‘human rights’ in their prevention practice; the idea humans are deserving of certain ‘rights’ because we are moral equivalents needing sufficient safety, care and protection. Generally, it appeared to be case that the ethical principle of ‘rights’ is most influential for the purposes of working with victims or perpetrators of violence, and less influential for doing primary prevention-type practice. That the concept of rights featured at some point in most interviews is unsurprising. As Taylor (1989:6) has observed, “we are all universalists now about respect for life and human integrity”. Not only are human service workers socialised generally about human rights and anti-oppressive practice in their university training and work settings (Cliford & Burke 2005: 678), violence prevention work has particular emphasis on rights for those affected by violence, and obligations for those who perpetrate violence. Of interest, shown below, was that participants conveyed different ideas about what can be called a ‘right’. Some cast a broad net, including for example emotional phenomena like ‘being happy’, as a right. Others were more circumspect in naming human rights.

General and broad ranging statements demonstrating a commitment to the ethical theory of rights included,

“Everyone has a right to be safe in their relationship. People have a right to feel safe and to be happy in relationships” (Fran).
“I have always had that very strong basic belief that nobody has a right to abuse anybody for any reason whatsoever” (Erin).
“We want people to have relationships that are free from the misuse of power… that people know their rights when there is violence” (David).

More circumspect attitudes about what constitutes a ‘right’ included:
“Some feminists come in and say that raising your voice is a form of abuse. I have a problem with that… abuse is about a pattern, it’s your basic rights being removed. Like your not able to move or you don’t have freedom, its not just being shouted at by someone else” (Hannah).
“I might say (in the program) children who have a right to be looked after, there’s a sense in that of not just being fed but appropriately fed according to age and things like that; and the right to shelter and clothing… but also stimulation, attention and affection from carers” (John).

Despite having different ideas about what can or cannot constitute a right, these participants appeared to use the idea of ‘rights’ as a kind of trump-card, or as John said “a kind of black and white concept” that communicates a benchmark for humanity.

The idea of normative constraints on the freedom of others also features in the ethical theory of rights (Lebacqz 1986). This idea was communicated by Ruth when she discussed what she has a right to say, and not say, as an educator, “I cannot use phrases like ‘be a better parent’, because that would be judging that person. I don’t actually say I am going to teach you how to be better parents, because I don’t actually have the right to do that, to tell others how to be”.

6.3.3 Feminist Utilitarianism
The phrase ‘feminist utilitarianism’ designates a moral-ethical approach based on feminist anti-violence theory with utilitarianism. Participants who stressed the value

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44 Defining feminism, and different feminisms, is far from a straightforward matter. There are a variety and diversity of feminists who operate with beliefs that are fundamentally different. However, ‘gender’
of delivering the anti-violence message, based on a feminist analysis, as an end in its self, I have interpreted as a feminist utilitarian approach.

Linda’s ethical approach was most clearly a blend of feminist and utilitarian principles. For Linda, the essence of a healthy relationship “is an equal relationship”. Feminism is the most important framework for Linda, “(this) comes from life experience, but the ideas are commonly accepted by the women’s movement, the Domestic Violence Clearinghouse, things like that”. While Linda experiences a feminist framework as being “unbelievably aligned” with her colleagues in the field, she experiences feminism as being at odds with accepted views in schools where she runs prevention programs. As a result she is careful with identifying as a feminist. Linda tends to use other phrases when describing her program philosophy, because her main aim is gaining access to the schools, to facilitate the program. She said, “You are working with male teachers and principals who may be frightened off by feminism… the hackles come up. Whereas, you say you are talking about equality, which is one part of feminism, that’s ok. To me it’s more important that we get into the schools…” As described in an earlier section, Linda is “always carefully selecting the men” who facilitate her prevention program. Also, facilitators must have “the same feminist philosophy”. She was adamant that maximising the utility of prevention programmes involved espousing feminist anti-violence theory, regardless of the client groups’ belief orientation. Clearly, Linda perceives that promoting feminist principles in programmes has the greatest chance of fostering healthy relationships in the broader community.

However, a feminist utilitarian approach was evident in other participants’ stories. Shari, Erin, Hannah, Tina and Fran strongly promote feminist principles like gender equality in their prevention programmes. They spoke about publicly challenging people in groups who disagree with the idea of gender equality, or who might collude in victim blaming. In the face of time restrictions, these workers see promoting the feminist anti-
violence message as the key prevention task. However, these participants discussed other ethical principles guiding their prevention practice, discussed below.

6.3.4 Blending deontological principles, personal experience and practice wisdom

Ruth Erin and Fran all stressed the importance of normative values concerning how people should act toward each other. These values included care, duty, deserving, protection, encouragement, respect and fairness. While these participants couldn’t always name the genesis for why these values are important, as Fran said “I don’t think I can tell you… I just grew up with these ideas about healthy relationships”, this group accepted that certain values and good intentions have universal significance. For these participants, their guiding practice framework blended personal beliefs and experiences, with deontological principles, including those emanating from (radical) human rights or liberal feminist\(^{45}\) frameworks. Ruth, Erin and Fran all communicated some level of ‘fit’ between their personal values, and the values espoused in the particular human services environment they are employed.

The human services field has been strongly shaped by deontological ethical principles. From the imperative that all humans have inherent worth, has been established the rhetoric of human rights (including children’s rights) in relation to safety and freedom, and the ideas we must accept and promote diversity (Clark 2006). Demonstrating these principles in practice not only becomes the duty of human services workers, but these principles are also promoted to clients as ‘universals’; they are the right way to live. Some examples of participants exhorting clients to do certain duties or have certain (right) intentions included,

“People need to have tolerance, if we can just accept diversity and be inclusive at all levels, that would make a difference… we need to have common goals, and work together to achieve them” (Ruth).

“We need anti-smacking legislation, we need public responsibility to report things that are not ok. We need to change our language to be non-violent, people should stop each other and say that’s not ok!” (Ruth).

\(^{45}\) Elements of liberal feminism include the goal to incorporate women into all aspects of society, notably those dominated by men, via legal or other institutional avenues (Spongberg 1998)
“We’re all different, we all grow up differently we all have different beliefs, religions and philosophies about life. People need to accept others are different” (Erin).

“Nobody has a right to abuse anybody for any reason whatsoever. There are other things we should do if we don’t like someone else’s behaviour” (Erin).

The values expressed here are normative. In contrast to utilitarianism, what is spoken about here concerns ethical processes in relationships, with less of a concern about relationship outcomes. The genesis of these values wasn’t always well articulated by these participants, but their importance has been confirmed through participants’ own life experiences. I extend this observation below.

As a young person, Erin was sexually abused. She also witnessed others in her family being abused. She describes having, for as long as she can remember, an internally derived\textsuperscript{46} capacity to discern injustice, and desire to ‘stick up’ for those being treated unfairly, “I spent most of my high school years sitting out in the quadrangle (laughter). It was about challenging authority. Not challenging appropriate authority, but what I would now term as abuse of power. I just knew when things weren’t right”. Erin describes herself as having a “rebellious …fight mentality” approach in her prevention work, which seems to sit alongside a creative edge, “what drives me to change and look for different ways of addressing (violence) is victim-blaming being a very fucked way to look at things. Victim blaming … it’s a stuck place to be. I’m not prepared to accept that, so I constantly look for other ways to try and shift culture.” Erin’s personal experience and instinctual urge to fight injustice coalesced in her studying criminal law, which has taken her into a practice field where she combines liberal feminist and human rights principles. Having worked in the human services for 25 years, Erin has developed a strong sense of ‘practice wisdom’. Erin spoke confidently about managing conflict in violence prevention education, peppered with anecdotes backed by experience. Erin has “very strong basic beliefs and a strong sense of ethics”. Perhaps the one exception in this ethical accord would be if Erin’s children were to be abused. She commented “I would fight like a woman possessed to protect my children, and I

\textsuperscript{46} Erin’s lifelong capacity to discern and rebel against injustice seems akin to an internal virtue. I discuss this further below.
wouldn’t care what kind of violence if I was protecting my children. So I don’t know how you marry that in with having a no-violence policy or philosophy?!!”

Ruth, too, is informed by a range of moral-ethical sources in her prevention practice including practice and personal experience, and her professional and organisational codes. Ruth said she relies on her self – bringing attention to practicing in the parenting and child protection fields for over 25 years. Unlike Erin, however, Ruth communicated uncertainty about her practice learning, that perhaps what she has experienced isn’t “right”. An interesting example of this, which directly concerns the problem of ethical authority, involved Ruth expressing concern about the lack of engagement in the early parenting field with parents concerning their views on ‘good’ outcomes for children. She said, “do parents want their kid to be a politician? Therefore they want them to be outspoken, a wordsmith, and to coerce people…(workers) don’t have the conversation with parents ‘what qualities do you want to encourage with this child?’ We assume! But, parents might not want their child to be tolerant”. In “exploring this new line of thought”, Ruth was subjecting her assumption that she can teach parenting principles and instruct parents about appropriate intentions, to scrutiny. Ruth is still on a journey in working out the issue of ethical guidance, “I think its more me based… my use of self is far stronger than the work ethic. So it’s less institutional, more personal”.

Fran communicated little about moral-ethical frameworks guiding her prevention practice. While she otherwise discussed feminism and lesbian politics as important factors shaping her experience in the human services, Fran projected a minimal reflective stance about what guides her in practice, she said “I don’t know (where I draw my values from). In terms of philosophy or anything like that it’s a bit hard to say. It is something I’ve thought about, and when I was doing my honours I thought about it, but it’s not a question I find easy to answer”.

6.3.5 ‘Post-modern’ ethical frameworks
Post-modern ethics has emerged out of a lack of confidence in traditional moral frameworks, seeking to discover new paths that can facilitate ethical achievement
A post-modern ethical approach is concerned with variety when outlining a normative basis; the question of ethical flourishing for various types of people rather than applying a fixed and universal idea of the ‘good’ intention or behaviour. These features characterised the preferred moral-ethical approach used by David and Adrian, who rely on a post-modern or ‘constructivist’ approach in their prevention work. Tina said she was also informed by this approach, however, coming from this approach was less distinctive in her interview when compared with David and Adrian.

David found it easy to articulate what frameworks influence his work, citing Foucault and post-modernism, ecological frameworks and a narrative therapy approach as significant. David’s attraction to these frameworks stem from his frustration with rigid and judgemental discourses experienced in the Anglican church, and in the social work profession. For example, David spoke about how his profession “pushes the barrow of wrongness and rightness” and promotes constructs like “being reasonable” as a way of proscribing how people should behave, “Social work …has this thing of people need to be reasonable. ‘Reasonable’ means your controlled tone of voice, it means being able to hear both sides of the conversation, it means being able to keep your emotions relatively in check whilst I explain why you’re not getting what you want. And ‘reasonable’ is like, if you do this, you’ll be able to get through the system and get what you want”. David finds his own professional ethical code unhelpful and extremely limited on the basis of its ‘reasonableness’. He feels similarly about his organisational ethical code; “(it is) actually a set of procedures… useless…aims to simplify and get rid of the grey, as though it’s not there, rather than clarify”.

In differentiation to being ‘reasonable’ in his practice, David uses an attitude of care when working with people. For David, ‘care’ is the most significant guiding principle for his practice. He traces the influence of this idea to reading Foucault’s writing on care of the self, modelling by significant friends, in addition to his Christian upbringing. “Care acknowledges frailty, and vulnerability, and not being perfect. For me it’s like a softness on oneself, not being so strict and hard on oneself, away from the
idea this set or rules you have to follow and you must adhere to these”. The idea of care, in David’s conception, remains a normative ethical principle. Not only does he cultivate this attitude personally, David considers it a worthy principle others should adopt.

For the past ten years, Adrian’s guiding practice philosophy has “been influenced by poststructuralist stuff and post-modernist stuff and other (narrative) writings about Foucault’s work like Michael White, David Epstein, Johnella Bird”. The attraction to this philosophy for Adrian includes its anti-pathologising and anti-truth stance, “space is opened up for other ways of thinking or using language or describing situations”. Adrian described himself as most comfortable practicing in the ‘grey areas’, where “there can always be another discovery”. This is a key principle for Adrian’s practice: that people can only make discovery and make change in what he called “the grey areas”. Dialogue, particularly that variety using deconstructive and narrative questions, is central in Adrian’s practice framework. Indeed, having this kind of dialogue becomes the normative ethical approach. Not only is deconstructive dialogue important for his personal practice, Adrian wants others including workers he supervises, to take up this form of dialogue. The value of dwelling in the grey areas while actively exploring new ways of being in relationships, in contrast to relying on fixed ethical codes and principles to tell us how to be in relationships, was communicated this way by Adrian, “(the workers need) skills to sit with what they don’t know and less of a need to get so uptight about “I need to know, I need to know, I need to know” … That attitude I see as an act of modern power, where they’ve got to be doing things in a certain way according to certain rules. But we don’t know who made the rules!” Characteristic to a post-modern attitude, Adrian is concerned with the representation of the good or healthy relationship in programs. In his practice, Adrian is keen to interrogate representations through dialogue, in the hope people will develop a personal, individual commitment to being ethical in relationships.
6.3.6 Religious and spiritual moral-ethical frames

In addition to deontological ethical principles, Shari, John and Stefan all described religion and spirituality as pivotal components of their practice philosophy. For Shari and John, combining religion and spirituality with secular practice philosophies feels cumbersome and unwieldy. Stefan, who practices Taoism, doesn’t struggle with accommodating professional and organisational-based ethics, as will be shown.

First, I acknowledge that agreement is yet to emerge regarding definitions of spirituality and religion. Stefan, whose account appears in this category, was adamant Taoism is a philosophy that has a spiritual component, and not a religion. However, the constructs ‘religion’ and ‘spirituality’ are widely viewed as overlapping entities (Gale et al. 2007; Hodge 2005). Stefan, John and Shari all affiliate themselves with a set of beliefs and practices they regard as having a transcendent quality; which I have termed ‘religious and spiritual’.

Shari has lived and worked in Australia for less than ten years. Prior to this, she grew up and married in a part of Asia where religion is central in everyday living and moral codes are “traditional”. Shari was brought up as a Hindu. She described her parents as “broad minded”; mixing often with Christian families and allowing Shari to receive an education and go to university despite the fact girls rarely were supported to pursue education in her district. While Shari experienced her family of origin as broadminded and has worked in Australia for some years, she continues to experience tension between the ethical worldview seemingly advocated in Australian domestic violence prevention work, and her personal ethical framework which is derived from her upbringing. One tension lies between secular values which condone casual sex, with her personal view that “having sex with someone is not just for fun - I don’t believe sex to be a casual thing, (it must occur) only when you are intimate with someone, when there is trust in a committed relationship”. Shari was at pains to communicate that she refrains from judging others who condone casual sex. She navigates this ethical dilemma in prevention education work through ‘detachment’ and ‘taking a back step’. “I can’t go and say this is not ok, that’s judgemental. It might hurt some of them. It’s a
very tricky thing. I don’t know how to explain that. One thing, I don’t want to hurt them. Another thing, I don’t want to be seen to be judgemental because then I lose the group… I let my co-worker take up those issues…It is a dilemma, it is very much an ethical dilemma for me”. While the issue of casual sex is one specific issue, it should be noted that Shari assumed that her religious and cultural moral framework is inferior when compared with secular values. Hence, she remains silent.

Shari has postgraduate degrees in women’s studies. Feminism joined with a human rights frame appears to be the important influence shaping her research choices, and her reasons for working in violence prevention, “those ideas... equality, independent decision making, economic independence for women. Rights...safety for women and children. These are very important”. In her interview, Shari talked at length about her experience working with religious leaders and migrant communities, how challenging and important it is “for the men” to recognise women and men must have ‘equal partnerships’.

However, another significant framework for Shari is her ‘spirituality’, “there is some inner strength in ourselves. It is our spiritual strength. It doesn’t have to be religious. It is our inner most mind… our inner most conscience… it tells us right from wrong”. While Shari didn’t elaborate on how her spiritual strength impacts her day to day work, she did speak about this being an important resource for women who have lived with violence. Further, Shari spoke about how important it is to value other people’s religious and spiritual beliefs in human services work, that this should be considered central to ethical and best practice.

Significant moral -ethical frameworks guiding Johns practice include Christianity, human rights principles (referring specifically to Article 27 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989 which discusses the right of every child to adequate standards of physical, mental, and spiritual care) and, to a smaller extent, his professional ethical code. Similar to Shari, John discussed a tension between his own religious and spiritual beliefs and the secular, even anti-spiritual values he has
encountered through practicing social work. John, too, has chosen silence in the face of secular versions of practicing human services work, “*university taught me several things I don’t agree with. One lecturer actually made a comment “are there any Christians in the room? I am going to dispel your myths!” He was really articulate. People didn’t speak up or disagree with him*”. John went on to say, “So you get this idea ok I can’t talk about certain things, even things that are in my experience … So you lose voice and I have found that time and time again since in the work”.

John experiences several areas of tension in terms of dominant values and his personal beliefs, in the field of violence prevention, “*there are just a few fundamental beliefs that I won’t move on. But there’s a whole lot of stuff I’m pretty flexible with, and not too worried about*”. One area of tension concerns the issue of “*common sacrifice*” in a healthy relationship. John contrasts the image of both partners putting the other first, with a liberal feminist image of ‘equal partnership’, in which women and men are simply concerned with their own rights and becoming somehow ‘equal’. John also has firm views about sex and commitment. In the public practice interface, he takes a position which steers a middle path between his own values and secular values, “if I were to stand up in a programme and say that you all have to get married and not have sex before you get married, I’d not be invited back to facilitate any other groups. But if I was to talk about the importance of committing to a relationship, and the importance of relationships, those sorts of messages fit my beliefs and are going to also fit the program and not be viewed negatively by co-workers”.

Differently from Shari and John, Stefan does not experience a tension between his Taoist beliefs, and the values espoused in social work. The important ethical principle in Stefan’s practice that emerges from both ‘the social work perspective’ and Taoism, concerns the inherent worth of all people, “*each human being out there is infinitely wonderful, beautiful, and valuable.*” As an ethical authority in his work, Stefan describes his beliefs this way, “*Over the years of working in child protection work, I have grappled with the whole theme of the shades of light and darkness. I am not comfortable with a frame that says we have good and we have bad—that segmenting*
view of life. The yin/yang perspective is a hill with dark and light. I don’t have trouble with darkness in people. I don’t see people as good and bad. Even a parent who’s highly abusive, I can’t demarcate people. So I guess in …my work I’m interested in the contradictions we bring into relationships, the paradoxes. I’m interested then in how (families) walks with those paradoxes”. Stefan said he carries Taoist philosophy deeply into his practice. The issue of ‘tension’ between other moral-ethical frameworks and Taoism appeared to be an insignificant one, for Stefan. Accommodating paradox, and difference, is already central to his practice philosophy.

6.3.7 Intellectual virtue

Another moral-ethical approach guiding practice was discussed by Dan, who conceives that the good or ethical action will be the result of thinking and deliberation. Situated within the tradition of ‘virtue ethics’; having intellectual virtue is a normative approach which accords primary roles to discernment and deliberation. The person of intellectual virtue will have a stable position to judge, before they act (Slote 2000). Dan said he uses a “hermeneutical” approach in practice; involving critical deliberation and dialogue with others.

Dan’s ethical approach was difficult to categorise. While he said his “underlying grammar is theological”, he described moving in a circle from poetry, to psychological theory, to philosophy, to theology when deliberating about practice. Dan discussed the value of “striving for truth” in his conversations with clients, but says what is true, or good will only become apparent through conversation. Dan hasn’t rejected the role that traditional moral-ethical frameworks can have, in discussing how deontological principles like “parental responsibility” can compliment constructivist ethical ideas. Dan’s approach to ethics has moved away from objectivism and relativism, to become a hermeneutical ethical approach (Christopher 1996:24).

Dan’s response to my direct questioning about moral-ethical frameworks used in practice alerted me to the influence of ‘intellectual virtue’, saying “I have a basic assumption that people know what they are doing…but to put it mildly, we don’t attend
to that stuff, we are in a manner dissociating… My view of the world is a paradox. And I think in terms of paradox … all traditions have a sense of paradox; like brokenness is healing”.

The importance of intellectual virtue for Dan was evident in a conversation about the paucity of liberal education human services workers have, he has been “blown away” by how narrowly informed many practitioners are. His view is “I think to be able to work with human beings, its best to be able to draw from a while range of disciplines and have a curiosity. All the remarkable therapists I read about are as well read in Dostoyevsky and Nietzsche, as Bowen theory. They have thought about what it is to be human, for themselves and for their clients. The work then becomes a cooperative, collaborative investigation”. For Dan, reading beyond the social sciences and psychological literature to a broader literature is important for the ethical worker, “to read more broadly… generates humility and wonder … both of which are needed to work well with others”.

6.3.8 Summary

It is easy to observe from this discussion that participants’ beliefs come from a wide variety of moral-ethical origins. Most frequently participants were found to blend principles from one philosophy or moral tradition with another, for example feminism with utilitarianism, or blending a religious and spiritual frame with deontological principles. This finding was not surprising. It is well recognised in the literature that workers draw from different ethical traditions in practice. Another finding described in this section that supports findings of similar studies, is the strong influence that personal experience and personal morality has in guiding individual workers ethical vision or decision making (Asquith & Cheers 2001; Zubrzycki 2000).

6.4 The ideal prevention worker

6.4.1 Introduction

The final personal morality category explored concerns the question of the ideal prevention worker. Participants’ responses to this question domain in interviews alerted
me to their having probably reflected on the matter before. The issue of becoming a skilled worker is a general theme in human services work; it is addressed in tertiary human services education, the job recruitment process, and in professional supervision. Below, four themes about the ‘ideal’ prevention worker are identified. These are: professional knowledge and skill; politics or the key ideas and philosophies a worker should have; personal qualities and life experience; and expectations.

6.4.2 Professional knowledge, skills and values

All participants referred to the necessity that prevention workers have adequate professional knowledge. This includes generic professional knowledge, in addition to knowledge regarding the interpersonal violence prevention field. Stefan, a professional development educator in child protection, said “there are many layers of theory… there are a whole lot of practice frameworks that are really useful, then there other psychological and social theories (like) loss and grief, trauma, or developmental frameworks. And then on top of that there are complex frameworks around child protection legislation, policy, interagency protocols and all that stuff.”

With regard to what knowledge is needed Linda said “workers need to know about patterns of abuse, cycles, how to identify abuse”. Ruth said workers in child protection require “knowledge about the essentials of good parenting, about child development… as well as the protective behaviours stuff”. Erin commented on the difficulty of integrating a broad base of knowledge and being able to provide succinct and accurate knowledge when working with young people, “workers really need to know what they are talking about – lots of tricky conversations that come up in programmes”.

Participants also discussed the need for workers to be skilled in practicing sensitively. Generic skills for working in caring professions were mentioned here: negotiating boundaries, conflict resolution skills, “people connection” and communication skills, facilitation and educative skills.
6.4.3 Politics

Five participants stressed the need for workers in the domestic violence prevention field to demonstrate and be committed to feminist politics. This includes being committed to certain ideas:

“Nobody has a right to abuse anybody for any reason whatsoever... always challenging any victim blaming” (Erin)

“Have to have thought through their own stuff... so they can be clear about (who is responsible for the) violence in any relationship” (Fran).

“To be really clear that forcing sex is never ok” (Tina).

The principle of working collaboratively, and sharing the same philosophy with co-workers was also regarded. Linda said “You can’t do this kind of work by yourself, workers should recognise it takes a community of workers... it is important to come from the same or similar philosophy...Committed to feminism...When you run a program like this and you have one worker or teacher contradicting something we have said, you have blown the program”. Erin also stressed this point, “know your co-worker! I certainly don’t want to go training with loose canons in this field!”

Differently, Shari communicated workers feminist politics needs to be conditioned by “a deeper understanding” of power and control in relationships. She has co-worked with people who “have a passion for particularly women’s issues number one, and number two who have an understanding of what is power and control in relationships... some workers who have a passion for number one... may get people in the community off side”. Similarly, Hannah sees it is possible workers be committed to feminism and “be able to accommodate the complexities that occur in relationships”.

Four workers discussed what can be conceived as another political issue – the idea that prevention workers should be well rehearsed in popular culture. Hannah said,

“(Prevention) workers need to be in touch with popular culture and read what most people read like women’s magazines. They need to watch what most people watch like Big Brother. You have to be in touch with that”. According to these workers, the
purpose of immersing in popular culture is to understand the world view of programme participants. More extremely, Tina said popular media is an important ethical authority for young people “Big Brother… Home & Away… this is where young people get their permission for how to be in relationships”.

6.4.4 Disposition and life experience
Possessing a certain disposition, and having adequate life experience were other qualities distinguishing the ideal worker. Motifs like being hopeful, seeing the best in people, optimism and ‘not being burnt out’ were all mentioned. Stefan said, “you need a belief in people. Belief in yourself. Belief in capacity in people to change and grow and reach their own satisfaction, their own fulfilment. A fair bit of heart. A sense of optimism and hope. A fairly positive frame.”

The issue of needing ‘life experience’ to work well in this field, sometimes a divisive issue in human services, was raised. For those workers supervising younger workers in the field, there was recognition that there is difficulty. Adrian said, “you have to remember, that working with violence is extremely confronting… for those workers it can be an enormous quantum leap just to be grappling with what they’re working with, with abuse and violence, let alone trying to bring an intervention into that”. Differently, Tina advocated the strengths younger workers bring to violence prevention work, “they are passionate, they are younger, they’re more informed about what’s actually happening for young people, so I guess in some ways they can talk the language and better understanding of what the pressure is out there”.

6.4.5 Worker ‘expertise’
Dan, Adrian and John were critical of violence prevention workers making the assumption they have expert or privileged knowledge. John said, “I am distrustful about what is commonly accepted as attributes of a professional. That idea of being non-judgemental and (being) certain about what is violent behaviour and what isn’t”. Adrian took the position that workers should not assume expertise as a way of establishing better connections with clients, “don’t assume! Assume you know nothing...
Invite people's own choices; work in a way that is about connection not disconnection.”

Dan was particularly scathing of professional ‘expertise’. He said “I see a lot of my colleagues grab for ‘this is the way to do it, this is the way it should be done’. The need to have answers. Some professionals have a lot of power and control issues”.

This chapter has discussed three categories of personal morality. It has been demonstrated that participants have different views concerning issues of moral and philosophical significance. The purpose of asking participants about their ‘personal morality’ was to explore the influence of these personal beliefs in violence prevention practice. Do certain moral-ethical beliefs make possible certain constructions of the good in relationships and not others? What does this tell us of participants’ ability to recognise moral dimensions in violence prevention education? What can be said about the moral scope of participants practice? The following chapter argues my interpretations of these things.

The findings in this chapter can make a fresh contribution to the literature on practice ethics in human services work. The issue of workers negotiating tensions between different ethical principles in practice, an issue under-developed in the literature, has been described here in relation to workers juggling religious, feminist and ‘secular’ principles. These tensions are explored also in the following chapters.
Chapter 7. The explanatory story: Conventions when promoting good relationships in violence prevention education

7.1 Introduction
This chapter summarises the project findings about the interplay between participants practice styles, and personal beliefs, when promoting desirable relationships in violence prevention education. Four conventions of how participants recognised and engaged in the moral practice of promoting desirable relationships are described in this chapter.

The four conventions are:

1. **Not recognising the moral dimensions of promoting desirable relationships**
   Some participants did not see that promoting good relationships is a contentious issue, or an ethical problem. They had difficulty describing what moral-ethical beliefs guide their practice. These workers conceived that professional competency (experience, knowledge and practice technique) is adequate in order do prevention education work.

2. **Avoiding moral complexities in violence prevention education**
   Some participants used a feminist anti-violence practice philosophy in their work. The vision of their work was to communicate that the good relationship is an *equal* relationship. In the effort to get the violence prevention message across, these participants actively avoid or reduce moral complexity.

3. **Practicing moral-ethical visioning**
   Some participants had heightened awareness that the issue of desirability in relationships is a problem of ethical complexity. These participants said working in this field demands a worldview that copes with uncertainty, and a trusting attitude that people will find the right answers.

4. **Inconsistency between personal beliefs and practice**
   Some participants had personal beliefs about good relationships they are careful to conceal in their prevention practice. These participants chose to adopt a practice style that is aligned with what they perceive as best practice or a traditional prevention style.

As discussed in chapter 4, these conventions were developed using a hermeneutical process that rested on an adaptive approach. The fundamental basis of adaptive theorising rests on the dialectic between prior theoretical materials with data emergent from current research (Layder 1998:166). In developing the four conventions discussed in the chapter, ‘prior theoretical materials’ used to make sense of participants’ practices and beliefs were derived from human service ethics literature, moral philosophy and
violence prevention literature. The theoretical ideas discussed in the chapter have been reviewed already in the earlier chapters of the thesis. In the chapter I make plain the sources of theoretical ideas used to make sense of participants’ experiences.

### 7.2 Not seeing moral dimensions when promoting good relationships

The first convention of belief/practice in this inquiry is workers not recognising that promoting desirable relationships in violence prevention education is a morally complex issue. Participants in this convention; Fran and Ruth, conveyed that desirable relationships can be prescribed in the same manner as violent or abusive relationships. These participants seemed to accept that healthy relationships are somehow self-evident. Generally, Fran and Ruth had engaged in minimal reflection about the fact they promote healthy or desirable relationships in prevention education. They found it particularly hard to articulate how their personal moral-ethical beliefs shape their practice. The personal beliefs they did share, however, are suggestive of why Ruth and Fran don’t recognise that promoting good relationships is a problem of moral-ethical visioning, as will be indicated further below.

The expert practice style adopted by Ruth and Fran was described in chapter 5. The expert practice style employs a didactic social learning approach, where the worker/expert imparts knowledge or guidance in the hope that clients might learn to distinguish at risk of violence behaviours in their own relationships. The parallels between using this expert practice style and Heidegger’s notion of in-authenticity have been considered. Heidegger (1962) described in-authentic practice will foreground the functional purposes of a relationship; it is relationship which is more concerned with utility rather than meeting with the other as person. Heidegger also discussed practicing without reflection, or acting merely on the basis of tradition, as forms of in-authentic practice. Both of these tendencies were observed in Fran and Ruth’s recounts of their practice. However, while I have indicated that the potential for Ruth and Fran practicing authentically seems diminished, it is also fair to observe that Fran and Ruth have genuine motives for doing violence prevention work. In particular, Ruth spoke passionately about workers needing to do better child protection interventions.
Heidegger’s assertion that while people may use ‘in-authentic’ practices they often have authentic motives seems very pertinent for Ruth. Commenting on Fran having authentic motives in her work is hindered by her minimal engagement on this issue in our interview. Perhaps, the fact that Fran was relatively inexperienced in the field when compared with the other participants impacted on her ability to respond. Fran came across as less reflective about the functions of prevention work, saying to me that she has adopted a practice style similar to what she has observed in her colleagues’ practice approach.

The moral-ethical beliefs discussed by Fran and Ruth in this inquiry—few in number compared with other project participants—seem congruent with the ‘expert’ practice style they employ. In the matter of human potential to use violence; the philosophical problem of whether human behaviour is a product of agency or a problem of determination, Ruth believed that some families are more likely to be abusive or neglectful in relationship. In particular, those parents who have previously been exposed to abusive ways of relating must be special targets for primary prevention activity. Ruth said “most families want the best for their children, but (some) families don’t have the skills to do this. Some families may always be abusive to their children, but if we can teach more parenting skills, and social skills and coping skills, it will put them back somewhere on that range to non-abusive parenting”.

Personal beliefs shared by Ruth and Fran in the matter of how people become aware of harm and the good in relationships indicated they didn’t see that people have an inherent capacity to discern. They thought people must be educated to distinguish violence and harm from safety in relationships.

Ruth and Fran hadn’t given a lot of thought to the question of what moral or ethical frameworks guide their practice. Fran very briefly responded to this line of questioning at the level of practice theory, discussing feminist concepts and some problems she has with second wave feminisms. Fran also said her values were formed in her family of origin; in this context she learned what ‘healthy’ relationships are. This experience was
correlated with having knowledge and skill to promote “healthy” relationships in the practice environment. Otherwise, Fran said she finds her practice philosophy a difficult thing to discuss. She said, “I don’t know why workers think we know what is healthy. Maybe having seen so many unhealthy things we think we know what’s healthy and what’s not healthy”.

Ruth also found it hard to articulate what philosophies guide her practice. Somewhat elusively, she spoke about her practice values emerging from a mix of personal experience and personal spirituality; things she termed “me based”. The issue of workers finding it difficult to articulate a theory basis for practice, including when this basis blends personal experience and conventional wisdom, is recognised in the literature (Trotter & Leech 2003; Fook 2002). This literature indicates that both experienced and inexperienced workers can have difficulty naming the theoretical basis used in practice.

Fran and Ruth’s responses to the question ‘what makes an ideal violence prevention worker?’ were also suggestive as to why they do not recognise that promoting healthy relationships is a problem of morality. In their conception, the ideal prevention worker has knowledge, good practice technique and experience working in the violence prevention field. An indication Ruth equates knowledge about healthy relationships with evidence based knowledge was given when she compared safety in relationships with safe pedestrian crossing, or children learning how to count. To make use of Taylor’s terminology, it might be said Ruth and Fran have not explored their moral ontology; they have not explored how they arrived at the knowledge they have, and were uncertain if they should defend the moral positions they hold. Taylor (1989:9) observed that people also resist exploring this background when there is lack of fit between how they want to represent their beliefs in public on one hand, with how they personally or internally are making sense of moral issues. Perhaps this tension was occurring for these participants which might impact on self-disclosure in the interview.
7.3 Avoiding and minimising moral complexity

In the second convention of belief/practice interplay workers avoid recognising moral complexities when promoting desirable relationships in prevention education. The beliefs discussed by these workers: Erin, Linda, Hannah and Tina indicated they are committed to an emancipatory politics of stopping sexual and domestic violence. In practice they wanted to minimise ethical complexity as much as possible in order to give the anti-violence message. The vision associated with desirable relationships for these workers, is bound up with a feminist politics that emphasises gender equality and an anti-victim blaming stance. The pragmatic task of promoting equality and confronting victim blaming takes preference over any philosophising about healthy and desirable relationships.

Participants in this convention adopted either an expert (Erin & Linda) or experimental (Tina and Hannah) practice style. Erin and Linda were comfortable with educating clients about what not to do in relationships, and were prescriptive about characteristics of healthy relating; primarily in asserting that a good relationship is an equal relationship. It was suggested in chapter 5 this practice style might be considered ‘in-authentic’; Linda and Erin objectified desirability in human relationships, and conceived there is a causal relationship between telling people what (not) to do and clients behaviour. Tina and Hannah were also clear in their work about what not to do in relationships, teaching or giving examples of risky behaviours and violent ways of relating. However, they adopted strategies of engagement when asking clients to consider healthy ways of relating. In considering the potential for considering Tina and Hannah’s practice style ‘authentic’, using Heidegger’s meaning, it was suggested these workers fall somewhere in the middle of the in-authentic –authentic spectrum. In other words, while they were sometimes prescriptive in practice, they steered away from claiming there is a simple causal relationship between giving knowledge and people having good relationships.

It is my view that the defining feature in this convention that influenced workers to avoid or minimise moral complexity was their commitment to a particular feminist anti-
violence philosophy; a feminist approach consistent with liberal and radical feminism. In general, these participants conflated the question of guiding moral authority with issues of politics and practice theory\textsuperscript{47}. Specifically, these participants made references to ideas in liberal feminist theory; an approach which conceives violence is a problem of gender/ power/ inequality. Employing this particular practice theory, at least in this inquiry, seems bound up in having a minimal vision of what is good in relationships – where the good is synonymous with gender equality. The correlation between having a feminist practice theory and avoiding the moral-ethical complexities of desirable relationships is discussed in the paragraphs below. I suggest that this group of workers were not relying on a feminist ethical theory to guide their practice, rather they oriented their beliefs toward liberal feminist theorising about why violence happens, and liberal feminist assumptions about what can make desirable relationships possible.

When asked about what beliefs or ideas are influential in practice, Erin said that her personal experience of violence as a child, a human rights framework and feminism are the most important influences. These things have grown into a political stance which is a “\textit{fight mentality}” against victim blaming, particularly the blaming done when women don’t leave violent relationships. Erin experiences herself as working in a kind of battle ground with people who do engage in victim-blaming, or who fail to see the gender-power dimensions of violence. Her belief that conflict imbues all relationships seems congruent with her provocative and risk focused practice style. Erin has little time for philosophising about the good, or taking a stand back approach when it comes to violence prevention. Erin said that “\textit{teaching young people how to identify the risks… that is the area of the most hope for change}”. In terms of the ideal worker, Erin clearly said she doesn’t expect colleagues to have an understanding of what makes

\textsuperscript{47} The term ‘practice theory’ designates a middle range theory of intervention (Fook 1993:40) which is distinguishable from an overarching ideology or philosophy. In this thesis, overarching ethical philosophies workers might be guided by were discussed in chapter 1. In chapter 2, I discussed key middle range theories informing Australian violence prevention interventions. These were: social learning theory, feminist anti-violence theory, deterrence theory and systems or ecological theories.

\textsuperscript{48} Erin’s position in this issue is disputed in the literature. At best, a social learning approach focusing on risk avoidance has been found to change attitudes in the short term only (Whitaker et al. 2006; Carmody 2006).
relationships ‘good’. However they must have a political stance that is pro-feminist, anti-violence, and anti–victim blaming.

Linda’s response to the question what beliefs, philosophies or values shape her prevention practice was that feminism is important. Linda spoke about the importance, indeed necessity that workers in the violence prevention field come from a feminist philosophy that recognises violence is a gender power issue, and accept that a healthy relationship is an equal relationship. In terms of the ideal worker, Linda recognised having a feminist politics, with sound practice technique makes a worker skilled for doing violence prevention education. She said “it is important that workers come from the same philosophy and be committed to feminism…when you run a program like this and you have one worker contradicting something we have said, you have blown the whole program!” When I asked Linda how she experiences her feminist worldview in this field, she pointedly responded that her feminist practice framework is “unbelievably aligned with the people I work with… people in the women’s refuge movement, the Domestic Violence Clearinghouse …all have these same ideas”. Linda seemed blind to, or perhaps didn’t want to entertain the possibility that other moral-ethical frameworks are operating in the field. She also didn’t comment on the diversity within feminist approaches to violence prevention.

Hannah’s response to my question of guiding philosophy was interesting in the sense she identified with a feminist practice philosophy, but wanted to distance herself from the universalising tendencies in some versions of feminism. She spoke of her journeying away from the idea all men are violent, because she has observed that women can be violent, and indeed some men are not violent. Hannah believes in the potential for all people to have positive and ‘equal’ relationships. She found it difficult to name a source for her belief that people can have positive relationships, however spoke at length in the interview about her feminist stance sometimes contrasting earlier versions of feminism in the domestic violence prevention field.
Tina also answered my questioning about guiding moral philosophy at the level of practice theory. She said that ecological, narrative and feminist frameworks are important in her prevention practice. The importance of feminism in Tina’s practice was evidenced by her criteria that facilitators in her program are committed to ‘feminism’. In addition, she considered the skilled worker “understands” issues of violence, has generic education skills, and has understanding about how popular culture influences young people’s decision making. Tina said prevention workers facilitating her programme don’t need have knowledge about ‘healthy’ relationships; she expects only that they accept the gender/power programme philosophy. The key vision in Tina’s programme is that young people might learn how to negotiate mutually satisfying sexual relationships. The ‘healthy sexual relationship’ in Tina’s programme is based on consent, equality and respect.

Participants in this convention had personal values that neatly coalesced with values, norms and theories dominant in the Australian gender violence prevention field. For these workers it is not necessary to separate personal values from professional values; it is commensurate for them to operate in an ‘intermediate position’ between invoking professional or legal ethical norms and invoking personal values (Clark 2006). The theoretical and political framework dominant in their work contexts is a feminist anti-violence framework which conceives family and sexual violence is a result and product of gender inequality (Mulroney 2003; Spongberg 1998). However, this feminist framework is distinguishable from a feminist ethical approach. According to Koehn (1998) a feminist ethical approach upholds the principles of connection, concern, relationship, and having imagination in the place of factual reasoning. A feminist ethical approach upholds the virtue of care as a positive good (Gilligan 1982; Young 1990). In distinction, participants using feminist anti-violence practice theory in this inquiry used a practice style aligned with ‘professionalism’ where the worker is seen to

49 While ‘narrative’ approaches are informed by post-modern theory, using a narrative approach is a practice theory.
50 MacIntyre (2000) said ‘positive goods’ refer to ethical goods that are an end and not merely causal. Here, equality and freedom are conceived as minimum ‘goods’, while caritas (care), love and life are construed as ‘positive goods’.
have control over the access to the right knowledge (Payne 2001)\(^\text{51}\). For example, two workers in this group described their role as ‘giving answers’ and ‘providing the information’. Furthermore, ‘goods’ promoted by these workers contrast virtues discussed by the feminist ethicist Carol Gilligan (1982). For example, in Tina’s account of the good in relationships can be observed the predicament where the skill of negotiation is substituted for a virtue like care, or kindness. Indeed words like love, care and hope were absent from the accounts of these participants. They did not expect or hope for themselves, or others in the field, to promote these virtues in relationship violence prevention work. Instead, these workers spoke about the need for workers to adopt a feminist philosophy and anti-oppressive practice framework, be consistent (and if needed, inflexible) in giving the anti-violence message.

That none of the women in this study said that feminist ethics was influential as their guiding moral framework, and sometimes use a practice style that seems contrary to feminist ethical practice principles including connection and humility, is regrettable in my view. Feminist ethics generally offers powerful alternatives to one dimensional and de-humanising ways of practice (Pratt 2005; Frank Parsons 1994). The predicament that none of these feminist workers identified with using a feminist ethical approach; only with a feminist anti-violence politics, is suggestive as to why promoting desirable relationships was not clearly recognised by them as a problem with moral complexity.

I can only speculate about why participants who were committed to a feminist anti-violence framework tended to avoid or minimise moral complexities in violence prevention education. Perhaps it is the case that these workers correlate feminist anti-violence theory with a ‘best practice’ approach; using a feminist analysis is accepted as adequate for the task of conceiving violence prevention education\(^\text{52}\). Responding at the

\(^{51}\) At other times, these participants expressed ambivalence about having the monopoly to the right knowledge, saying things like “the client has the right answers”.

\(^{52}\) The Keys-Young (1999) inquiry into domestic violence prevention education in Australia recommended that future funding be given to programs using a feminist gendered analysis of violence. In this report, ‘best-practice’ was synonymous with a feminist anti-violence approach. However, there is scant evidence that suggests a liberal feminist anti-violence approach to sexual and domestic violence actually ‘works’ (Carmody 2006). There is scant evidence also that suggests social learning theories reduce violent behaviour (Hague 2001).
level of practice theory when asked about guiding moral-ethical philosophy may demonstrate that Linda, Erin, Hannah and Tina are concerned more with the question ‘what works’, and less with the moral-ethical question ‘what is good?’ in relationship violence prevention education.

It is also possible that being a feminist in this field makes it difficult to notice workers who have different worldviews. In the Australian field of domestic and sexual violence prevention there are many networks for feminist practitioners, and as participant Linda observed; feminism pervades key organisations in the field. In writing about how women approach ethics, Carol Gilligan says women are “embedded in relationships with others (where) moral dilemmas hold them in a mode of judgement that is insistently contextual” (1987:274). In other words, women work out ethics through and with relation to those around them. If feminist workers only work with other (liberal and second wave) feminists, perhaps the issue of desirable relationships is not considered to be ethically contentious because these women are only coming into contact with people have the same or similar views as themselves 53.

It is important to recognise that important gains have been made by feminists in violence prevention field. It is now widely recognised that men most often perpetrate violence toward women, that women experience more severe injuries than men do, and that women and children comprise the majority of sexual assault victims. The importance of feminist theory in this field is perhaps suggestive of why these workers considered a feminist anti-violence practice approach is an adequate ethical approach. In liberal and radical feminisms, the key vision is that women will be delivered from oppression and exploitation. Promoting the message of gender equality and promoting an anti-victim blaming stance are very important messages in this schema. Indeed, it could be said these workers are promoting a kind of moral-ethical vision; a vision where women and men might share power in relationships, and where women’s victimisation be recognised by the broader community. In a critique of Gilligan’s

53 In a related vein, McAuliffe’s (2006) study of social workers managing ethical conflict found that those workers who shared the values of the work culture did not report, or were less likely to report, ethical conflict.
theory of feminist morality, Gould (1988) makes the point that morality for feminists working against oppressive social structures might be less with interpersonal care relations and more with changing social structures. Gould says, “Gilligan did not take into account the oppressive life situations that may contribute to (ethical) decisions…under certain conditions, the question of individual choices and responsibilities in moral decisions cannot be divorced from the question of societal moralities and responsibilities, unless we are going to blame the victims” (1988:414).

However is promoting equality in relationships, or changing gender norms in society, constitutive of an adequate vision of the good in relationships? Indeed, will a focus on gender norms actually prevent violence in relationships? With thirty years of experience researching in domestic violence prevention, Dutton (2008:26) controversially argues that educational interventions using a gender analysis are “too rigid, too late, too superficial, too narrowly defined”. Dutton argues that the feminist prevention vision of changing cultural norms about gender is a limited strategy because most men do not sanction violence toward women, a predicament which suggests the gender norms focus will not take the community much further in preventing violence. In a different vein, Ferguson (2001:53) suggests that emancipatory politics is too simplistic for late-modern human services work, “the emphasis today is not simply on safety, equality and securing of rights (emancipation), but on self-actualisation; the question ‘how shall we live?’” The ethical good of ‘equality’ in relationships, as discussed by these participants seems to me a kind of substitute vision; a minimalist notion that these participants accept as good enough in preference to violence or risk of harm in relationships. However, I believe that the ‘good’ in relationships is something that is different from how mainstream feminist anti-violence theory assumes it; where ideas like consent and equality are defended as adequate positive goods in relationships.

54 Dutton (2008:139) says psycho-educational interventions (for domestic violence) are misdirected in focusing on male privilege and cultural acceptance of domestic violence. Only 2% of North American men accept physical violence as a means of controlling their partner.
55 Participant John remarked in this inquiry he works with feminist co-facilitators who have “that idea where as long as the woman is equal, than that makes everything else ok… whereas I think a good relationship is more than that”.
I approach this problem, which I perceive as a failure to engage the ‘thorny’ question of the good in human relationships, in the concluding chapter of the thesis.

Based on their acceptance that violence occurs when there is a power inequality, or misuse of violence in relationships, workers in this convention promote the view that ‘healthy’ relationships must be equal, where there is shared negotiation of power. While it has been interpreted that these participants avoid moral-ethical complexity when promoting the feminist anti-violence message, I accept that these workers are promoting a kind of moral-ethical vision. Erin, Linda, Tina & Hannah are obviously passionate about preventing relationship violence and concerned that clients have adequate safety in relationships. However, engaging clients’ worldviews about what could be in relationships is a secondary or less important agenda in their prevention work.

7.4 Practicing moral-ethical visioning in violence prevention education

The third convention of belief/practice observed in this inquiry is workers practicing moral-ethical visioning. Three participants: Dan, Stefan, Adrian discussed personal beliefs that are oriented toward recognising moral and ethical complexities when promoting good relationships in prevention work. These beliefs are congruent with their revolutionary practice style; a style which involved posing questions and engaging clients rather than prescribing what is desirable in relationships. In this convention, I conceive moral ethical visioning is being practised because in the doing and believing, these participants appreciate that promoting good relationships is an issue with moral and ethical complexity.

In chapter 5 I made the observation that the revolutionaries’ practice style seems most closely resemblant of what Heidegger (1962) called authentic practice. The characteristics of their practice style seem also convergent with how others (Maidment 2006; Gray & McDonald 2006; Nash 2002) have described ethical practice. Rather than using a didactic approach that tells what is desirable in relationships, Stefan, Dan and Adrian engage clients in conversation about what the client is seeking in interpersonal relationship. Dan said “the work is helping people find the language... the words have
“to live, they have to meaning for the person”. Stefan said “I start by asking the people I work with ‘what would life be like if it was really satisfactory, what are the elements of that?’” And Adrian “creates room to have conversations”. For these participants, giving a recipe for what to do “just doesn’t work in the area of relationships”. Dan said that when workers practice with a prescriptive attitude “don’t do that, do this instead” it is an abuse of power “its kind of that middle class thing for workers – ‘we’re above you! We can tell you what to do!’” In distinction, these participants engage in violence prevention work with a fundamental sense that the good relationship means different things to different people. Working out what is desirable in relationships can be arrived at only through honest, trusting dialogue between workers and clients.

The moral-ethical beliefs discussed by these participants in interviews are clearly congruent with their practice style. Dan and Stefan began their interviews by asking me why I was pursuing the question of good relationships in my inquiry; they were drawn to the conceptual or philosophical basis of the inquiry. In response to my asking about human potential in relationships both Adrian and Dan said that all of us have the potential for using violence in relationships. They avoid making assumptions about who is most likely to use violence, including making assumptions around gender and violence. Stefan would not be drawn on the question of potential, saying it is not his role to demarcate people. When responding to my question about how people become aware of what is happening in their relationships, or discern risk or violence in interpersonal relationships, these three participants all said that people do have an innate sense when there is wrong-ness or violence in relationships. However, they also said discovery is made in conversation; bringing into language people’s thoughts is important for being accountable to others.

In terms of guiding moral or ethical frameworks, Dan, Adrian and Stefan are attentive to spiritual and theoretical forms of guidance. Their approach to ethics best fits in the virtue tradition; they spoke about developing personal characteristics like trust, humility

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56 That Dan and Stefan began their interview through engaging me about my interests, and not assuming where I was coming from or jumping straight in with their own professional knowledge and experience, is also congruent with the practice worldview they espoused.
and the intellect and spoke less about guidance via formal ethical principles. Adrian has been influenced by post-structuralism and narrative approaches to working with people. For Adrian, prevention work is primarily a linguistic endeavour where dominant discourses about gender and power in relationships are examined through dialogue, and clients are invited to step into alternative or preferred stories about relationships (Nylund & Nylund 2003:387; Bird 2004). Characteristic of a post-modern ethical approach, Adrian does not claim to have the truth about good relationships. The closest he will get to this is “asking people how they see power is operating in relationships”. Adrian’s commitment to post-modern ethics is based on “hope…there can always be another discovery… people are not stuck in one definite description of themselves or their relationship”.

Stefan blends a Taoist philosophy with social work ethical principles, and selected concepts from psychology about satisfactory and meaningful human living. Stefan described his beliefs and practices as inter-connected, he operates with a sense of “the whole”. Stefan discussed his career in child protection as a journey; where he has learned to live with paradox and contradiction. His beliefs have styled his practice, which is concerned with helping others to accept and live well with contradictions in their own lives.

Dan said he uses a hermeneutical approach in his work; he draws from a number of traditions (theology, philosophy, psychology) and values reflective deliberation for the purposes of practicing well. Others in this study, particularly those who identified as having a feminist worldview, spoke about how their personal experience fits neatly with the culture of prevention work. Dan however discussed how his personal experiences of relationships has led him to seeing that a professionalism stance “doesn’t work”. He has moved away from practices which involve telling others what is wrong and right in relationships. Instead he believes that prevention work must be a collaborative investigation for workers and clients by virtue of our shared human-ness. Because of the depth of the question ‘what is desirable in human relationships’, Dan said he feels a constant sense of risk when doing prevention work. He considers it is
necessary that workers in this field “tread carefully ... have humility... have a sense of curiosity”.

In responding to the question what makes a worker skilled or ideal in violence prevention practice, these participants all discussed characteristics other than technique or having adequate knowledge. Stefan discussed the need for life experience, and having a sense of integration across personal beliefs and experience, and practice theory. The literature also has described having congruence across personal and practice spheres as important for genuine practice (Dybič 2004; Fook 2002). Because working in the field of violence prevention is “enormously confronting”, Adrian spoke about the need for having life experience and a capacity for reflection. Dan said too, that it is important violence prevention workers are reflective, have studied broadly to enhance their worldview, and be respectful toward clients.

It is evident that the workers within this convention had a clear sense that there are moral dimensions when promoting desirable relationships in violence prevention education. In concert with what Nash (2002:12) has described as ideal when working with ethical problems, these participants demonstrate awareness there is a range of moral conflict, and different moral positions, operating in the field. They were deeply aware of the moral functions of their own role.

The three participants who are identified as practicing moral-ethical visioning are male. I provide some comment about this. These three male participants spoke about using practice frameworks that are philosophical in origin (hermeneutics, post-structuralism, Taoism), demonstrating their capacity for undertaking abstract thinking and applying this to practice. In theorising about the differences between traditional male and female moral development, Gilligan (1982:38) made the observation that men adopt impersonal modes of thinking by establishing rules, and valuing abstract reasoning in decision making. In contrast, Gilligan said women adopt a mode of thinking that is ‘contextual and narrative’ because of their reliance on personal communication techniques that can maintain harmony between people. It is apparent that the males in
this modality certainly do value abstract or philosophical reasoning. However it certainly wasn’t borne out in this inquiry that these men’s decision making in practice is ‘impersonal’. In fact, as has been observed in the previous section, women committed to a feminist anti-violence approach in this inquiry often used a practice style that was prescriptive and inflexible, with less interpersonal engagement. In contrast, Dan, Stefan and Adrian described their practice as engaging in dialogue, having curiosity, and trust that people can find the right answers. Indeed, these male workers appear to think and relate, to reason and feel, therein contradicting essentialist notions of ‘doing’ gender in practice, like those argued in Carol Gilligan’s theory (1982).

In making interpretations in this and the previous sections, I was very aware of my own moral position, and how this impacted on the evaluative interpretations made in the thesis. My own ideas about what it means to practice well in human services work most closely resemble the worldviews and practice styles discussed by this group of participants. I consider that workers must appreciate, and practice in response to, the realness of complex moral dimensions in human relationships.

7.5 Inconsistency between personal morality and practice style
The fourth interplay of belief/ practice convention observable in this study was the trend of inconsistency or incongruence between personal moral beliefs about good relationships, and how good relationships are promoted in practice. Three participants; John, Shari and David shared personal moral beliefs in their interviews concerning desirability in relationships that contrast how they speak of relationships in their practice. These participants acknowledged this inconsistency. They actively conceal aspects of their personal worldview either because expression of such views might undermine “the real work” of violence prevention education, or because their personal beliefs sit uncomfortably with the secular norms in the field.

In this convention, participants’ personal beliefs are in conflict with what they espouse in the public arena of practice. John and Shari’s personal views about good relationships have a strong spiritual and religious dimension, and it is these dimensions
they conceal when discussing ‘healthy’ relationships. David’s inconsistency between personal worldview and practice message is a product of feeling thwarted previously when he tried out different ways of visioning healthy relationships, drawing from post-modern ideas.

Shari uses an expert practice style in prevention education. She described herself and her violence prevention colleagues as being keepers of the right knowledge, having the ability to “provide a lot of depth information about what is a healthy relationship, and what is a violent relationship”. It has been suggested, in chapter 5, that Shari’s practice style might be considered in-authentic, based on Heidegger’s use of this term. Shari objectifies and describes moral-ethical ‘goods’ in relationships in the same manner that she describes facts of violent behaviours, or legal statutes. Also, Shari minimises disagreement and debate in order to get the feminist anti-violence message across in programmes. Shari’s practice style in violence prevention work seems very similar to the practice styles used by Fran, Linda, Erin and Tina in this study.

However, Shari shared personal beliefs that do not sit neatly with her identified practice style. She is influenced by a religious and cultural tradition (emergent from Hinduism) that is actively concealed when the issue of ‘healthy’ sexual relationships arises in violence prevention programmes. According to her personal belief tradition, a flourishing and ‘healthy’ sexual relationship will occur within the context of a committed marriage-like relationship. A casual sexual encounter between two people does not indicate a desirable or ‘healthy’ relationship. The strength of Shari’s personal commitment was evidenced by her saying she raises her two daughters to adopt the norm that a healthy relationship is a committed marriage-like relationship, and would not want them to adopt the secular norms advocated in the violence prevention field.

However, Shari stressed that she wouldn’t discuss her personal beliefs at work. When delivering violence prevention education, Shari is silent about her personal normative standard and “goes along with” the secular values in the program; including the norm that casual sexual relationships are considered ‘healthy’ as long as there is mutual
consent. When this issue arises, Shari sits back and lets her co-facilitator lead this part of the session. For Shari this predicament is “very much an ethical dilemma… I can’t say (casual sex) is not ok, that’s judgemental, I don’t want to hurt them”. While she personally believes that mutual commitment is important in ‘healthy’ relationships, she doesn’t share this value. Because Shari is juggling a number of incommensurable moral and ethical commitments; she must respect difference and remain non-judgemental however her personal commitment is that sex should only occur in a committed relationship, she has responded by concealing her personal moral beliefs and demonstrating allegiance to secular norms advocated in programmes. This moral dilemma is compounded for Shari by the fact she is a relatively new-comer to Australian human services work culture. Shari believes she must “learn the values of this culture” in order to do the work. This comment suggests the dominance of secular values in Shari’s practice setting. It also perhaps suggests that Shari fails to appreciate there is a range of moral perspectives about sexual relationships in the broader Australian community.

John also conceals aspects of his personal moral beliefs when discussing healthy relationships in high-school based violence prevention education. He has been aware that both his Christian beliefs and some of his ideas around gender, fit uncomfortably or are incommensurable with some values and cultural norms in the violence prevention field. John described his professional experience as having learned to adapt; choosing when to stay silent, and knowing to what extent he can share his personal belief system. While John has on many occasions facilitated programmes based on a feminist anti-violence theory, he disagrees with some assumptions in such programmes concerning desirable relationships. Influenced by the Christian moral tradition, John believes that a good intimate relationship is built on mutual regard and commitment, “which involves a common sacrifice… being just as concerned for the other person as you are for yourself”. John has chosen not to explicitly communicate this belief in practice because he is convinced that the idea of ‘common sacrifice’ is not acceptable in the field perhaps because it disrupts the notion of women’s emancipation. John is also careful
not to communicate his personal beliefs about the norm of sex occurring in the context of marriage, “if I were to stand up in a program and say you all shouldn’t have sex before you get married, I’d not be invited back”. John has altered his terminology to suit norms in the field while holding onto some of his beliefs. For example, he stresses the value of being in relationship, a phrase that suggests commitment in contrast to a norm that accepts casual or non-committed sexual encounters. John recognises that taking this route is to adopt a minimalist stance, however he seemed pragmatic about this in saying “in this work we are clear about what is not ok, but we are very blurry about the excellent or what is ideal”.

In David’s experience was evidence of another type of belief – practice inconsistency. This emerged from a clash between the values within professionalism; the value of workers demonstrating expertise, and using a post-modern approach, which proposes a subjectivity of method that is sceptical of ‘expertise’ (Hugman 2005). For some years, David has been committed to using a post-modern and narrative approach in his violence prevention work. This approach advocates ideas that contrast motifs in both liberal feminism and in social learning theory. For example, a post-modern approach conceives our social identity is more fluid than that suggested in second wave feminism. A post-modern approach to practice also is sceptical regarding expert or dominant knowledge claims. David spoke about his distaste for “pushing the barrow of wrongness and rightness” in violence prevention work and the practice where people are categorised as perpetrators or victims. David wanted to hold on to this stance in developing a sexual violence prevention strategy in his region, however was thwarted in adopting an experimental post-modern approach. David wanted to develop this strategy based on the notion of sexual ethics which moves away from fixed categories, however “in the end we started (the prevention strategy) with that idea that sexual assault is an abuse of power… and stuff about men’s responsibility”. In the final, David was worn down by what might be called ‘the tyranny of the habitual’. He used a feminist approach to sexual violence prevention which construes men as potential perpetrators and women as potential victims; an approach that the Australian sexual assault field considers ‘best practice’ (Keys Young 1999). In this experience, it would
appear that David was caught between adhering to his personal values, and complying with organisational norms or culture-of-work mandates.

The phenomenon of workers having personal beliefs that are inconsistent or different from values they espouse in practice has been discussed in the ethics in human services work literature. Banks (2001) has observed it is implausible to expect workers to wholeheartedly adopt the values of their profession, or somehow hide their personal beliefs in practice. It has also been found that workers can experience considerable stress and tension when their personal ethical framework is incommensurate with the values of their organisation (McAuliffe & Sudbery 2006; Holland & Kilpatrick 1991). While some workers in this study found it easy to meld their personal ethical worldview with political and ethical frameworks espoused in their work context, participants John, Shari and David did not find this easy. These workers appear to engage in a process of what MacIntyre (2006:117) calls compartmentalisation; where different spheres of life are governed by distinct sets of norms. According to MacIntyre, the broader social context enabling ethical compartmentalisation involves rejection or questioning of traditional moral norms, and the adoption of values like consumerism. In this heterogenous context, the workplace is no longer connected with workers broader aspiration and goals. The workplace is conceived as a realm of existence separate from family life and leisure (1999:256).

A form of ‘ethical compartmentalisation’ is evidenced in the accounts given by Shari, John and David. While Shari wants her own children to adopt the norm where healthy sexual relationships occur only in the context of a committed relationship, in the work context she “goes along with” a more permissive norm. Emergent from his Christian beliefs, John believes that ‘healthy’ intimate relationships are based on mutual regard, commitment and common sacrifice. However, in the practice setting John espouses values that are commensurate with secular Australian culture while staying on track with the anti-violence message. David also had compartmentalised different ethical positions. His personal ethical worldview upholds the value of not categorising people and being open to the different ways power might operate in relationships. David’s
attempt to blend these personal values with organisational norms (including the organisational ‘value’ that he develop a strategy based on a ‘best practice’ framework), was in many ways thwarted.

While these participants engage in a process of ethical compartmentalisation, I consider this is different from their having ethical ‘dissonance’. The idea of ethical dissonance, borrowed from the cognitive theory of dissonance (Floyd-Taylor 2007), implies passivity on behalf of the agent. To the contrary, Shari, John and David actively made a choice not to promote their personal ethical worldview in prevention practice. Shari and John have been influenced by a powerful argument in the human services discouraging practitioners from discussing their personal worldviews, especially religious beliefs. This argument admonishes workers to keep their personal values separate from practice ethics (Spano & Koenig 2007; Williams & Smolak 2007; Gale 2007; Holloway 2007). David chose to be quiet about his post-modern ethical worldview because it didn’t stack up against what was valued in the work context. The ethical compartmentalisation performed is an active response to these workers deliberating about the potential negative consequences of revealing their personal beliefs in practice.

Having now described four conventions in terms of how participants combined their personal beliefs and practice style brings this thesis to the denouement of explaining the findings in the field. In the next chapter, I review the key interpretations made in the inquiry, before finally considering what conceptual and practice implications might proceed from them.

57 Social work academics Spano & Koenig (2007) are particularly critical of workers using religious beliefs in practice decision making, saying workers should make ethical decisions through the prism of ethical codes. They acknowledge, however, that these codes are not designed to address ultimate moral answers as to how the world ought to be.
Chapter 8. Conclusion

Recognising moral dimensions in relationship violence prevention education

8.1 Crafting a ‘risky’ narrative about violence prevention education

Before beginning my doctoral inquiry I had worked in a violence prevention educational role for three years. I had observed two key functions in violence prevention education; that programs raise awareness about what not to do in relationships, and also promote ideas about what should be done in relationships. There was very little discussion about this second function of the work. Workers coming into the violence prevention education field may be questioned about their politics concerning why violence happens (specifically if they support a gender analysis), but not asked about personal values relevant to the question what is desirable in relationships. I didn’t encounter facilitators challenging how ‘healthy’ relationships were being depicted in programmes. My colleagues appeared to accept the public health terminology of ‘healthy’ relationships, a second wave feminist construction of gender, and what is a ‘permissive’ approach to sexual relationships. Perhaps some workers, like me, were reluctant to ask questions about the values being promoted in programs. Nevertheless, workers seemed to accept they had the expertise - and adequate moral politic - to guide clients in the way of the ‘healthy’ relationship.

It is fair to observe that my experience working in the field of violence prevention education was limited. I worked in one particular outer metropolitan region and facilitated two different violence prevention programmes. In my experience, there was little opportunity in the inter-agency context to discuss with co-facilitators the values being promoted in violence prevention programmes. Given these issues, it can be said I had a “vague, average” apprehension only (Heidegger 1988) of the issues

58 My educative experience has been with adults and young people and I have not facilitated violence prevention educational programmes with children. I recognise this bias (focusing on violence prevention initiatives targeting adults and young people) in my thesis argument generally.
involved for workers who promote desirable relationships in their work. In beginning the journey of this inquiry, I knew I wanted to discover more about workers thinking and believing around the practice of promoting ‘healthy’ relationships.

Using a hermeneutical phenomenological approach in this inquiry offered valuable tools given my personal experience in the field. This approach accepts that the inquirer will be ‘prejudiced’ in the sense of already being alongside or embroiled in the problem at hand. According to Gadamer (1976) this ‘prejudice’ is the very thing that helps an inquirer understand; meaning is made in the present through joining with the continuity of the past (Sharkey 2001:27). In doing this inquiry, I was willing to test and risk my prejudices (my initial knowledge) through dialogical engagement with workers in the field, and engagement with literature. I genuinely wanted to find out if, how and why workers in the violence prevention education field perceive that promoting desirable relationships is a moral problem.

Given the sensitive nature of the issue I was exploring; which traversed individual workers practice style and workers personal beliefs, using an in-depth phenomenological interview method proved to be beneficial. In Heidegger’s (1988:2) conception this approach enables an inquirer to get description of a problem “half-hidden, disguised or forgotten”. This problem description suits the subject matter explored in this inquiry. Promoting good relationships in violence prevention is a practice seen, but not really noticed in the literature. To enable descriptions to be developed about this feature of practice, interviews involved focused probing and digging, and my using participants own words and terms as a means of apprehending their worldview. In interviews I tried to remain as open as possible to the different ways the practice of promoting desirable relationships was conceived. My hermeneutical labour with interview data enabled three different core experiences to be identified concerning how desirable relationships are promoted in practice. In the thesis these three core practice styles have been evaluated. It has been contended that one of these core practice styles (the revolutionary practice style) might be considered more authentic (Heidegger 1962) when compared with the others, because of the greater
potential in their approach to engage client groups in a relational, and non-objectifying way.

From the genesis of the project I had wanted to learn about the values, beliefs and philosophies that underpin individual workers' promotions of desirable relationships. Based on my personal experience wrestling with some of the values assumed and promoted in programmes\(^59\), I knew that workers' personal beliefs may not coalesce with the values projected in the public realm of practice. Again, this ‘knowing’ was my personal prejudice. In the inquiry I wanted to test and risk my prejudice, to learn more about how workers' personal beliefs might influence their practice. Questions about personal guiding moral frameworks were asked in interviews, again through using phenomenological probing. Based on analysing this material; using a cyclical process of coding, category building, interpreting ideas via literature, and crafting themes, a complex and diverse picture of how workers' personal moral-ethical beliefs influence their practice was developed. I have argued that individual workers' personal moral and ethical commitments make possible certain versions of the ‘good’ in relationships to be promoted in practice, and not others.

In the final version of this thesis can be read a piece that weaves findings from my field project and the relevant literature, in a fashion that makes it possible for me to argue that moral dimensions of violence prevention education are often not recognised. However, this ‘whole’ will not reflect the unwieldy journey of conducting this inquiry. On many occasions I experienced doubt that the broad scope of issues that emerged in the project could be contained. Because this project fuses issues emergent from two distinct fields; the field of ethics in human services work and the field of violence prevention, the hermeneutic process required cyclical entering and exiting of both fields. However, these fields are very different in their evaluation of the question ‘what is good practice’. Ethics in human services work literature can employ a philosophical

\(^{59}\) I struggled particularly with the reductionist moral norm that any casual sexual encounter is ‘healthy’ as long as there is consent. I struggled also with using excerpts from sitcoms like Home & Away to demonstrate ‘healthy’ relationship encounters. I chose not to share these struggles with co-workers while working in the field.
attitude, while violence prevention literature tends to be scientific-empirical in its approach. Given the different approaches of these two literary traditions, I felt a constant tension concerning the question of epistemology in seeing the project issues. The ‘thing’ I was looking at; which was the issue of promoting good relationships in violence prevention education, changed shape as I engaged and fused these two literary traditions. A further dimension of this interpretative process involved the ‘double hermeneutic’ (Archer 2003) operating; joining my own research horizon with the worldviews communicated by the project participants.

Another epistemological issue that prompted doubt in the thesis journey concerns the status accorded to different epistemologies when researching an issue like violence prevention. In the field of violence prevention, it is evident that the kind of research that matters is that which can argue what is effective practice. While in this project I wanted to provide useful findings, I didn’t endeavour to ‘prove’ in any scientific-empirical sense what moral-ethical frameworks, or practice styles, work best in violence prevention education. Indeed, given the tasks undertaken in this inquiry together with the nature of moral problems, it would be impossible to make such an argument. The purpose of my inquiry was to demonstrate and interpret moral and ethical dimensions of violence prevention education, and make evaluative commendations on the basis of my findings. I was not conducting inquiry of the ‘evidence-based’ ilk; the question of what works to prevent relationship violence. Having said this, I was sometimes troubled in my thesis journey that I ‘wouldn’t have much to say’ about how we might prevent violence. When asked by others, including those in academia, about the ‘point’ of my thesis, I wrestled with how to speak about the purpose of my thesis. If I was doing a doctoral study about violence prevention, wouldn’t I be saying something about how to prevent violence? Even when I mentioned pursuing the problem of ethical practice in this field, the ‘effective’ practice question seemed to remain. Also, I wrestled with doing an inquiry about an issue (workers moral visioning) that seemed unimportant when compared to the ‘real’ problem of preventing relationship violence.60

60 The ‘real’ problem of violence, and how to prevent it, is the issue that permeates media. The thorny question of what people might do instead of abuse and violence is rarely engaged in public debate.
These experiences, culminating in personal doubt, prompted me to work extra hard in making the case that promoting the good relationship in violence prevention education is a practice with moral dimensions. More importantly, I wanted to demonstrate that promoting ‘good’ relationships in this field is a morally contentious problem.

The narrative about violence prevention education provided in this thesis is a moral narrative. It has canvassed theories of moral and ethical living, explored the nature of ethical practice, discussed competing accounts of desirable ways to be in interpersonal relationships, and generally revealed the moral nature of facilitating violence prevention education. Providing a moral narration of violence prevention education has a different purpose when compared with giving a scientific narrative. In a scientific-empirical narrative of violence prevention education, evident in the public health literature, the focus is on the issue of ‘effective’ practice. In these narratives the aim is with evaluating or assigning outcomes for violence prevention activity. Differently, the aims of this ‘moral narrative’ have been with interpreting and evaluating moral and ethical dimensions in violence prevention education.

However, pursuing a moral narrative about violence prevention education does not discount asking the question of what can be considered ‘good practice’. To the contrary, recognising moral dimensions in this field is necessarily bound up with the question of good practice in violence prevention education. Toward the end of this chapter I argue that number of conceptual and practice implications might proceed from recognising the moral dimensions of promoting desirable relationships in violence prevention education.

If I were asked to give an account of the gestalt, or essential experience, encountered when doing this study I would discuss experiencing a sense of risk. In crafting a moral narrative about promoting the good relationship in violence prevention education I

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61 Some philosophers would argue that morality is concerned with interpreting purposes and not dictating purposes, including those writing in the metaphysical tradition (Haldane 2008). Other moral philosophical traditions (for eg. utilitarianism) are concerned with arguing right purposes or ends for human practice. Hence, some moral narratives will give a greater emphasis on good ends for practice.
experienced a constant sense of risk. Doing evaluative interpretation of participants stated moral-ethical beliefs and values felt risky, particularly in using concepts including Heidegger’s (1962) notion of authenticity to critique orthodox practices in the field. In making interpretative commentary about participants’ practice style, and their capacity to recognise moral dimensions in practice, I felt a constant tension between respecting participants’ work commitment and making critical evaluation. This tension was strongest when evaluating the practice experiences of those participants committed to feminist anti-violence practice frameworks, who adopt an ‘expert’ approach when doing violence prevention education. When writing my thesis, I experienced a sense of risk also in recognising the religious and faith dimensions in some participants’ accounts. Recognising the influence of religion and spirituality in human service workers practice in an optimistic way, seems rarely an attribute of human services scholarship (Gale 2007). Related to this issue, I experienced risk writing an academic sociological piece about the question of what is ‘good’ in human practice. This risk seemed heightened because of my personal belief that the good has a transcendental ground. In holding this personal belief while undertaking the academic tasks of the thesis, I was inspired by the approach taken by Margaret Archer and her colleagues (Archer, Collier & Porpora 2004) in accommodating transcendental issues in academic scholarship.

8.2 The good relationships project: Key findings and interpretations
8.2.1 Recognising moral complexities
The final interpretations made in this inquiry concern the problem of violence prevention educators recognising moral dimensions in their practice. Conventions showing the interplay between participants’ practice styles and personal beliefs have been discussed in chapter 7. In two of these conventions, it was recognised there are moral dimensions when violence prevention workers promote desirable relationships in practice; participants who practice moral visioning and workers’ whose personal morality is inconsistent with their practice style.

The participants who practice moral visioning use an ‘anti-expert’ practice style. They are sceptical of how professional and evidence-based rhetoric construes human living,
or human flourishing. These participants have actively rejected professional discourses that emphasise the worker has expert and privileged knowledge. They draw from a broad knowledge base in their practice; fusing ideas from continental philosophy and/ or psychology and theology. A foundational belief for these workers was that giving answers “doesn’t work” in violence prevention education. This group of workers were keenly aware that the question of desirable relationships is a morally contentious issue; that people have different beliefs and values about relationships. They make use of respectful dialogue, and have a trusting or hopeful attitude that clients might seek the good in their own lives.

Another convention when participants recognised moral dimensions of violence prevention education, particularly the moral quandaries involved, was having personal beliefs that are inconsistent with practice values. These participants sustain personal beliefs about the good in relationships that are emergent from transcendental religious beliefs (John and Shari) or a philosophical tradition (David). John and Shari expressed personal beliefs about the form a good intimate relationship will take (a marital-like relationship) as well as the qualities it will have (long term commitment or common sacrifice). In practice John and Shari are careful to conceal these personal beliefs, they engage in what seems a ‘watering-down’ of their personal morality. In the secular practice settings in which they work, John and Shari believe their personal views would be dismissed as conservative and by implication, not beneficial. Both of these participants indicated such views may even be considered professionally inappropriate. I have suggested that these participants’ practice messages are not dissonant from their personal beliefs, in the sense they are unaware of the practice/belief inconsistency. Rather, John, Shari and David hide their personal morality because of contrasting and competing values in the field concerning the question of effective practice. They hide their personal beliefs because these sit uncomfortably with the values espoused in secular ‘professionalism’, or uncomfortably with dominant liberal feminist claims.

The remaining two conventions of belief/practice combination identified in chapter 7 indicate workers who do not recognise, or avoid recognising, moral dimensions when
promoting desirable relationships. There were participants in this inquiry who genuinely did not appear to conceive that discussing desirable ways of being in human relationships is a moral or ethical issue. These workers used terms like ‘healthy’ relationships, or ‘positive’ relationships, without having done any examination of what these terms mean. It has been suggested these participants conceive desirable relationships are a you-know-it-when-you-see-it phenomena, a conception which ignores the complexity and diversity surrounding the question of what makes relationships ‘good’. These workers found it difficult to describe what beliefs and philosophies guide their practice. While it has been found elsewhere that workers have difficulty articulating their moral and theory base (Fook 2002), this remains an issue of concern. It seems critical for ethical practice that workers understand how they know what they know, particularly when assuming an ‘up the front’ role like group-work educator.

In the last convention, participants avoided the moral dimensions of promoting desirability in relationships in practice. These participants were committed to using a feminist anti-violence approach; an approach consistent with liberal feminism. The main strategy for minimising moral complexities among these participants was to emphasise that the desirable relationship is an equal relationship. It has been suggested that these participants minimise or actively prevent moral and ethical debate in prevention programmes because they don’t want to somehow ‘lose’ the feminist focus on gender issues, and specifically gender inequality, which most feminists claim lies at the heart of the violence problem. It has been accepted that these participants are promoting a kind of moral vision; that which hopes for gender equality and personal freedom. However, through minimising and avoiding other moral and ethical worldviews in order to promote this feminist vision, the potential for considering these workers practice as ethically aware is diminished.

8.2.2 Three core practice styles: on authenticity in practice

To enable final interpretations to be made about the interplay between participants beliefs and practice style, two analytical tasks were undertaken. The first was to retrieve
descriptions of how workers promote good and desirable relationships in violence prevention practice; their practice style. The second task was to explore the shape of individual participants’ moral ontology\textsuperscript{62}; their personal beliefs about human potential in relationships, and the philosophical or theoretical sources for these beliefs.

In this inquiry I choose to speak with individual workers about their practice because I believe they have significant agency to shape the course of violence prevention work. Inspired by the work by Archer (2003, 2000) I assumed that workers in this field can deliberate, reflect and choose a course of action when promoting the good relationship in practice. Recognising the significant potential for human agency to shape social practice is important given the broader aims of this project. This conception recognises that change at the level of individual workers practice is possible.

While this inquiry was based on the assumption that promoting desirable relationships in violence prevention education is a moral concern, the aim of the field study was to retrieve workers understandings of practicing in this field. Phenomenological hermeneutical engagement with the interview material involved my being attentive only to the relevant issue being explored in the inquiry; how desirable alternatives to violence are promoted in violence prevention education. In drawing out and analysing participants’ told experiences, I was able to discern patterns and distinctions in the structure of this practice experience. Three core practice styles of promoting desirability in relationships were identified.

The first core practice style identified was that of the experts. In the expert approach, participants were prescriptive about what constitutes violence in relationships, as well as what features characterise ‘healthy’ relationships. In other words, characteristics of desirable relationships were objectified. These objectified ethical goods (which included notions of equality, fairness, happiness to name a few) tended to be introduced in the same manner as the facts of violent behaviours, or the content of legal statutes.

\textsuperscript{62} Taylor (1988) uses this term to describe the individual framework we have that structures and orients our living, that provides the basis of our understanding what is important.
by these participants. However, the experts also used the strategy of defining ‘healthy’ relationships using a deficit approach; or bringing attention to what this thing is not. This strategy was used according to one expert because, “we have no certainty about what the good is”. Being able to demonstrate expertise about relationships, and have clarity was important in the experience of the experts. Discussion and dialogue with client groups was very structured in this practice approach. It was more important that people are given the anti-violent message, and less important that there is dialogue around the matter of relationships in the expert practice style.

The experimenters employed less prescription in their practice style. While a typical social learning approach was sometimes used, the experimenters more actively engaged clients’ ideas for the purposes of doing the violence prevention programme. The experimenters sometimes employed a strengths based approach, making efforts to find ‘positive’ language to describe peoples’ experiences in relationships. In promoting ‘healthy’ relationships the experimenters attitude toward their role seems positioned somewhere between possessing confidence they are getting expert information across, and having modesty – perhaps even uncertainty – that this knowledge has a sound basis.

The revolutionaries avoided using a prescriptive or didactic approach in their prevention practice. The revolutionaries are cautious about using a ‘professionalism’ or expert approach in their practice because of the sensitive and complex nature of violence in interpersonal relationships. In the revolutionaries practice style, dialogue and genuine engagement with clients is seen as the pivotal mechanism that will promote change in the area of relationship violence prevention.

This inquiry is based on the experiences of a small sample and hence the aim was not to claim universal representation about violence prevention educators’ practice styles. What this study has demonstrated is that there is a diversity of practices when promoting desirable alternatives to violence in violence prevention education. In my opinion, different practice styles described in the thesis should not be dismissed merely
as ‘different styles of practice’ or ‘different ways of doing the same thing’. Rather, I have contended that these different practice styles can be evaluated on the basis of authenticity. While Heidegger’s notion of ‘authenticity’ is a limited and incomplete way of perceiving good human practice, it is not one that should be dismissed. It should not be dismissed if it can be recognised that violence prevention education is a field fraught with moral and ethical complexity. According to a number of scholars reviewed in the first chapter of the thesis (Maidment 2006; Gray & McDonald 2006; Dybicz 2004; Hepworth et al. 1997), working with ethical complexities invites a practice approach that accommodates moral knowledge, a genuine stance, and a capacity for reflection, in lieu of assuming expertise about what people should do in human living.

8.2.3 Bringing personal morality to work: violence prevention workers’ beliefs

The second aim in the project inquiry was to learn about participants’ personal morality; what I have sometimes called their moral-ethical worldview. I wanted to learn about this as a means of exploring how individual workers personal beliefs make possible certain versions of the good relationship to be promoted in practice. In some interviews, it appeared participants were surprised that I dwelled on their personal beliefs and indicated discomfort when answering my questions about personal beliefs shaping practice. Others were attracted to the inquiry on the basis I would be asking such questions and responded in depth about their moral-ethical worldview.

The first category of personal morality discussed in chapter 6 contained the themes potentiality and awareness. Participants expressed different opinions regarding the issue of human potential to have ‘healthy’, and conversely, violent relationships. In the responses to the question ‘do humans have the same potential to use violence, or not?’ was found two opposing sub-themes. The first was where participants shared the belief that all humans have the capacity to use violence, and indeed, that all humans do hurt others. This belief can be compared with taking a selective position that some population groups are more likely to use violence (populations who have been victimised by violence, or men as a group). The ‘selective potential’ for using violence position is perhaps the less surprising finding. Violence prevention literature is riddled
with ‘at risk’ empirical evidence. Workers in this inquiry would be familiar with this literature and would have experience espousing this information in prevention programmes. Given this backdrop, the more surprising finding in this inquiry is four participants expressing the opinion that all humans have significant potential to use violence. While I cannot make comment about the superiority of the universal or selective potential position in terms of prevention outcomes, some researchers have documented that a selective ‘finger pointing stance’ at men can backfire in violence prevention, reinforcing negative masculinity stereotypes (Dutton 2008; Schewe 2002; Winkel & De Kleuver 1997).

Some participants who took the ‘selective potential’ position expressed a related opinion that achieving ‘healthy’ relationships is more difficult for some population groups. This opinion is bound up with the theme of human capacity to be aware of violence, and conversely, be aware of ethical goods in interpersonal relationships. Three sub-themes were recognisable in responses to the question ‘how do people become of aware of violence, hurt or otherwise goodness in interpersonal relationships?’ The first was where participants believed people must be taught how to recognise violence in relationships. In this sub-theme was expressed the view that some in the population (those who have been victimised by violence) need special help in recognising harm and abuse in relationships. Interestingly, the participants who said that people must be taught to discern violence and harm in relationships used an expert practice style. It might be observed that their personal views about human (in)capacity to be aware of violence of violence fits neatly with their prescriptive, social-learning approach to practice. Another sub-theme identified was the belief that people intuitively know about the state of their relationship; people feel or intuit when a relationship is going well or not. In this sub-theme, Dan claimed that people are aware when violence and abuse is happening, however, people dissociate or ‘turn-off’ this awareness. The third sub-theme identified fits somewhere between the other two positions. Here it was expressed that while people intuit or ‘know’ what is occurring in their relationships, there needs to be conversation to bring this knowing into existence.
The question of how people become aware of what is occurring in their relationships is indeed a philosophical type of question. Some might say that this question is an interesting, however, trivial issue compared to the ‘real task’ of preventing violence. In my view, beliefs held by workers concerning how people grow awareness about issues of violence and goodness in interpersonal relationships is not an entirely trivial matter given the functions of violence prevention education. If a worker conceives they are working with a ‘blank slate’ – or with people that have little capacity to discern harm in relationships – it would follow they use a different approach to the worker who believes that people intuitively recognise harm and goodness in relationships. If a worker perceives (and respects) that people coming to the prevention programme have an existent ‘worldview’ about interpersonal relationships, there is more potential for the worker to work alongside, or in dialogue, with people. If workers conceive people as having existing values and commitments, and not simply as tablets to be written on, there is a greater potential for them to engage genuinely, or work alongside client groups.

The second category of personal morality explored in the thesis concerned the sources, or authorities, for participants’ personal morality. This thesis offers valuable insights to the range of moral and ethical commitments that can inform workers’ practice; ranging from political commitments to philosophical and religious commitments. This trajectory of exploration is important given recognition in the human services’ literature that workers personal moral frameworks are significant authorities in practice decision-making (McAuliffe & Sudbery 2006; Zubrzycki 2003; Asquith & Cheers 2001; Ferguson 2001). This trajectory of exploration was interesting also because it indicated participants’ conceptual knowledge; the way they think about interpersonal relationships. While it can be said that a range of moral traditions, philosophies and knowledges (and blending of these things) were discussed by participants, there were also some observable trends. One significant trend, explored at length in the previous chapters, was five participants being influenced by feminist anti-violence claims. These participants spoke about the significance of gender in interpersonal relationships and the value of gender equality in relationships. It has been observed these participants
indicated a particular kind of feminist knowledge, which I have interpreted as emergent from second wave liberal feminism. This knowledge appears to have a controlling function in these participants’ practice approach; sometimes they use feminist claims to correct or teach others in the way of the desirable relationship. Promoting these feminist ideas as law-like generalisations (MacIntyre 2007) can be compared with the way knowledge was conveyed by other participants in this study. Other participants, particularly those using a revolutionary practice style, use their professional knowledge as a beginning point for conversation, or in a modest way.

Another trend in this study, that may be surprising to the reader, is three participants discussing the influence of ‘post-modernity’ in practice. According to Hugman (2006:106), post-modern approaches to practice propose a subjectivity of method where claims to truth can only be seen as reflecting the particular stance or position of the person asserting that truth. Accordingly, the ‘post-modern’ violence prevention educator would reject the idea that any one system of belief, or theory of violence prevention, can produce truth. Instead, each individual is to seek moral (or ethical) responsibility in themselves, and seek it in others (Bauman 1994:19). In this continental philosophical tradition, the practice of promoting fixed ethical norms in violence prevention education becomes a suspect practice. Promoting norms about what humans shouldn’t do, as well as norms about what humans should do in relationships, is to be critiqued. Values in a postmodern conception are not neutral, but they are never universal (Swartz 2008; Hugman 2003). Values are conceived as constructions via relations of people and power, hence the importance of dialogue in the practice of workers in this inquiry using a postmodern ethical framework. Unsurprisingly, participants committed to a postmodern approach refrained from committing to a moral position about the ‘good’ in relationships. It was difficult to get a picture of how these workers’ make a commitment with regard to the question what is good in human relationships.

Four participants discussed the influence of religious and spiritual traditions in their practice. Two participants discussed the influence of the Christian faith, one the
philosophy of Taoism, and the other Hinduism. Two of these participants spoke about their discomfort in being open in practice about the influence of their faith traditions; they conceal aspects of their personal spiritual beliefs because they conceive professional colleagues will have difficulty with the seemingly conservative nature of their beliefs. The other two participants draw from their faith for the purposes of critical engagement in practice, in the manner of how Robinson (2008:27) describes a tradition of ‘audacious challenge’ in religion. Stefan uses the Taoist principle of dark and light to challenge the demarcation in the violence prevention field between ‘violent’ and ‘non-violent’ contenders. Dan employs theological ideas as a deeper source to help make sense of the complexity of human living. This faith has helped him gain insight to what are otherwise unexamined claims in ‘evidence-based’ approaches to practice.

The last category of personal morality engaged in this inquiry was participants ideas about the skills, values and disposition needed to work in violence prevention education: the question of the ideal worker. Participants in this inquiry agreed on many attributes: the need for generic professional engagement skill, experience working in the violence field and ‘knowledge’. However, the issue of what kind of knowledge, and how workers should use knowledge were debated in this sample. Dan, John and Adrian were sceptical or dismissive about the role of ‘expert’ knowledge when working with issues of violence. Some participants, not surprisingly those who had identified as feminists, spoke about the need for workers to adopt and espouse feminist politics to work in the field. Linda and Erin regarded it is important that a team of educators share the same political commitments. The value of workers sharing a philosophical commitment is recognised often in ‘best practice’ prevention literature (Mulroney 2003; Indermaur et al. 1998). Other participants focused more on the need for violence prevention workers to have life skills, and have a personal disposition that can cope with complexity or “grey areas”.

In my opinion, grown throughout the project journey, workers doing violence prevention education should demonstrate modesty when speaking about the good in interpersonal relationships. As expressed by participant Dan, modesty can be grown
through engaging with broader traditions that are outside ‘best-practice’ and technorational human services literature. Human service workers might engage moral philosophy and ethics literature, social theory, theology and works of classic fiction. These alternative literary traditions, that are not often recommended as core reading in tertiary human service courses (Gray & Webb 2008) might enhance and grow workers conceptual and moral understanding. Reading outside the violence prevention literary canon might grow the realisation that ones professional ‘knowledge’ is only in the early stages of all that has gone before (Hardiker & Baker 1991:97). In practice settings like violence prevention education, where workers are not immediately emancipating people from oppressive social conditions and rather are engaging clients about the question of choosing to live well (Ferguson 2001), it is perhaps particularly important that workers grow broader moral understanding. Certainly, workers should not be reading from some checklist in correcting others about flourishing human living, a practice used by some participants in this inquiry.

It is important that violence prevention education has an information based component. Providing information increases the potential for communities to share an understanding of the risks, social context and consequences associated with violence (VicHealth 2007; Wolfe 2006; Dyson, Mitchell, Dalton & Hillier 2003). However when it comes to promoting desirable alternatives to violence, it is my view that ‘providing’ information alone is untenable. As has been contended by a number of moral and ethical theorists reviewed in earlier chapters (MacIntyre 2007; Nash 2002), people do not learn to be moral or ethical via rational teaching methods. Learning to be moral or ethical in relationships does not result from prescription by a human service worker delivering violence prevention education. When people in the community make a moral commitment to those they are in relationship with, or try to be ‘ethical’ in intimate relationships, they are motivated and guided by different moral and religious traditions. This diversity, and more importantly, these deeper grounds for people’s sense of what is good in human living, could be at least recognised by workers doing violence prevention education. At best, workers could be skilled in bringing different
moral perspectives ‘into the room’ for discussion as a means of helping clients to recognise and commit to an ethical way of being in relationship with others.

8.3 Practice vision and ethical practice in violence prevention education
8.3.1 Does the field need to recognise moral dimensions when promoting desirable relationships?

The practice of violence prevention education merges ideas in criminal justice and public health in providing information about the risks and consequences associated with violence, with the intention of promoting awareness, reducing risk and deterring violence in communities. In most Australian violence prevention educational programs, a feminist inspired social learning approach is used to teach community groups about risks associated with violence, provide information about service provision for victims, and to challenge negative masculine social identities which undermine the vision of gender equality in relationships. An otherwise important function in primary violence prevention programs is the promotion of desirable alternatives to violence in relationships; promoting so called ‘healthy’ relationships (Chung et al. 2006; Ryan 2005; Rosewater 2003; Mulroney 2003; Indermaur et al 1998).

As evidenced in this inquiry, the function and practice of promoting ‘healthy’ and desirable relationships in this field has not been conceived as a moral or ethically contentious issue. It seems that violence prevention educators are often guiding clients in the way of the desirable relationship without acknowledging the sources of the positive ethical goods they espouse; the philosophies, theories or assumptions about human nature that underpin promotions of desirable relationships in programs. Certain ethical norms are being promoted as desirable in violence prevention educational programs, for example the norm of gender equality and enjoying individual freedom, without recognition that others in the community might dispute the importance of these norms. Indeed, some in the community would regard other moral norms to be more important in intimate relationships.

Failing to recognise or avoiding recognition of moral complexities when promoting desirable relationships in violence prevention education is perhaps understandable
given the broader neglect of morality in the social sciences (Bauman 1990), together with assumptions in professional caring work. The liberal ethos in tertiary social science and social work schools prefers to leave moral judgements about the good life up to individuals. Human service workers are socialised and encouraged to be non-judgemental and respectful of different opinions. Also, the disciplines of social science and social work eschew metaphysical questions in human living almost entirely (Gray & Webb 2008; Sherwood 2007; Shaw 2004), and are quick to critique ideas connected with traditional sources of morality, including religious morality.

In the current professional environment is an emphasis on scientific approaches to practice, where the stuff of morality and ethics might be substituted for language like ‘effective’ or evidence based practice (Gray & McDonald 2006; McAuliffe 2005). The moral interpretation of human practice; the question what is good in human practice, is sometimes substituted for the question ‘does this practice work, is it effective’? In the field of primary relationship violence prevention, wrongs in human living (including rape, assault, neglect and harm) are also rationalised. This field deals in concepts like perpetration, victimisation and risk factors as a strategy for patterning and controlling the violence problem, but generally avoids the moral complexities, and indeed the moral questions that might be asked when humans choose, or not, to hurt others. In my opinion the field of violence prevention education has also rationalised goodness in relationships. In policies, publications and educational programs, norms about ‘healthy’ relationships are communicated, with little or no discussion about why these norms have been chosen. These ‘healthy’ relationship norms are assumed to be universal, when in fact they are at least in part ideological, and certainly function to exclude other moral positions about good relationships. I view this predicament as less about the need for ideological control in the field (however this may be an issue), and more about the field having swallowed the empirical equation offered in public health: the violence problem can be stopped if we ameliorate behaviours and attitudes x, y and z, and have people adopt desirable alternative behaviours and attitudes a, b and c. The thorny questions not asked in a public health framework include, what makes these alternative
norms desirable? And, why should people coming to prevention programs commit to the moral goods promoted by violence prevention educators?

This thesis has argued that when violence prevention workers promote desirable alternatives to using violence in relationships they are promoting moral goods. Having this conception or recognition is an unusual one, and it is evident that violence prevention education has evolved regardless of this recognition. However, I believe it is important that the field recognises and develops the moral function of promoting desirable relationships. Developing moral dialogue about the question of desirable and flourishing human relationships just might benefit the field of violence prevention education. Below, I suggest two potential benefits to be gained for the field if it develops moral recognition and moral dialogue about how people should commit to non-violent relationships.

The first benefit to be gained from developing moral recognition and moral dialogue in violence prevention education is the potential to help population groups commit to an encompassing non-violent vision in lieu of a mere ‘risk avoidance’ vision. Many violence prevention educational programs still focus on risk avoidance and consequences associated with violence, with what seems a supplementary ‘feel good’ discussion about healthy relationships. In a quick fix format, this supplementary discussion is likely to achieve nothing other than reprieve from talking about the hard issues of violence. The limitations of doing ‘one-off’ violence prevention sessions as a strategy of reducing violence have been well documented (Imbesi 2008; Carmody 2006; Hague 2001). It seems prudent to assume also that mere brainstorming of ‘healthy’ relationships, or having people watching a video clip about ‘safe’ intimate negotiation, will have little or no impact on the community committing to flourishing, and non-violent relationships. If the primary prevention field wants to help people commit to ethical and non-violent relationships, it might make more time for discussing the ways humans could be in our interpersonal relationships.

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63 I make this observation on the basis of provisional findings of a current project (2008-2009) looking at Australian sexual assault prevention education programs. I am a research officer in this project.
The huge task of helping people in the community to commit to non-violent and desirable relationships requires the prevention field to further genuine dialogue about morality in relationships. And, to paraphrase participant Dan in this inquiry, it seems the words used in this discussion “have to live, they have to have meaning” for all people sitting in the room. Educators could create a space for people to listen to each other about why and how individuals might be moral or ethical in their relationships, if indeed the vision is that people have flourishing relationships and not merely violent-absent relationships. It is my view that discussions about desirable ways we could be in relationships in violence prevention education either should not happen at all; if this will involve human service workers simply telling clients how to live, or it should happen in a way that involves bringing the moral question of goodness in relationships into the room for genuine discussion.

The second benefit to be gained from developing moral recognition and moral dialogue in the field of violence prevention education is increasing the potential for stakeholders in this field to listen to each other. It is evident that people in the field of relationship violence prevention are not always listening to each other. Despite the fact that stakeholders might share a commitment to stopping violence, people speak past each other when they hold onto certain values and dismiss different values that others hold. In this inquiry was evidenced significant examples of when stakeholders in violence prevention do not listen to each: when feminist workers don’t listen to (even refuse to recruit) workers not identifying as feminist, and when workers are unwilling to negotiate with religious schools or religious community organisations. On the predicament of facilitating a violence prevention program in a local Muslim secondary school, participant Hannah spoke about “really losing something in being able to focus only on sex within marriage”. While I don’t know the reason why Hannah’s organisation did not eventually facilitate this program, I can guess that insistence on espousing a secular anti-violence stance and not adapting this stance to suit Muslim moral obligations would have stopped the conversation between these different stakeholders. These few examples of violence prevention stakeholders not listening to
each other indicate the impact that a workers personal moral and political beliefs, or an organisations political stance, can have in practice. Commitment to a political or ethical framework is not an undesirable predicament, but it is one that must be better recognised. If it can be openly recognised that workers and agencies in the violence prevention field have strong moral and political commitments about significant issues then we might begin better dialogue about commonalities and differences amongst stakeholders in the field.

There will be no hope for different stakeholders in the field working together if values of basic importance to one group are dismissed by others on the basis that such views are different. For there to be clarity in the debate about how to prevent violence, it seems essential that different moral and political positions are communicated, discussed and respectfully debated. It should be recognised in the violence prevention education field that consensus about the question of what is desirable in interpersonal relationships is not realistic in our diverse society. Further, it could be recognised that disagreement about what is ‘good’ in relationships is not necessarily destructive for the field. Rather, it is misunderstanding and speaking past those who have different opinions that will be ultimately destructive (Blake & Katrak 2005). Given the seriousness of the issue of human flourishing, and the importance that violence prevention activity is not politically impotent, it seems timely for the field to better recognise moral dimensions in the work. It is time for this field to debate in what form the moral visioning of desirable relationship could be promoted in violence prevention education.

8.3.2 Implications for practice: Workers having a personal moral commitment

Woven into the data interpretations in the thesis has been an evaluative stance toward how workers might practice better in the field of violence prevention education. In these final sections of the thesis I outline two practice related issues that could be developed in response to the recognition that promoting desirable relationships in

64 There are many examples of stakeholders speaking past each other in the gendered violence field. I had personal experience of another deep rift and a speaking past each other when I was doing research on the link between poverty and domestic violence (Evans 2005).
violence prevention education is a moral activity. The first issue that might proceed from this recognition concerns individual workers, and communities of workers, developing their moral commitment. The second issue concerns the problem of teaching and learning about ethics in tertiary human services courses.

A perhaps unusual claim made by professional ethics academic Robert Nash, reviewed in the first chapter of the thesis, is that an ethical worker will have a personal moral commitment and an ability to articulate their moral commitment (2002:12). In making this claim, Nash departs from what is generally written about ethical practice and worker virtue in the professional ethics literature. Commonplace in the human services ethics literature is discussion about the importance of workers demonstrating professional principles (for example, a commitment to social justice, and respect for persons), and displaying virtues such as reflexivity, integrity and impartiality. Nash’s claim is unusual because it poses the ethical worker as someone who has a moral commitment; who discerns that some things are right and others are wrong, and believes that people should honour certain values, and not others. Nash believes it is important that professionals have a personal moral commitment, and the ability to articulate their moral commitment because of the dangers associated with value neutrality. He makes the observation that “value-neutrality is impossible and undesirable … non-judgemental strategies are loaded with the superiority of certain principles (2002:42)”. Similarly, Payne (1999:257) has observed “social workers use the talisman of moral neutrality to try to deny what is obvious to everyone. This leads workers to avoid the responsibility to be absolutely scrupulous in making and applying the moral judgements that (they) do make.”

I want to build on Nash’s claim about the importance of workers having a personal moral commitment. I consider this claim is pertinent for doing moral visioning in the violence prevention education field; in so far as it speaks hope for this field better engaging with diverse population groups, if it can be recognised that we all have a personal moral commitment, or potential to have one. Here, my interest is in the

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65 I borrow these insights from Sherwood (2007:121).
implications of recognising that human beings do have moral commitments, that we have what Charles Taylor (1989) calls a ‘moral ontology’. I want to stress the importance of violence prevention educators acknowledging that they themselves, together with the people they work with, have a moral ontology. In the practice of violence prevention education, workers are not educating blank slates or mere discursive subjects. They are working with people who have a deeper or emerging sense of what is good in human living.

In this inquiry, many participants had difficulty articulating their personal beliefs about ‘good’ relationships. If a moral or ethical position was communicated, participants were careful to acknowledge that their view is one among many, making comment about the value of respecting and not judging others’ opinions. Perhaps it is common practice in the field of violence prevention education for workers to make moral judgements about violence and harm in relationships, but otherwise commit to being impartial and non-judgemental about how people should conduct their relationships. However, as has been observed by participants Shari, John and Adrian in this inquiry, the values promoted about relationships in violence prevention education are far from ‘neutral’. Moral and ethical norms are being constantly promoted in this field. The danger with workers not recognising this fact includes potential abuse of power; where workers might impose their own agenda without recognising they are doing so, and in the process are potentially ignoring and silencing the views of participants coming to violence prevention programs.

It is my view that violence prevention educators should better recognise that they are promoting certain moral norms about relationships. I consider this recognition invites workers to be more aware of, and open about, the moral commitments they espouse. It invites workers to develop a greater willingness to listen to those who may have different moral commitments, both within the violence prevention field, and in the broader community. Honest and purposeful moral dialogue in the field of violence prevention education.

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66 Participant Adrian discussed the predicament where trainers “ask questions that are couched so closely to advice, and they say ‘I’m not giving advice’ but by God it’s loaded with advice. What answers are they wanting with that question?”
prevention education must involve really listening to the shape of others moral commitments, and trying to understand the derivation of different beliefs. For example, a refusal to commit to secular relationship norms might emerge because a Buddhist holds a utopian vision of human behaviour, or for a Christian because of Christ’s injunction to love one’s neighbour as oneself. On the other hand, a secular libertarian may see casual sex as consistent with self-fulfillment. It is important to understand the derivation of different moral norms that may arise, because from this understanding we have a greater chance of finding points of commonality, an issue that is so important if violence prevention initiatives are going to be successful.

Given the importance of the vision that people enjoy flourishing and non-violent relationships, it seems beneficial that primary violence prevention workers recognise the moral functions in the work, and develop a stronger moral vocabulary about desirability in relationships. A vocabulary about what can contribute to flourishing human relationships. Also, it seems important that the field, and individual workers, base the visioning of desirable alternatives to violence with strong sources. These sources may lie with traditional deontological ethical principles, virtues, feminist ethics, postmodern ethics, religious and spiritual moralities or a combination of these. In my view, the moral or ethical position adopted should not be amenable to nihilism or solipsism, and should always seek the best way. Taylor (1989:516-7) writes, “high standards need strong sources. Do we have ways of seeing the good which are still credible to us, which are powerful enough to sustain (moral) standards?”

Working well with moral complexities in the field of violence prevention is an enormously difficult and challenging task. In this discussion I have only hinted at why and in what form this moral dialogue could occur in the field of violence prevention education. Thinking through this problem well would involve another thesis and another field inquiry, and I would suggest this is an important avenue for future research. Having acknowledged this, I move on to finally consider how workers might be better prepared to practice with moral and ethical issues. Specifically, this is the

67 These positions are discussed by Bush & Neutze (2000) in the context of the drug reform debate.
question of how tertiary human service work degrees might better teach students to recognise, and work with moral complexities.

8.3.3 Implications for workers practice: Teaching and learning ethical practice

This inquiry has raised important questions about preparing human service workers to work well with moral and ethical visioning in practice. Specifically, this inquiry has focused on violence prevention educators recognising and being skilled in promoting the moral good of desirable relationships. A number of findings in this inquiry speak to the issue of poor preparedness for practicing with ethical complexity in the field studied. The first was that more than half of the participants in this inquiry did not perceive that promoting desirable relationships in violence prevention education is inherently a moral activity. These participants adopted strategies including: being prescriptive about what is desirable, objectifying ethical goods in relationships in the same manner that the facts of violence are objectified, or proposing that the good relationship is a self-evident phenomenon. It has been argued that these participants failed to recognise the moral scope and function of their role, an issue that has been recognised as pivotal for practicing ethically (Gray & McDonald 2006:16; Nash 2002:12). Another finding pertinent to the issue of poor preparedness to practice with moral and ethically complexity in this inquiry was when participants had difficulty discussing sources or authorities that influence their promotions of desirable relationships. In the violence prevention literature this problem is sometimes conceived as a problem of inadequate theoretical underpinnings in the work. Mulroney (2003) observes that Australian domestic violence prevention programmes rarely make explicit the underpinning theory base, and that this problem needs redress for success in the field. However, there is another layer behind or underneath the theory articulation problem, which is the moral or ethical dimension of practice. In the next paragraphs, I focus on the problem of preparing students of the human services to work well with moral and ethical dimensions of practice.

The literature reviewed in chapter 1 of the thesis about teaching ethics to students in tertiary human services courses indicated limitations in the current pedagogical
A number of scholars recognise that ethical theory is not taught as a general field in most tertiary human services undergraduate degrees (Gray & Gibbons 2007; Clifford & Burke 2005; Healy 2005; Reamer 2001). In these courses, ethics is not taught as a philosophical anthropology, where students can be engaged about a range of moral traditions, and are encouraged to test different approaches to ethics as a means recognising how the self and others act and discern moral action. Rather, teaching the ‘core values’ of the profession, including the values that underpin professional ethical codes (for example: social justice, equity, social inclusion) appears to be the focus in most Australian human service undergraduate courses. The pedagogical approach in teaching professional ethics in these courses is bound up with helping students integrate ethical principles in their practice; the notion of applying ethical principles in practice. In this approach, educators make use of case studies, and the strategy of having students apply a problem solving approach to a dilemma they experience in a field placement (Gray & Gibbons 2007; Weber 2006; Asquith & Cheers 2001). Developing students’ ethical reasoning skills via these methods is understandable given the demands of professional accountability and time constraints in the tertiary setting.

The development and trial of ‘ethical checklists’ (McAuliffe 2005b), what are more or less ethical blue-prints for practice, are also perhaps understandable given the demands of professional accountability and evidence based practice in the contemporary era. However, the current pedagogical approach to teaching ethics must be also criticised on the basis of promoting a narrow conception of ‘ethics’, and hence what might be considered ethical practice, to students in human services courses.

In raising the problem of ‘narrowness’ in the teaching of professional ethics, I will reinstate two questions asked in the first chapter. First, will having been taught the core values of the profession, and skills in anti-oppressive practice, equip a human service worker to practice well with issues relevant to human well-being and human

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68 This approach to teaching ethics is advocated by Nash (2002). However, the ideas here are inspired by my partner Angus Brook who teaches ethics as a distinct unit at a Catholic liberal arts university.
69 For example, the demand for ‘excellence in practice decision making’ (Asquith & Cheers 2001:26).
70 I applaud the commitment of human services academics currently developing ethics modules in courses, and do not pretend to have knowledge about the many issues involved when developing professional ethics curriculum. Recent interesting approaches to teaching ethics in human services courses include Gray & Gibbons (2007) and Clifford & Burke (2005).
flourishment? Secondly, does the teaching of professional ethics exclusively in connection with principles like do no harm\textsuperscript{71}, or in connection with power and issues of social exclusion, equip workers to guide their clients in the way of good and desirable human living?

Given the findings and discussion in this inquiry it will be understood that I pose these questions as rhetorical questions. Despite expectations that exist about workers expertise, perhaps particularly in public health where workers are assumed to have knowledge not only about problems prevention, but also about problems solutions (Peterson & Lupton 1996), it can be recognised that possessing a human services degree does not equip workers with moral and ethical skills or moral sensitivity. As suggested by some participants in this inquiry, and in examples of ethics literature reviewed in the thesis, it is a variety of things that grow workers’ moral skill and sensitivity. As has been argued throughout the thesis, growth toward moral sensitivity or working well with ethical problems doesn’t simply happen. It involves making a choice. While human service and professional development courses can go someway toward helping professionals recognise the moral functions of their role, and teach ethical skills, it is up to individual workers to develop their own moral sensitivity.

This thesis has argued that promoting desirable alternatives to using violence; the vision of ‘good relationships’, necessitates violence prevention educators to have more than mere knowledge about violence, and more then generic practice skills. It has been argued that violence prevention workers need a broader understanding of moral issues and a personal commitment to morality in human relationships. Workers might develop the ability to reflectively engage the question of what is good in human living; what is moral or ethical, for the purposes of their practice. For some violence prevention workers, these new skills and commitments are required because, to use the insight of social work academic Ferguson (2001:53), the functions of the work in part “is in enabling people to explore who they are and how they should live”.

\textsuperscript{71} The first principle in medical ethics. This principle is suggested in many other human services professional codes.
My caveat statement is that it is unrealistic to expect that all violence prevention educators will be moral educators extraordinaire. Like most fields of human service work, violence prevention educators are already required to have broad knowledge and skills across many different areas. Also, it would seem that moral and philosophical inquiry is not for everyone (Bohme 2001). There will always be human service workers for whom moral, philosophical and spiritual issues have no meaning, and who consider that good practice is adequately encompassed by the psycho-social approach (Holloway 2007). However, as this thesis has argued, recognising moral dimensions in the practice setting, and recognising the moral functions in ones role, is important for achieving ethical practice. Having said this, I acknowledge also that better recognition of the moral dimensions in prevention education will not make practicing in this field easier. Indeed, better recognition of moral and ethical complexities can make the practice of human services work more difficult (Gray & Webb 2008; Gray & Gibbons 2007; Maidment 2006; Bauman 1994). Recognition and purposeful engagement of moral complexities in violence prevention education will be particularly difficult in the broader practice milieu where workers and their organisations must demonstrate ‘effective’ and evidence based practice.

8.4 Recommendations for the inclusion of moral vision in violence prevention education

In so far as it has been recognised in this inquiry that violence prevention education is a practice with intrinsic moral dimensions, I propose a number of recommendations.

1. Researchers and policy makers in the field of relationship violence prevention should better recognise, and consider the implications of, what are moral dimensions when this field proposes desirable alternatives to using violence in relationships. In contrast to the public health assumption that it is through the striving of expert professionals that can assure the conditions necessary for enabling non-violence in relationships, this inquiry has brought attention to the moral dimensions of conceiving desirable human relationships. While science can tell us ‘what is the case’; in providing knowledge
about risk factors for violence, and in documenting predictive factors for people having non-violent relationships, science can not tell us what we ought to do in relationships. Given this problem, the violence prevention field could begin purposeful interdisciplinary dialogue with scholars in the field of morality and ethics, and with important others, who can contribute to a richer understanding of what it means to pursue desirability in human relationships.

2. Violence prevention educators should be trained in how to recognise moral dimensions in practice and should be skilled in working with ethical dilemmas. As was evidenced in this project, even experienced human services workers may not be able to identify what are moral issues, and moral dilemmas, in practice. Not recognising the moral functions of ones role can have detrimental consequences, and may even result in an abuse of power. It seems timely for the field to better recognise that facilitating violence prevention education is not a technical exercise; it is a practice that involves discussion, debate, reflection and moral responsibility. Indeed, the process of violence prevention education is even more important for learning outcomes than the content provided in programs (Berkowitz 2002). As a number of participants in this study indicated, important elements of violence prevention education cannot be collapsed into a list of curricula content. Given the complexity of the violence prevention educators role, there is a great need for educators to be trained not only in knowledge and attitude components of this work, but also to receive training in how to teach sensitive issues which comprise the substance of moral dilemma in human living.

3. Violence prevention educators should be encouraged and supported to include moral and ethical visions of good relationships when working in the community. Fundamental to the recognition that promoting desirable relationships is a question of morality, is the recognition that people in the community have different ways of evaluating goodness in relationships. As has been argued in the thesis, violence prevention workers might better appreciate that clients they work with are not blank slates to be written on. Rather, they are educating groups of people who have an emerging, or deeper sense of what is good and significant in human relationships. Workers too, have their own
emerging or deeper sense of what is good in relationships. Given this; that there are
deeper grounds for working out what is good in relationships, it seems time to bring a
greater diversity of ideas about ‘the good’ into the violence prevention education arena.
Workers can play a pivotal role in this process; they can model to others how to discuss
a personal moral framework in a respectful and purposeful way.

4. Violence prevention educators should be sensitive to faith-based diversity when
facilitating discussion about desirable human relationships. It is evident that a
significant percentage of the Australian community believe that religious and faith
based morality is important. This inquiry indicated that religious and faith based
morality can be in tension with secular or more permissive values espoused in violence
prevention education programs. In this study, it was found that strategies employed by
two workers coming from a religious worldview to deal with this tension included
silence or withdrawal from program facilitation. These two workers were not prepared
to make themselves vulnerable to their colleagues, and were not willing to expose their
“conservative” or faith-based morality about what is desirable in intimate relationships.

It is plausible to assume that young people from faith-based backgrounds might
respond similarly when permissive relationship norms are promoted in violence
prevention education programs. In the context of doing sex education with religious
young people, Thomson (1998:264) writes “people will go to considerable lengths to
avoid the conflict involved when there is an exposure of their values” and that “a
consensus over values is most easily achieved through the silencing of certain voices …
many prefer silence, albeit disempowering, to exposure”. Perhaps it is the case that
permissive relationship norms promoted in violence prevention programs are not
accepted as smoothly as educators might assume; some people coming to violence
prevention programs may be silent about their religious worldviews in order to avoid
exposure, and potential rebuke or ridicule by their peers. In learning about moral
dimensions in the work, violence prevention educators should recognise there are
tensions between secular and faith-based approaches to the issue of desirable intimate
relationships. Educators should be sensitive to these tensions. Also, efforts should be made by program writers to develop material that sensitively accommodates cultural and religious pluralism in the community.

5. Transcendental values, and most importantly the value of love in relationships, should be acceptable in violence prevention education lexicon. In this inquiry was some evidence for the trend toward ‘evidence based practice’ in violence prevention education, with the related idea that workers can be or should be ‘experts’. Some participants in this inquiry assumed an expert role; discussing the importance of providing ‘answers’ in their work. However, these participants also acknowledged that giving answers about what is ‘good’ in relationships can be difficult. The strategy of defining the good via negativa was used by these participants, because they had no ‘certainty’ about what is good.

This final recommendation speaks to the problem of the field assuming that ‘expert’ knowledge about desirability in relationships can be promoted in the work. In so far as the violence prevention education field assumes via the public health approach that it can establish what is ‘healthy’ or desirable in relationships, I propose the field revisits this assumption. Public health science can describe protective factors associated with so-called ‘healthy’ relationships, however, this approach can not tell us how we ought to be in relationships; the question of what is good in relationships. In other words, the promotions advocated in a public health approach cannot be equated with having a moral or ethical framework for desirability in relationships. The endeavour to understand what we ought to do in relationships is more appropriately suited to the content of fields including moral philosophy and theology. I consider this endeavour is suited to things of transcendence; with values including love, a thing which is perhaps non-observable, but nevertheless real in moral and ethical terms. Public health science cannot cope with a human capacity for transcending what is the case; our capacity to focus on ‘ultimate concerns’ like issues of love, compassion, and reconciliation in

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72 Promoting the message in violence prevention education that people can have positive casual sexual encounters contravenes religious norms about desirable sexuality (see for example Sanjakdar 2006 in the relation to sex education with Muslim young people).
relationships. Archer (2004: 65) says it is only in the light of ‘ultimate concerns’ such as these that actions are ultimately intelligible; practices in the violence prevention field are only intelligible because there is concern that we ought to prevent violence, and concern that we ought to have good relationships. In the light of this, I propose that the violence prevention education field takes the risk of using the language of transcendence when discussing what is desirable in relationships. This field could more often use terms like ‘love’ and ‘care’ when speaking of desirability in relationships, while continuing to search for better models and prevention strategies that can help people commit to what is perhaps the most desirable outcome: people demonstrating and experiencing love in relationships.

The completion of this thesis has occurred at a time when the Australian violence prevention education field is undergoing a significant shift. In the years that this thesis was written, the field has increasingly taken up the strategy of focusing on desirable, ‘respectful’ and ‘healthy’ relationships as the method for doing primary relationship violence prevention (VicHealth 2007; Urbis Keys Young 2004). In 2008, the Rudd government through the National Council to Reduce Violence against Women & their Children has committed several millions of dollars toward primary prevention projects, including ‘respectful relationships’ programs in schools. Programs which demonstrate an ‘evidence base’ and ‘best practice approach’ will attract this funding.

Increasing funding for primary prevention initiatives is important. However, as argued in this thesis, there are some thorny issues yet to be debated in a field that has walked into moral territory without recognising it has done so. The field of violence prevention education has not properly begun the discussion about what it means to promote ‘healthy’, respectful or desirable relationships. It has not begun the debate about what moral and ethical norms about relationships could be promoted. If the field of violence prevention education genuinely wants people in the community to commit to flourishing relationships, not merely ‘violent absent’ relationships, it seems time for the conversation to begin.
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Appendix A: Recruitment Advertisement

Do you have experience working in the primary prevention of child abuse & neglect, family/ domestic violence or sexual violence?

If so, I would like to talk with you.

I am a PhD candidate from the Centre for Social Justice & Social Change at the University of Western Sydney. I am researching how primary relationship violence prevention work is promoting non-violent and ‘good’ relationships. Vital to my study is asking workers about this aspect of their work. I am keen to hear your stories if you develop policy in this area, or write, facilitate or evaluate primary prevention programs relevant to violence in relationships. Perhaps some of you have experienced dilemmas in this aspect of prevention work, or have developed strategies you use when promoting ‘good’ relationships, that you wouldn't speak about in the public domain but might share in this research project. If you want to be involved in the project you will receive an information sheet and an idea of the questions I will ask before you consent to be involved. This project has ethics approval through my university ethics committee, and your participation will remain confidential.

I hope the project will further contribute to better work being done to prevent violence in relationships, and contribute to the professional development of human service workers. My name is Susan Evans and you can email me at su.evans@uws.edu.au
Dear 

Thank you for your interest in the research project. I am sending you this information so you can decide if you’d like to be interviewed by me.

WHAT IS THE RESEARCH ABOUT?

The research aims to discover how violence prevention-related human services work constructs ‘good’ relationships. The level of prevention I am focusing on is primary prevention –which targets population groups before a problem has been identified. Therefore, primary relationship violence prevention targets population groups (communities, school groups, parenting groups etc.) with the aim to stop the problem violence from occurring in relationships. I am interested in what ‘good’ alternatives to the use of violence in relationships are being communicated in this area of work.

WHY IS THE RESEARCH IMPORTANT?

The research is important for a number of reasons. Primary prevention of violence in relationships has been around for many years in human services work –even though many of you may not use that formal term to describe your work. This kind of prevention work involves educating people about what violence looks like, and ways of avoiding the use of violence in relationships. Often, these programs also discuss ‘healthy’ relationships, or ‘non-violent’, ‘resilient’, ‘good’, or ‘good enough’ relationships. These programs encourage people to think about how they can have more desirable kinds of relationships with intimate partners, children and other family members. However, the assumptions about what makes relationships good are rarely made explicit in prevention programs.
Also, little is known about what ideas, beliefs or values workers writing and facilitating these programs have about desirable ways of being in relationships. The purpose of this project is to learn more about these things.

I will ask you what you have found works or doesn’t work with your client group/s when you are discussing non-violent ways of being in relationships in programs you are involved in.

I will be interested in finding out more about how your work history – which may be in or outside relationship violence prevention – shapes your ideas about good relationships in your work. I will also ask you about personal beliefs and values that shape your work in this area and how these are positioned in relation to the programs you work with.

I am hoping that this research may offer something to professional development organisations – including human service courses in universities, prevention programmes, and your own work concerning better ways of doing primary relationship violence prevention. Your views –as experienced workers in this area – are vital for this project being able to achieve these things.

**WHAT WILL YOU BE ASKED TO DO?**

You will be asked to agree to take part by signing the written consent form attached to this letter and sending it back to me at the above address. Alternatively, you can email this form to me if you can provide a signature that way. Involvement is voluntary and there is no penalty should you choose not to take part. The research will take the form of a conversation in an interview, which will last between 1-2 hours. I will want to interview you during work hours, and will come to your place of work, or an appropriate place of your choosing if this is possible for me. While my preference is to interview you face to face, you may be given the option of having a telephone interview. In the interview you will be asked a number of questions relevant to the following themes.

Theme 1: Your professional/ educational background and why you are doing primary prevention work in area of domestic/ family violence, child protection, sexual violence.
Theme 2: How the prevention programs you have worked with construct desirable/ non-violent relationships. What works/ doesn’t?
Theme 3: What has influence on your views about what makes relationships ‘good’.
Theme 4: Where would/ could you go to understand more about good relationships for the purposes of your work.

**ARE THE INTERVIEWS CONFIDENTIAL?**

Yes. All interviews will be audio taped on blank tapes and kept in a secure location by me. The interviews will be confidential, data will be coded and identifying information removed to ensure no –one knows your name or place of work. I do think it is important for this study, though, that potential readers know about the type of prevention program you work with, the target group, and some information about you, for example your educational/ professional background. You can tell me what you want me to include. If at any time during the interview you don’t want to continue, the interview will stop and you don’t have to give any reason. Any papers, reports or books that result from the research will not identify you in any way.
WHO AM I AND HOW CAN YOU CONTACT ME?
My name is Susan Evans. I am a PhD. candidate at the University of Western Sydney. I have had previous experience conducting qualitative research with human service professionals. I am also a qualified social worker with 8 years of experience working with relationship violence prevention. Please email me on su.evans@uws.edu.au should you have any questions about the research. You are welcome to email me, also, at any time in the months following our meeting and I will welcome further thoughts you may want to contribute at that stage.

COMPLAINTS OR RESERVATIONS

At SJSC there is a commitment to undertaking ethical research. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research that has been approved by the University of Western Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee, you may contact the Ethics Committee through the Research Ethics Officer (tel: 02 47 360883). Any issues raised will be treated in confidence and investigated fully and you will be informed of the outcome. This research has ethics approval (06/018) from the University of Western Sydney.

Thank you for your interest in this project and I am excited about hearing from you via the consent form should you wish to be involved,

Susan Evans.
Consent to be interviewed

Being in relationships well: Human services workers’ constructions of ‘the good’ in primary relationship violence prevention.

AGREEMENT TO TAKE PART IN RESEARCH

I ------------------------------------ (the participant) have read the information above and understand what is being asked of me. I agree to taking part in this study and having the interviews audio taped. I understand I can request the interview cease at any point during the interview. I understand that data from the research may be used in written publications and that my real name will not be used.

Signatures

Participant --------------------------- Date -------------------

Researcher -------------------------- Date -------------------