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Enabling the Epistemic Authority of Domestic Violence Survivors in a Work Setting

Denisse Schweinsberg[1], Stephen Schweinsberg[2],*

[1] University of New England, Armidale, Australia, denisseschweinsberg@gmail.com
[2] University of Technology Sydney, Sydney, Australia, stephen.schweinsberg@uts.edu.au

Corresponding author: Stephen Schweinsberg, University of Technology Sydney, 15 Broadway, Ultimo NSW 2007, Australia, stephen.schweinsberg@uts.edu.au

Abstract

Domestic violence is a social issue, which can cause immense pain and suffering to people in our community. However, it also presents a challenge to business. How can businesses offer support to domestic violence survivors to navigate an immediate crisis situation or, if they wish, to empower survivors with the epistemic authority to apply their own personal experiences and knowledge to affect change in an organisation? In this paper we argue that managers have an important role to play in enabling the epistemic authority of members of the workforce which have been affected by domestic violence. We argue that the ability of a manager to enable a domestic violence survivor is grounded in that manager's willingness to critically examine their own sense of self. Will they be guided by the prevailing cultural understanding around domestic violence in their organisation? Or will they be guided by their own values and understanding? We examine these questions with reference to West's (2008) model of existential ethical decision making.

Keywords

Epistemic Authority; Existentialism; Domestic Violence; Workplace; Australia

Introduction

The World Health Organisation (2021) has estimated that 'about 1 in 3 (30%) of women worldwide have been subjected to either physical and/ or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner violence in their lifetime'. While women are disproportionally affected by domestic violence; 1 in 14 men in Australia have also experienced violence from an intimate partner since the age of 15 in 2021-2022 (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2024b; for a review of the academic literature of domestic violence against men see Scott-Storey et al. 2023). The negative impact from domestic violence is considerable with many people confined to a life of abuse owing to not having the financial security to leave their violent partners (Summers 2022a). Throughout the world a range of governments have legislated leave provisions, coercive control laws and other strategies to provide support for domestic violence survivors (Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Communities and Justice 2023; Commonwealth of Australia, Fair Work Ombudsman, 2023a; Gavin & Weatherall 2022). At the time of writing, the Australian Commonwealth Government has just finalised a review into the operation of the *Fair Work Amendment (Paid Family and Domestic Leave) Act* (Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Employment and Workplace Relations 2024a) which currently allows staff 'access to 10 days of paid domestic violence leave over a 12-month period' (Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Employment and Workplace Relations 2024b). In the authors' home state of New South Wales, the state government recently provided a $230 million emergency package to address ongoing domestic violence in the community (Dole 2024).

Over recent years there has been recognition that business has a responsibility to support its employees who experience domestic violence (Champions of Change Coalition 2020; Commonwealth of Australia, Fair Work Ombudsman 2023b). However, while addressing domestic violence makes good business sense for companies through the reduction in rates of presenteeism and lost productivity (Logan 2016), organisational level domestic violence supports for employees often remain ad hoc. In Australia, some 54.8% of small business owners suspect that a member of their organisation is experiencing domestic violence (Khadem 2022). However, reflecting a perception of many in business that they are unequipped to manage issues of domestic violence (UNSW Media 2022) employees continue to 'experience workplace discrimination as a result of taking time off work or temporarily having lower levels of productivity due to their experience of violence at home' (WorkPlace Plus 2022). Not all domestic violence survivors will choose to either enter into or stay in work (one estimate is 60% of reported domestic violence victims are in work, in Remeikis 2021); for many the declining value of government employment benefits places an onus on them to 'seek [or attend] work or … employment preparation programs' (Summers 2022b, p. 22). With domestic violence survivors choosing to either stay in their current work or change careers to find more supportive work environments, there is a responsibility for the business community to proactively support members of their organisation (Gavin & Weatherall 2022).

The aim of the present paper is to consider how a manager might better engage with an employee who has experienced domestic violence. With reference to existentialism, we will explore the thought process a manager might employ to avoid operating in 'bad faith' and being swayed by the cultural stigma around domestic violence. It has been demonstrated that cultural stigma around domestic violence can influence a survivor's willingness to seek out support networks (Overstreet & Quinn 2016) and while not all co-workers will react negatively to someone who is facing domestic violence, when it does occur it can impact many parts of a survivor's life:

> . . . Lots of gossiping about me—often when I was in the room. Teasing me about my choice in life-partner, that I was weak physically and mentally and was 'so useless that was likely the only person' I was capable of attracting . . . (MacGregor et al. 2016, p. 1147)

In some cases, domestic violence survivors have even been sacked from their jobs as a result of their abuser's intrusion into the workplace:

> He would call my work to make sure I was there...I got fired at three different jobs because of him; … he would repeatedly call, or he'd come to the store and be there for hours and hours on end. [He would be] loud and rude in front of customers.... And just on and on until it wasn't good for the business ... So they would get rid of me. (Sandy in Deen et al. 2022)

Branicki et al. (2023) have demonstrated that whilst organisations have collectively improved their responses to domestic violence, 'corporate responsibility can only be achieved if organizations shift their responses from the management of employee experience of IPV [intimate partner violence] to strategic action which takes seriously the structural and cultural changes required to fully integrate responsibility for IPV into organizations' (Branicki et al. 2023, p. 672). Managers have an obligation to create spaces where domestic violence survivors can thrive (Australian Human Rights Commission 2021) and this requires addressing the sexism and misogyny that has become ingrained in much of the business community (Barnes & Adams 2022; Heimann, Johansson, & Franklin 2023; Shohel, Niner, & Gunawardana 2021; van Engelen et al. 2022), and which has often perpetuated an 'implicit sanctioning of female dehumanisation' (Piterman 2014).

Managers must ask themselves if they are satisfied with simply supporting domestic violence survivors through the immediate trauma (Adhia et al. 2019), or whether a manager can also work to imbue domestic violence survivors with a level of epistemic authority. Epistemic authority refers to the beliefs of others who are in a better position, based on their experience, to judge a specific situation (Bokros 2021). When a domestic violence survivor experiences trauma they have the capacity to develop epistemic growth. They have the epistemic authority developed through their place of work; they have the epistemic authority arising from their experiences of domestic violence; and they may be in a position to bring these two together. This can lead to the creation of an epistemic authority which can manifest itself in a range of transferable skills that can place domestic violence survivors in an excellent position to be leaders in the organisation going forward. These skills can include: a positive mindset (resilience); a focus on placing one's well-being and one's dependents above all else; the capacity to empathise with other people who are affected by trauma; an appreciation of the importance of financial frugality; and the ability to coordinate interactions with the police, locksmiths and other support services (Bryngeirsdottir & Halldorsdottir 2022; Stylianou, Counselman-Carpenter, & Redcay 2019). As a survivor of domestic violence wrote:

> Every difficulty we experience, and every challenge we overcome, enables us to become more attuned to someone else's suffering and hardship. I have become much more aware of other people's feelings, discomfort, and loneliness. Obviously, I can empathise strongly with other victims and survivors of domestic abuse, but it's not limited to that. I can empathise with people who have found themselves in all types of struggles. I hate to think someone feels alone or left out and do my best to make people around me feel that they belong.

(Pearl Lifestyles with Lisa 2023)

These skills can position the survivor to make positive contributions to domestic violence programs in an organisation; helping the company to define policies around domestic violence and helping future victims to navigate the maze of government regulations, support services and the like that are on offer. More broadly these transferable skills are also relevant to other day-to-day aspects of business including project management, the development of organisational policies around homelessness and other social issues; strategies around the recruitment of new people to the company that reflect the organisation's commitment to addressing domestic violence and helping to manage change within the organisation.

Domestic Violence

Domestic violence can be defined as 'the pattern of abusive, mental, emotional and/ or physical behaviour between two intimate partners in which one partner maintains control over their counterpart' (Showalter 2016, p. 38). Domestic violence is experienced by women and men across all parts of society (Anderson 2005, 2009; Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2024a; Mission Australia n.d.; National Domestic Violence Hotline n.d.a; Walby et al., 2017). It is a practice, which can become so engrained in our society that it can become difficult to discern what is normal and what is not. Across society, domestic violence survivors are characterised by a diverse range of experiences relating to interactions with authorities; the intrusion of the perpetrator into all aspects of their financial and digital life; and the process of helping their children through the trauma of witnessing domestic violence within the home. While societal discussions of domestic violence have increased over the last decade and it is now recognised that domestic violence represents a form of emotional and financial, as well as physical, abuse (Keddell & Stanley 2019), many survivors struggle to associate stereotypical understandings of what is and what is not domestic violence with their own experience (Hill 2019).

Domestic violence is an issue that will often affect people across their lifetime, one which will often escalate in severity and frequency during particular periods as was seen during the COVID-19 pandemic (Kourti et al. 2023; United Nations, 2022). People impacted by domestic violence have real fears related to their futures, their physical safety, and that of their children. These issues can be exacerbated by society viewing women who are experiencing domestic violence as deficient mothers as opposed to victims (Keddell & Stanley 2019) and male survivors being ignored because 'men are not victims of abuse' (Mend Project n.d.). People experiencing domestic violence often struggle to be supported by the court system and child protection (Hussein 2023); they often fear failure after leaving the perpetrator and have a fear of being judged for leaving, being homeless and for not having financial security, and of losing friends and family (Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety 2020). All of these concerns can be exacerbated by survivors often struggling to be believed on account of the difficulties in producing evidence beyond their allegation (Deck & Paterson 2020) and entrenched prejudices regarding why people choose to report abuse (Epstein & Goodman 2018). Difficulties for survivors dealing with domestic violence can also be exacerbated by language barriers (Caspersz et al. 2023), the cultural nuances around kinship groups and domestic/family violence in indigenous cultures (Olsen & Lovett 2016; Pio & Moore 2022) and uncertainties regarding whether, in reporting domestic violence, they will be re-enforcing cultural stereotypes (Storer, Rodriguez, & Franklin 2021). Within societal groups such as LGBTIQ+, 60% of people have been found to have experienced domestic or familial violence in their lifetime. These high rates of abuse are caused by specific social factors including the unavailability of appropriate housing for men who have been abused by their partners and the perception in society that female abusers should inherently be believed (Annese 2024).

The consequences of not reporting or addressing domestic violence can be severe for a person's mental and physical health (Lloyd et al. 2017; Su et al. 2021). Domestic violence can lead to the development of a number of secondary mental health impacts including post-traumatic stress disorder (hereafter PTSD) and depression, which can continue long after the domestic violence perpetrator is no-longer able to directly influence the survivor. However, the study of domestic violence in the workplace has to-date tended to focus on identifying an employee who is experiencing domestic violence and helping them to access support services and navigate an immediate crisis situation (Lee 2005; McAdams 2018). Organisations need to recognise that secondary health impacts from domestic violence such as PTSD can impact on a person's ability to function effectively in a work setting in the long term (Lee et al. 2020). Individuals diagnosed with PTSD have an 80 percent chance of having a dual diagnosis with at least one other mental health condition, such as depression or anxiety (American Psychiatric Association 2022). In recent decades there

has been increased scholarly attention afforded to managing instances of PTSD in the armed forces and crisis response agencies (Haugen, Evces, & Weiss 2012; Jones et al. 2013; Motreff et al., 2020). However, in organisational contexts, the existence of PTSD in the workforce often continues to be viewed negatively on account of its potentially disruptive influence on workplace productivity and the often-narrow neoliberalist views of management (see Smith & Ulus, 2020).

The 2023 International Women's Day called for 'gender equity to be part of every society's and business's DNA'; equity being predicated on finding ways 'to provide individuals with what they need to achieve equal outcomes, regardless of their differences' (Greater Manchester Leadership Hive 2023). However, while businesses are publicly acknowledging the challenges posed to their employees by domestic violence (Wood 2024) and the duty of care they owe to their employees under work safety laws (Safe Work Australia 2021), many companies continue to view domestic violence as a sanitised legal, industrial relations, human resources issue rather than as an all pervasive social and cultural one (de Jonge 2018; Weatherall, Gavin, & Thorburn 2021). In the absence of enforceable government policies in the workplace, the provision of support mechanisms is often left up to the discretion of individual employers (MinterEllison, Australia's CEO Challenge, DV Connect, & Queensland Government 2019). Organisations and their HR departments will often say that they are unable to assist, arguing that domestic violence is a family or legal issue (Maurer n.d.). This issue can be exacerbated in male dominated industries such as politics and construction where patriarchal viewpoints (Ortner 2022) often dove-tail with psychosocial hazards including role overload, long hours, tight time pressures and excessive workload (Australian Human Rights Commission 2021; Sun et al. 2022).

Wilcox et al. (2021) have argued that organisations are beginning to explore how human resource, corporate social responsibility and risk management programmes can be implemented to allow domestic violence survivors to feel safe in the workplace. Strategies include: 'formal administrative policies such as special leave provisions or flexible work arrangements; behavioural strategies such as education of managers and co-workers or advocacy for support services and environmental strategies such as additional security or screening of phone calls' (p. 714). Organisations need to demonstrate to survivors that they are working in an environment where people will support them, as well as demonstrating and reinforcing the message that those individuals who engage in misconduct 'will not be protected, rewarded or promoted' (Australian Human Rights Commission 2021, p. 20). In the next section we will consider in more detail what it means for a manager to support a domestic violence survivor.

Existentialism and Domestic Violence

Over recent years existentialism has been applied to the study of domestic violence in a number of ways including research to understand the familial and other psychological thought processes that would motivate a man to beat his wife (Vignansky & Timor 2017) and research to understand the effectiveness of social support services for women who feel isolated and existentially alone due to domestic violence (Arij & Omar 2022). Existentialism represents a 'philosophical belief that says human beings are responsible for creating purpose or meaning in our own lives' (Ethics Centre 2018). Proceeding from the idea that our existence precedes our essence, existentialism was first introduced in the nineteenth century through the writings of Friedrich Nietzsche and Søren Kierkegaard. It was popularised by Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone De Beauvoir and others in the mid-twentieth century as a way of giving people a sense of agency in the context of the horrors of World War 2 and society's need to confront the 'anxiety-provoking givens of death, freedom and meaninglessness' that pervaded the western world (Aho 2020; 2023).

With existentialism representing an understanding of how a person creates their own meaning in their lives and takes responsibility for the consequences of that meaning, we must also acknowledge that

when a person experiences a profound change in their life such as a loss of a loved one, an experience of domestic violence, a terminal illness or a betrayal of their trust, there is the possibility of existential trauma (Davidov & Russo-Netzer 2022; Thompson & Walsh 2010). In such a situation people can have their world view shattered and their meaning in life can be questioned. The questioning of one's existence is of course experienced most acutely by domestic violence survivors (Hampton-Anderson et al. 2022) who can experience an almost total loss of self as their abuser does more than fight them; rather they seek to dominate their victim through 'isolation, pain and fear' (Lecovin & Penfold 1996, p. 40). However, it is not only survivors of domestic violence who are sometimes forced to re-evaluate their sense of self. For example, social workers need to consider what motivates them to support a domestic violence survivor through a period of acute trauma, which Buchbinder (2007) observes is often based in their own personal experiences with pain.

This has relevance in the wider workplace, especially when significant shifts are being made in policies affecting workplace culture, such as those that might involve acknowledging the potential impacts of domestic violence on an employee and his or her capacity to fulfil work responsibilities. When a manager sees an employee experiencing the consequences of domestic violence, he or she needs to consider what an ethical response might be. Crane and Matten (2010) have argued that leaders have an obligation to promote a spirit of cultural change, where a leader's role is to articulate and personify the values and standards that the organisation aspires to and then to inspire and motivate employees to follow their lead. From an existential perspective this involves acknowledging and owning 'up to our freedom, take[ing] full responsibility for our choices, and act[ing] in such a way as to help others realise their freedom' (Aho 2023, para 3, point 5, Ethics). At the time of writing one of the authors of this paper was made aware of an initiative in their university to promote the polished man campaign where men are sponsored to wear nail polish as a sign of a pledge to campaign for the end of the abuse and trauma faced by women and children in society (see https://polishedman.com/). Such an initiative requires the buy-in from across an organisation with people empowered not only to promulgate specific values but also to effect change at the local level through personal action. When the polish pledge was launched at the afore mentioned university, it was a senior member of the university executive group who talked of his own personal experiences with domestic violence and the importance of drawing a line in the sand to protect not only his own children but all future generations from this 'insidious scourge in our community' (Hayes 2023). Here, one can see how the epistemic authority derived from the workplace joined with the epistemic authority that derived from experience of domestic violence.

Organisational policies and procedures around domestic violence typically develop in relation to rational decision-making processes where an understanding of a problem leads to considerations as to its severity, the availability of human and financial resources to support and the future sustainability of the program (Tamagno & Varnadoe 2017). Many global organisations are having to adapt to changing legislative requirements to respond to issues of domestic violence in the workplace (Gavin & Weatherall 2022). The willingness of an organisation to embrace change around how it addresses domestic violence can be driven by economic factors, the necessity of adhering to government workplace laws and a personal motivation to ensure the health of one's employees. In the 2021-2022 financial year it was estimated that domestic violence cost the Australian economy over $9.9 billion, including $609 million in costs related to production from staff turnover and absenteeism (KPMG in Care Corporate 2022).

However, from an existentialist perspective it is also important that those in positions of authority realise their own personal ability to act, based on their epistemic authority. As we see in the polished man initiative, the individual agency of people within the organization can effect change (Agarwal & Cruise Malloy 2000). West (2008, pp. 19-20) proposed the following model of existential decision making as a means of illustrating not only the sequential steps an individual might go through to determine what they believe, but

also providing a framework for accounting for the subjective reality that guides one's decisions in individual circumstances. The stages of the model are as follows (see West 2008, pp. 19-20):

1. Acknowledge and identify my freedom to act.
2. Accept my responsibility.
3. Consider my prior choices, projects, and goals.
4. Consider the pressures and expectations of others.
5. Consider the practical constraints of the situation.
6. Proceed with the choice that reflects my own awareness of freedom, my personal responsibility and is most consistent with the goals and objects that I freely choose.

Central to all discussions of existentialism is a 'willingness to acknowledge and identify one's freedom to act' (West 2008, p. 19) on a given issue. When West (2008) talked in terms of critically assessing one's responsibilities, it was in relation to the idea that if we are to act authentically, we must not hide behind the smoke screen of organisational policies and programs; nor can we cling to the expectation that someone else will step forward and address the issue for us (West 2008). Acting in such an authentic manner is, however, complicated by the pervading influence of traditional practices of behaviour including 'egocentrism, very conditional loyalties … [and] a declining sense of responsibility to others [… and…] a growing tendency to commodify women' (Connell 1998 in Pullen & Rhodes 2018, p. 96). Of course, an individual and the organisation they work for should adhere to their legal obligations. However, a society may also adopt particular forms of cultural activism. One such example in Australia is White Ribbon Australia, which has encouraged men from all walks of life not only to enter into a national dialogue with the aim of ending domestic violence but also to encourage their organisation to consider engaging in White Ribbon's workplace accreditation and training programs (see https://whiteribbon.org.au/get-involved/).

A number of individual businesses and sectors have implemented policies and strategies designed to support domestic violence survivors both within the business and in wider society (Business Council of Australia 2022; Unilever Diversity and Inclusion 2021; Work 180 2020; Zack, 2022). Recent examples of such strategies include Telstra providing 6000 smart phones to people impacted by domestic violence during the COVID-19 pandemic and Aurecon's move to establish universal paid parental leave for men and women in the hope of normalizing societal expectations around women's and men's roles in the home (Work 180 2020). Company strategies to address domestic violence need to be re-assessed in light of changing domestic violence policies (Phillips & Ravishanker 2023).

Lee (2005) has argued that managers need to have the skills to identify warning signs of abuse and to approach the employee in a way that is sensitive and cognisant of the pressures they are under. From an existential perspective, managers need to recognise that how they approach a domestic violence situation will be seen through the lens of our fundamental work and life goals, as there may be no formalised processes or informal guidelines to guide our response. As West (2008, p. 19) has observed, 'my choices are not independent occurrences but relate to my goals at both a relative and fundamental level'. In this context, managers also need to consider how a business initiative aligns with their own goals and values. In recent years there has been a number of business oaths, which have been written to challenge people within an organisation or professional body to reflect on whether they should care about anything beyond their own private interests (e.g., Anderson & Escher 2010; Schweinsberg 2024). Such oaths are also seen in relation to domestic violence, with White Ribbon Australia challenging men to sign-up to the oath; 'I will stand up, speak out and act to prevent men's violence against women. This is my Oath' (Turner 2017).

When business leaders and the organisations they represent respond proactively to address domestic violence they are appropriately lauded by the community at large (Carfreae 2022). However, business leaders should also always be encouraged to reflect on whether their decisions in relation to a particular program

are illustrative of their personal essence, or whether their freedom of choice was curtailed and/or directed by the views of others in their organisation, much as Tajalli and Segal (2019) discussed in a reflection of the creation of a hybrid model of ethical decision making; existentialism presupposes a focus on one's own individual meaning and a recognition that one cannot deny responsibility on the basis that one is simply fulfilling a role.

Recognising Domestic Violence in the Workplace – A Role for Epistemic Authority

People who are affected by domestic violence need not only to escape from their abusers but also to be given an opportunity to thrive; to be empowered to lead the life they want, not the life they have been given (Zahra Foundation 2023). Organisations such as 1800Respect, the Domestic Violence Prevention Centre and White Ribbon Australia provide a range of practical tools and strategies for supporting people who are currently experiencing domestic violence. For managers in the workplace, a number of books have been published, which have addressed issues around how companies might best manage the immediate effects of domestic violence in their workplace (Lee 2005; McAdams 2018). Here, topics include helping people in business to understand what domestic violence is, including the elements of abuse and patterns of behaviour. Attention is also often given to educating businesses as to why domestic violence should matter to them and offering advice as to how to spot the warning signs that a colleague is being abused (McAdams 2018). However, such resources can do little more than provide a starting point. They may extend the knowledge and skills about possible policies and organisational procedures, but they do not address key aspects of organisational learning, that is, how to empower domestic violence survivors to apply their own epistemic authority to become leaders in a workplace setting. There is some evidence that tentative steps are being taken. A web search for 'domestic violence workplace empowerment' reveals a growing interest in society around how to empower domestic violence survivors at work. For example, the National Domestic Violence Hotline notes that:

> Assuring job security is one way for businesses to create a supportive environment. The design of policies that offer flexible work arrangements, such as remote work, flexible hours, or extended leave, acknowledges survivors' challenges and allows them to seek help without fear of losing their jobs. Employers who notice their employees experiencing relationship abuse can empower survivors in the workplace by doing the following:
>
>   - Increasing awareness of domestic violence
>   - Provide domestic violence leave
>   - Ensure a safe working environment
>   - Embrace diversity, inclusion and belonging (DEIB) practices at work
>
> (National Domestic Violence Hotline n.d.b)

These strategies do not, in and of themselves, enable domestic violence survivors to develop transferable skills, and they may not provide opportunities to express the knowledge and skills gained through dealing with domestic violence. However, set against the backdrop of the MeToo movement, which over the last decade has seen women exercising their right to talk about their domestic violence experiences (Rhodes 2022), they may provide a starting point for those survivors of domestic violence whose existential position enables them to make their experiences public. In Australia, prominent anti-domestic violence activists such as Rosie Batty and Grace Tame have used their positions as Australians of the Year in 2015 and 2021 respectively not only to manage their own domestic violence trauma but also to use their experiences, their epistemic authority, to inspire wider dialogue and create positive societal change.

At an organisational level, the empowerment of women is:

> … fundamentally about power – about the power to redefine our possibilities and options and to act on them, the power within that enables people to have the courage to do things they never thought themselves to be capable of, and the power that comes from working alongside others to claim what is rightfully theirs (Kabeer and Cornwall 2008, p. 5 in Asi & Williams 2020, p. 724)

However, domestic violence empowerment in the workplace has principally been seen in relation to the empowerment of organisations to help victims (Widiss 2008) or in relation to the empowerment of domestic violence survivors to navigate the 'addiction, mental-health [issues], homelessness, financial hardship and other serious illnesses' that are often associated with their experiences (Torchlight Foundation n.d., Facilitate). Such work is vital as it can educate society as to the ways in which domestic violence infuses throughout a person's life. These acknowledgements of domestic violence move it from the private realm into the public sphere. Once that move is underway, society is better able to grapple with the question of what and who to believe. Historically, when such cases came to public attention, the tendency has often been for people to believe alleged perpetrators because they are seen as well respected and valued in the community (Women's Aid n.d.). This can, in turn, lead to survivors experiencing epistemic injustice (Fricker 2007; Warman 2023) as a result of other people questioning their 'capacity to engage in epistemic practices such as giving knowledge to others (testifying) or making sense of one's experiences (interpreting)' (Crichton, Carel, & Kidd 2017, p. 65).

In business, managers are often told that they need to be committed; committed to the betterment of the environment, society and to economic responsibility (Stobierski 2021). An important part of being a socially committed organisation is a willingness to grow the capacities of employees and to develop a vision for the organisation that employees can collectively champion; when an organisation is seen as socially responsible, the well-being of employees is often improved (Bocean et al. 2022). Thus, when a manager in an organisation chooses to marginalise a domestic violence survivor or ignore them, he or she is not only attacking the self-worth of the individual, but also not living up to obligations under work-place laws (Safe+Equal n.d.) and certainly not demonstrating a commitment to the betterment of society. Beyond minimising the spread of knowledge around domestic violence, marginalising survivors can also have the effect of robbing the company of the skills including empathy and resilience, which a domestic violence survivor has developed as a result of their trauma, as noted above.

As managers, in most organisations, we respond to domestic violence through either an implicit or explicit set of organisational rules that prescribe what we can or cannot do. Managers must make decisions about how to extend their own epistemic authority, and then how to use that knowledge to effect positive outcomes in the organisation. When a manager is aware that an employee is a domestic violence survivor, they must make an existential decision that can be framed as: Will I 'go with the flow' and marginalise the survivor or can I work with a survivor to give them the epistemic authority to become a leader within the organisation and not simply the recipient of its assistance (Miller 2019). When we acknowledge the epistemic authority of someone who has experienced traumatic situations, we can assist in developing a capacity for resilience and post traumatic growth in all employees. We can define an individual who has experienced post traumatic growth as one who has experienced:

> … positive personal changes as a result of a struggle with a traumatic event. The individual has increased personal strength, improved relationships with others, experiences positive changes in attitudes and appreciation towards life, and sees new possibilities in life. The experience, though negative, has had positive meaning for the person (Bryngeirsdottir & Halldorsdottir 2022)

For domestic violence survivors to be incorporated into the workplace in a way that sees value in their experiences, the skills and views of a survivor needs to be incorporated into the wider organisational

culture. Organisational culture can be defined as 'a set of values, beliefs, assumptions and symbols that is shared by all members and that directs their decisions and organisational behaviours' (Schein 1985 in Cui, Liu, & Mou 2018, p. 2). In the same way that individuals such as Rosie Batty and organisations such as White Ribbon Australia or the MeToo movement have begun to shape societal values on violence against women, the question of how the values of organisational culture and decision-making should be determined has come into sharp focus in recent years. The increased focus in society on diversity in private sector organisations and other social groupings (Ghauri, Mansi, & Pandey 2021; Ozturk & Tatli 2016; Pullen et al. 2019; Rhodes 2017) has focussed attention on how voice and agency can be enabled in workers from minority groups (Brigden 2019). However, while women have collectively seen their representation in leadership roles increase in recent years (McKinsey and Company 2021) some groups of women remain at a disadvantage. Wingfield (2020) has noted that women of colour are often affected by 'stifled leadership opportunities, the ongoing persistence of specific forms of sexual harassment, and subtle but pervasive doubts about competence, intelligence, and skill that are unrelated to actual performance'. Medina (2011) has argued in relation to race-based injustices in the judicial system that when we imbue one person or group with epistemic authority, we are implicitly calling into question the credibility of others. Therefore, organisations need to recognise how the traditional patriarchal discourse of employers and employees can privilege masculine narratives around violence and strength (Bettman 2009) and marginalise female and minority voices, and argument made over at least the past fifty years in Australia.

Returning to the workplace experiences of survivors of domestic violence, their experiences can be harnessed to greater innovative ends, if they are willing to share them. This can have important ramifications for how a business manages future instances of domestic violence against its employees. For example, people who have experienced domestic violence often report greater introspection, self-awareness and are more likely to help others in the same situation (Cobb et al. 2006) through advocacy and social action (Flasch et al. 2020). This can make them ideal candidates not only to take on strategic roles assisting other domestic violence survivors, but also to take on other leadership roles in the organisation. While it is important to acknowledge that the majority of people who experience trauma will not seek to translate their trauma into any type of advocacy or outreach, preferring to recover in private (Herman 2015), the art of being a good leader is not to solve all of society's problems. Rather, a leader's job is to help other 'people who need to adapt or find ways to solve the problems themselves (Nixon & Sinclair 2017, p. 171). For organisations wishing to draw on insights from domestic violence survivors, managers will need to recognise the limitations to their own epistemic authority and a willingness to draw on the expertise of others (Mazzocchi 2021 in Schweinsberg 2022).

Conclusion

When society encounters domestic violence survivors our response tends to fall into four categories - silence, blame, deference, and agency (Govier 2015). In this paper we have sought to argue that managers in organisations can take an existential position, to go beyond organisational procedures and policies in their interactions with survivors of domestic violence. They can avoid marginalising domestic violence survivors (forcing them to be silent) or assuming they are suffering on the basis of their own actions and thus worthy of blame or pity. Domestic violence survivors have access to a range of transferable skills and insights that equip them to be business leaders in a socially committed organisation. How a survivor wishes to bring their experiences to work is a matter of their own existential position, a matter of personal choice. Not all domestic violence survivors will wish to discuss their experiences openly in a work setting given the potential for negativity from employers, unions and coworkers (MacGregor et al. 2016; McLindon, Humphreys, & Hegarty 2021) or out of fear of reprisals from their perpetrators (Edwards & Sylaska 2014). However, for those who do wish to take a more active role, managers may be able to empower survivors to live the life they want and not be limited by the circumstances they have experienced.

However, these changes in society and in organisations will not happen overnight, nor will they occur without concerted efforts to change the knowledge and perceptions of future thought leaders. Knowledge change needs to be cultivated initially in the education sector. So often in different business sectors we are told that the role of the tertiary education sector is to conduct research with the aim of improving society's situation, whilst also equipping students with the technical skills to become future business leaders. Discussions of the possibilities of managers taking an existential stand on societal issues, alongside their responsibilities for implementing organisational policies, has been largely absent from undergraduate and post-graduate business curriculums, and issues of domestic violence have mostly been seen as personal and private, rather than issues affecting civil society. Understanding why this might be the case should be a core focus of future research.

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