

Living with the Dominator

A book about
The Freedom Programme



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Illustrated by Jackie Fleming

Living with the Dominator
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AN INTRODUCTION

I have decided to write this book for all the people who for, whatever reason, have not been able to attend a Freedom Programme, or the training, but have asked for more information about it. It is, basically, a summary of the information which used to be given in the handouts and some that I give verbally. The book is not to be used to facilitate the Freedom Programme, but to provide information to individual readers.

The other aspect of the programme that I cannot give you is the camaraderie, friendship and fun that we get from attending a programme with a group of other people. So, if you are a woman and it is possible for you to do so, please be inspired by this book to seek out a Freedom Programme near you. They are all free and run by wonderful, welcoming women at venues across the U.K. A list of venues is updated regularly on my website. Now in 2024 many programmes are available via Zoom.

Many of us women find the Zoom programmes more helpful than those which are provided face-to-face. There are good reasons for this. One is that we can be ordered to attend by Social Workers as part of a child protection plan. It is so much easier for us to stay in the comfort of our own homes and use our mobile phones to join a programme. Prior to the Zoom phenomenon, some of us had to take two buses across town after taking the children to school, only to find that the programme had been cancelled.

Another advantage is that we can attend, even if we are still with the abuser. For example, we can join from the supermarket, hairdresser or our place of work. If we have an occupation such as a social worker, health visitor, or a judge we may not want to take the risk of meeting

anyone who knows us by attending a face-to-face programme. So, we can choose a programme which comes from Dubai, or Australia.

If you are a man who would like to change your behaviour, you too are most welcome to attend a programme on Zoom You can check the list of programme providers in the search section on my website. The men's programmes that I endorse are also run in a welcoming, friendly atmosphere and the men who have graduated say they enjoyed the experience.

I will begin by offering a short history of the programme. Between 1986 and 1996 I worked as a probation officer. During that time I worked with hundreds of violent men. For some of that time I was a parole officer. Some of these men had committed murder and were released into the community under a provision known then as 'Life Licence'. Most of the murderers I met were men who had killed their female partners or former partners. I also acted as chairwoman to the management committee of the local women's refuge and worked in the refuge itself during that decade.

During those years I believed I had some understanding about domestic violence. I now know how wrong I was! In 1996 I went to work on the probation service programme for male perpetrators of violence against women. For two years I sat with groups of men who had assaulted, raped and even killed women. I listened to these men and I began to realise several things. To my horror, I recognised that I had unwittingly colluded with every abusive man I had ever met.

I also began to understand that no one else who worked in my field seemed to have the information that I was getting from working with these men. The third thing I learned was that there is a very common misapprehension that a woman who has been abused has some understanding of what has happened to her. This is simply not true.

When a woman is being subjected to abuse she feels that she is in the middle of a very confusing mess and that it must be somehow her fault.

These revelations had a profound effect on me. It was like being possessed! I was a fifty-year-old supposedly experienced Probation Officer. I now realised that I had been living in a world of illusion. I became determined to get this information to other professionals and, most of all, to all the women who are experiencing domestic abuse.

I ran my first Freedom Programme for women in 1999. It was, basically, a copy of the perpetrators' programme. I ran it for women who were on probation for committing offences that I could then see were a result of being subjected to abuse. I needed crèche facilities, so I teamed up with a social services family centre and opened the programmes to any woman who wished to attend.

In 2002 I left the Probation Service to become a self-employed trainer. When I left, I gave a sigh of relief at not having to work with abusive men any more. Wrong! Within weeks I received a request from a district judge to provide a Freedom Programme for men. Soon I was back in the business of working with men.

I am updating this book in 2024 and the men's programmes have been a great success. From reports from their partners or former partners I judge that about sixty percent of the men who complete the programmes have improved their behaviour. The ideal situation is that the woman attends the Freedom Programme for women while the man is on the men's programme. If social services refer a man I will not accept him unless his partner has completed the Freedom Programme for women. I then invite her to observe the men's programme. This gives the women the knowledge they need to protect themselves and their children even if he does not change his behaviour. In the last twenty two years, several couples who have completed the programme have been reunited with their children.

During the last few years, I have moved away from the concept of calling the men who attend my programmes 'perpetrators'. Instead, I now present information to any man who is interested. I state that they are aimed at men who want to improve their behaviour.

Initially, I ran the men's programmes over twelve weeks. Some men did not complete the whole programme. This was often due to work commitments. For years we then ran them over two days but now once more, via Zoom they last for twelve weeks. The men's programmes are all free, but the men who join need to purchase the online Freedom Programme, complete the written work and present it to the facilitators on the Zoom sessions.

We never provide reports or certificates of completion. If we did the men could use them to persuade their victims to take them back or as ammunition in the family courts.

All the information in this book comes from the thousands of men and women with whom I have worked since 1996.

Some of the statistics quoted in this book date from before its initial publication in 2008. Sadly, since then there has been little or no change. A woman is still murdered in the UK every three days and most women are murdered when trying to leave a violent relationship.

3.

THE BULLY

In Britain, a woman is killed by a violent partner every three days. (ONS 2021)



Examples of Tactics Used by the Bully to Intimidate

The **Bully** is excellent at using body language to intimidate. He uses every inch of his body to achieve this. Starting from the head down, he will glare or stare. He can make himself red in the face. He may grind or grit his teeth. He may splutter and foam at the mouth. He has a particularly menacing smile in that he smiles with his mouth and glares with his eyes. He also sneers.

He breathes heavily. He huffs and puffs. He uses a particular tone of voice. This could be flat and cold, a menacing whisper, or he could shout. He can sulk and terrify us because we do not know what he is thinking. He may whistle or hum.

He invades our personal space to intimidate us. He can lean over us or approach from behind. He may come close to our face and rant or glare. He folds his arms, swings or taps his foot, drums his fingers or cracks his knuckles. He clenches his fists and fires questions at us without giving a chance to answer.

As if that is not enough, he kicks the walls or furniture and selectively smashes things. These things are usually our prized personal possessions. He may sit in an aggressive manner, often thrusting his crotch, and can puff himself up to make himself look larger. He uses secret gestures, which only we will recognise as a threat because of our past experiences with him. For example, he may use facial tics and certain words, which we know to be a threat. He often sends the children to bed (a clear warning of trouble to come).

He paces up and down. He bangs doors and slams things down on surfaces. He points. He makes sudden gestures and looks as though he is going to hit us, but stops just before making contact.

He drives too fast when we and the children are passengers. He cleans weapons, blocks exits and hurts pets. He goes out without saying when he will return or where he is going. We are then left in fear, not knowing how he will behave when he returns.

These tactics can also be used in same-sex relationships. Therefore the **Dominator** can be an abusive gay woman or an abusive gay man. It is important to emphasise that the **Bully** is making the effort to use a sophisticated array of tactics. He is thinking clearly and he is completely in control of his emotions. **He is not, therefore, angry.**

What does the Bully believe which allows him to behave in this way?

It is worth reminding ourselves that the **Bully** sees his beliefs as facts of life. He has never questioned these beliefs. He believes that all the behaviours we have identified are not abusive but normal. He *knows* that it is OK to bully to get his own way. He *knows* that this behaviour is manly and that real men are tough. He *knows* that men who don't bully are either gay or wimps. The **Bully** also believes that bullying works.

He *knows* that we are chattels and are owned by men. He *knows* that women like to be treated like this and need to be kept in order. He *knows* women are like pets and need controlling and protecting. He believes that women and dogs need to be trained. Our **Bully** *knows* women are inferior and men are superior in every way. If questioned about this belief, he will usually say that this is because men are physically stronger.

This is an interesting example of confused reasoning. If he was right, and men are superior to women because they are physically stronger, then he must believe all men are superior to all women because they are indeed stronger. However, if he believes this, then he must also believe that all physically strong creatures are superior to all physically less strong creatures. If that were true, then the most superior creature in the world would be an elephant or a whale. These creatures would rule the world. This is patently not the case. **Our Bully** is mixing up or conflating two different concepts. Physical strength is not the same thing as superiority.

The Bully *knows* that violence is acceptable if you use any excuse. This means that violence is acceptable if someone does something you do not like. I have lost count of the times I have heard groups of abusive men say it would be OK to kill your wife if you found her in bed with someone else. I often remind them that, in the UK, it is legal to have an affair or leave your partner. It is not legal to murder your female partner.

Where does our Bully get his beliefs from and how are they reinforced by the society he happens to live in?

Where shall we start? How about his childhood? **Our Bully** may have learned by example. He may have seen his father bullying his mother, his brothers bullying his sisters. He may also have copied his father by having tantrums to get his own way. This tactic may have been successful. Women can learn early not to challenge and to opt for a 'quiet life'. This would have reinforced the belief that bullying works. However, this is not always the case. Many abusive men have non-abusive fathers. Many non-abusive men have had very violent fathers. Beliefs can come from many other sources outside the family.

The **Bully** himself may have been bullied at school and learned from that experience at an early or late age that bullying is effective

The **Bully** may be a football fan. In a World Cup game several years ago one player head-butted another. The next day, the media was full of the question: "What did the other player do to cause this assault?" This implication, that the victim was to blame, strongly reinforces the Bully's belief that women make men hit them.

I WILL NOT TOLERATE
BULLYING IN MY
SCHOOL DO YOU
UNDERSTAND BOY?
I SAID . . .

DO..
YOU..
UNDER..
STAND..?



The beliefs of the Bully may be reinforced by societal norms such as. 'The rule of thumb'. This phrase is said to come from a time when it was acceptable in common law for a man to beat his wife with a stick, if it was no thicker than his thumb. Years ago I was listening to 'Gardeners Question Time' and I heard this quoted:

***"A wife, a dog and a walnut tree,
the more you beat them the better they be!"***

As I stated at the beginning of this chapter, in Britain a violent partner kills a woman every three days (ONS 2021).

The depressing thing for me is that, since I started the Freedom Programme in 1999, those statistics have not changed. Historically, most men who kill their female partners have been convicted of manslaughter instead of murder and, consequently, receive very short sentences. Abusive men have been receiving the message that it is easier to kill your wife than to divorce her, and you will probably get to keep the house.

Until recently the marriage ceremony instructed us to 'love, honour and obey'. Women are 'given away' to their husbands by their fathers.

There are other cultural acceptances of bullying and violence. For example, culture and practice in the armed forces imply that it is desirable to use bullying as an acceptable way to train soldiers. I was listening to a radio programme about army conscription. A man recounted that he was conscripted when he was just eighteen and had left home for the first time. He spent the night in his billet and in the morning he laid his polished kit out on his bed for inspection. The sergeant looked at it, shouted abuse at him and then threw it all out of the window. That is an example of the use of intimidation, which is designed to break the spirit of the recruit so the subject will obey orders. **Our Bully** uses it to achieve the same effect on his female partner.

Many of us enjoy action movies where men use violence to get their own way and are treated like heroes because they do. There have been several soap operas where an abusive male character has been using all the tactics of the Dominator to control his female partner. The men on my programmes tell me that when they watched such dramas they saw the depiction of this man as an example of how a 'real man' should treat women.

Sports, such as boxing and wrestling, give credence to violent behaviour. It is also legal in Britain to use violence against our own children. We smack them. When he was very small, **our Bully** may have learned the lesson that it is acceptable to use violence when someone does something another person, in this case an adult, disliked. He may have been smacked for being 'naughty'.

Some popular songs glorify violence to women. For example, songs with titles like 'Slap the Bitch'. There are other songs with more insidious messages. 'Delilah' tells of a man who saw himself as driven to kill his female partner because she was having an affair. The tone of the song is full of self-pity and he absolutely blames the victim. I understand that this song is the unofficial anthem of the Welsh rugby team and is sung with feeling by thousands of supporters on a regular basis. There is a very popular computer game where participants shoot prostitutes.

The **Bully's** belief that women are inferior is supported by those religious institutions, which insist that women cannot act as priests. The message is that we are not good enough. Even today we can be paid less than men, which further reinforces this belief.

The behaviour of our Government reinforces the beliefs of the Bully every time MPs debate in the House of Commons. They shout, jeer and interrupt each other. Political commentators describe such encounters as giving the opponent a 'bloody nose'. This is a description more suited to a prize-fight. Commentators describe football, rugby and cricket matches in terms which could be used to describe a military battle. I heard the term 'dug out' used about the area where football managers watch the game.

Many presenters of current affairs and news programmes browbeat and interrupt interviewees. Viewers of so called 'reality television' watch avidly as contestants bully and abuse each other. This gives a powerful message that abusive behaviour is not only normal but also desirable and entertaining. Social media depicts constant 'pile ons' directed towards any persons with whom these Bullies disagree.

Which of the beliefs of the Bully do many women share?

Many of us have identified that, before we attended the programme we 'craved' a man who would behave abusively and avoided men who did not. We felt that Mr. Right was dull because he was 'too nice'. Before completing the programme we saw the Bully as a strong man who can take charge. Many of us have recognised that we assumed that men are superior because they are physically stronger. We, like the Bully, were confusing physical strength with superiority. We have also recognised that we, too, believe that bullying works.

*one day you'll wake up and
see him as he really is - where you
saw an Adonis you'll see a selfish child,
where you saw a prince you'll see a FROG...*



For centuries, women have been used as sexual currency. We have provided sex and services in exchange for shelter and food. Now in a very small part of the world, a few women have the right to independence and paid work. However, centuries of conditioning are still with us, whether we are aware of it or not. Many of us still expect to be kept by men and, indeed, feel that to be single and independent is a mark of failure. We also feel that we need 'looking after'. There is a very fine line between 'protecting' and 'controlling'.

The Fairy Story

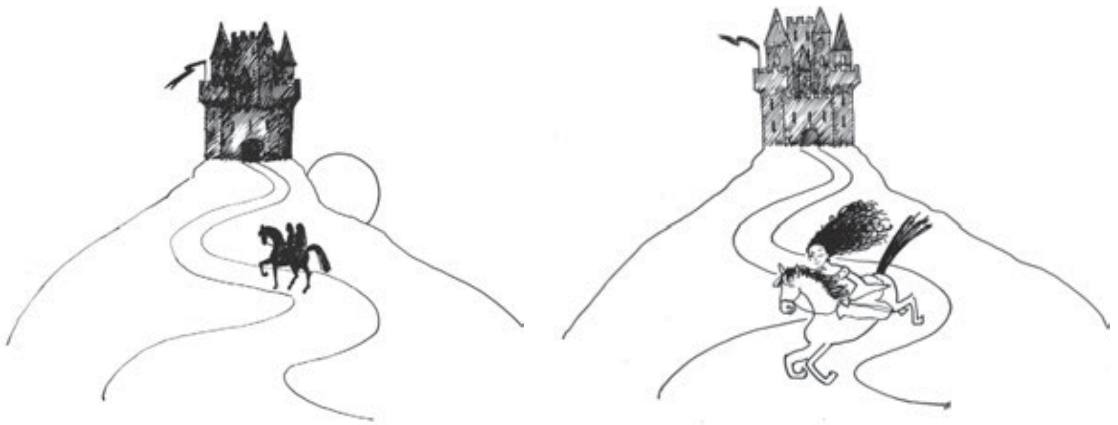
Once upon a time, there was an unmarried princess who ruled her land wisely and well. She made the laws, collected the taxes and was loved by all her subjects.

One day, when she was sitting by her lake, a frog hopped out of the water. "Hello Princess," said the frog. "I am not really a frog at all, he continued. I am, in fact, a handsome prince. A wicked witch turned me into a frog. However, if you kiss me, I will regain my handsome human form. I will then marry you.

You can have my children and care for them. I would like about eight. You can wash my clothes and cook my meals. You can keep the palace clean and tidy. I will take over as ruler and enforce the laws. I will be King. I will collect the taxes and keep all the money. I will, of course, give you a generous allowance for household expenses."

Later that night, when the princess was dining on sautéed frogs' legs in a tarragon, cream and brandy sauce, she said to herself: "I don't fucking think so!"

There is a serious point to this story. Why do so many of us 'jump at' the frog's offer?



How are women affected by the tactics used by the Bully?

When we live with a Bully we are walking on eggshells. We can never relax properly, as we are always awaiting the next outburst. We constantly try to second-guess him and to avoid antagonising him. We dare not disagree and we cannot express opinions. We dare not leave and we lose our confidence and become timid.

When we walk down the street, we look at the ground. We are afraid to go to sleep. We are completely controlled.

We may become bullies ourselves and victimise other women or our children. Our bully can order us to attack other women. Women have told me that they have got involved with even worse bullies to protect them from the last one. We defer to men, and apologise all the time to everyone for everything.

We may feel brave when using alcohol or drugs, so become dependent. We are afraid to show affection to the children in case he takes it out on them. We believe he is angry so we try to placate him. As I stated earlier, this is not the case. What reason would he have to be angry?

THE NON-ABUSIVE COUNTERPART TO THE BULLY IS THE FRIEND. HE CAN BE AN EXAMPLE TO US ALL

THE FRIEND



This is how the Friend behaves

He smiles with his mouth and with his eyes. His eyes are warm and friendly and this is because he is thinking warm and friendly thoughts about us. He is cheerful and pleasant and has a sense of humour. His posture is relaxed and open. His voice is calm and pleasant.

He talks to us and to the children and, even more importantly, he listens. He will engage in discussion and reasoned argument. If he disagrees he will accept our right to hold a different opinion and will not have to win every argument.

He is a companion in that he enjoys shared outings or treats. He is consistent in that he remains more or less the same person.

The same person goes out in the morning and comes back in the evening. When he comes into the house he calls out: "Hello. I'm home! How are you?" This contrasts with the Bully who walks in, kicks the door shut, ignores everybody and turns on the TV.

The Friend likes women and enjoys our company. He believes we are equal and worthy of respect. He accepts that he can be wrong and can admit it. He dislikes bullies and believes no-one has the right to control another adult human being.



Living with the Dominator

A book about
The Freedom Programme

This book explains violent and abusive behaviour and places it in a social context. It can help readers of any age and sexual orientation to change their own behaviour and to recognise when they are being controlled.



The Dominator

Reader Reviews

*"Thank you for the book.
The warning signs have helped me
not make the same mistake again"*

*"Pat Craven seems to know
my husband!"*

*"I can honestly say that without
reading that book (9 times no less) I
don't think that I would be here today
relaxed in my own home with my
children that I love so much"*



The Friend

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