

Breakthrough – Building Awesome Matua Study 1 Evaluation: Pre- and Post-course Surveys

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BACKGROUND

The first part of the evaluation process for Breakthrough was the creation of a theory of change model which was completed in March of 2018 and can be found here: [Breakthrough Theory of Change](#). The theory of change helped guide both the development of the Building Awesome Matua curriculum as well as guide the evaluation planning by identifying the assumptions, change process, and short- and long-term outcomes that participants are hypothesized to experience. Two studies were planned, but due to the lengthy delay of finding the community partners to start implementing the program and facilitator training, the evaluation work was substantially delayed. The first study, and the focus of this report, is an outcome evaluation with a mixed-methods questionnaire completed by participants prior to and after completing the Building Awesome Matua course (pre-/post-course design). The goal is to assess participants on the same measures at both time points and then estimate change in the outcomes from pre- to post-course. More specifically, this study assessed change across six outcomes identified in the theory of change: Māori cultural identification, the quality of whānau relationships, parenting confidence, anger reactivity, need for control, and parental mentalizing (i.e., a parent's effort to try and understand the mental states and unique perspectives of their child).

The second study was a formative evaluation with a qualitative methodology and was led by a Child and Family Psychology Master's student at the University of Canterbury and supervised by the current author. This project involved interviewing several Building Awesome Matua facilitators about their training, facilitation experiences, and perceptions about suitability and effectiveness of Building Awesome Matua. Data collection for Study 2 was completed, the results have been analysed, and the thesis submitted for examination. Unfortunately, due to the disruptions of the Coronavirus pandemic the public report for the facilitator study will be delayed and will be published in a separate summary.

METHODS & PARTICIPANTS

As mentioned above, Study 1 employed a pre-/post-course mixed-methods questionnaire design assessing six of the outcomes identified in the theory of change and general participant satisfaction with the course, the information presented, and the materials. The questionnaires were designed so that participants respond to a small selection of quantitative scale items (all scale items were scored from 1 to 5), followed by one or two open-response qualitative questions. Here are links to both questionnaires: [Pre-course](#) and [Post-course](#). The scale items for an individual measure were averaged together to retain the 5 point scale. For example, there were 4 items that assessed anger reactivity, each scored on a 5 point scale. These items were averaged together so that the minimum possible score is 1 and the maximum possible score is 5.

Programme Participation

See Table 1 below for the statistics of the community partners that are delivering Breakthrough and the demographic characteristics of the participants to December 2019. Table 1 shows that there are more community partners delivering Breakthrough in the North Island than the South Island and more community partners outside of Salvation Army centres. However, it should be noted that all

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participants in this report were from the North Island. No data was received from any community partners in the South Island.

Table 1 also shows that while there was a diverse age range of men (17-58 years), the mean age of participants was in the mid-thirties (the median was 35 years). The most frequently reported ethnicity was Māori, followed by Pākehā, men from the Pacific Islands, and a few from other ethnicities. It should also be noted that while there were a high percentage of Māori men compared to men from other ethnic groups, both Māori and Pacific participants were more likely to not complete the post-course surveys compared to Pākehā (attrition: Māori = 45%; Pacific = 50%; Pākehā = 18%). However, it is not known whether this also reflects a failure to complete the course or just the second survey. Finally, there was also considerable diversity among the men in terms of their parenting roles and partner relationships, with just under a third in committed stable relationships, and just over a third with their children full-time. Finally, the discrepancies in the number of men who have participated in Building Awesome Matua ($n = 160$) compared to those who completed the pre-course survey ($n = 65$) and the post-course survey ($n = 36$) can only be partly explained by the lack of information on those participants who participated within the prison ($n = 50$). Thus, it seems that there is a significant percentage of participants for whom we have no information.

Table 1: Breakthrough participation statistics to December 2019

Community Partners & Facilitator Training		Participant Demographics (Pre-course survey $N = 65$)	
Salvation Army centres		Age (range = 17 – 58)	$M = 34.7$
• North Island	3	Geographic regions:	
• South Island	1	• Auckland	52.3%
		• Gisborne	38.5%
Additional community partners		• Other North Island	9.2%
• North Island	3	Ethnicity	
• South Island	3	• Māori	48%
		• Pacific Islands	20%
Prisons	1	• European	28%
		• Other	4%
		Whānau characteristics	
Total number of facilitators trained	40	Partnership:	
		• De facto/Married	32%
		• Separated	29%
		• Single	28%
Total number of courses completed or in progress	18	Child caregiving:	
		• None	29%
		• Part-time	32%
		• Full-time	38%
Estimated total number of participants	160		

RESULTS: Quantitative Measures

Average level change. Table 2 below shows the results of changes in the mean (average) scores across the six outcome variables across all participants. Positive mean difference scores indicate that participants' scores after the course were higher than their scores before the course, while negative mean difference scores indicate the opposite (higher pre-course compared to post-course). Thus, at the average level, the change in participants scores across all the outcomes were in the expected direction (i.e., participants showing positive changes in their lives). Furthermore, these results were statistically significant across each of the measures except for one (need for control), which was borderline. In addition, the effect sizes (the magnitude of change) ranged from small (need for control, anger reactivity, whānau relationships) to medium (parenting confidence) to large (Māori cultural identification). Thus, it seems on average, there is evidence for positive change as self-reported by the participants across these six outcomes.

Table 2. Pre-/post-course self-reported change across six outcomes measures identified from Breakthrough theory of change.

Outcome (# of items)	Mean Diff	Cohen's <i>d</i> ; <i>p</i>
Māori cultural identification (4x)	0.58	1.07; .001
Whānau relationships (7x)	0.30	0.37; .02
Parenting confidence (6x)	0.56	0.67; <.001
Anger reactivity (4x)	-0.30	0.38; .02
Need for control (5x)	-0.22	0.29; .07
Mentalizing (9x)	0.22	0.42; .01

NOTE: Sample size ranges from $n = 17$ (Māori cultural identification) to $n = 37$ (Anger, Control, Mentalizing)

An important consideration is whether other variables might also have a relationship with these outcomes, especially sociodemographic factors, and if these other variables moderate the effect of change over time. To examine this possibility, we tested if continuous variables, such as age and number of children were correlated with any of the pre-course variables, but none were. For categorical variables such as ethnicity, caregiving status, and participants who are subject to a court order, these were entered into the analyses as between subject factors. For example, the analysis with ethnicity examined the possibility that because the course is based on a Māori kaupapa, perhaps Māori participants show a greater degree of change than Pākehā participants. However, none of the analyses with ethnicity and caregiving status were significant. There was only one significant effect with the categorical variables. Participants who were the subject of a court order showed less change compared to those without a court order and this was statistically significant for the analysis with mentalizing (see Figure 1 below). To summarize, the results in Table 2 above show that when participants' scores are averaged, the sample as a whole displays significant change across almost all of the variables, and in general this was not moderated by demographic characteristics of participants (apart from the one reported above).

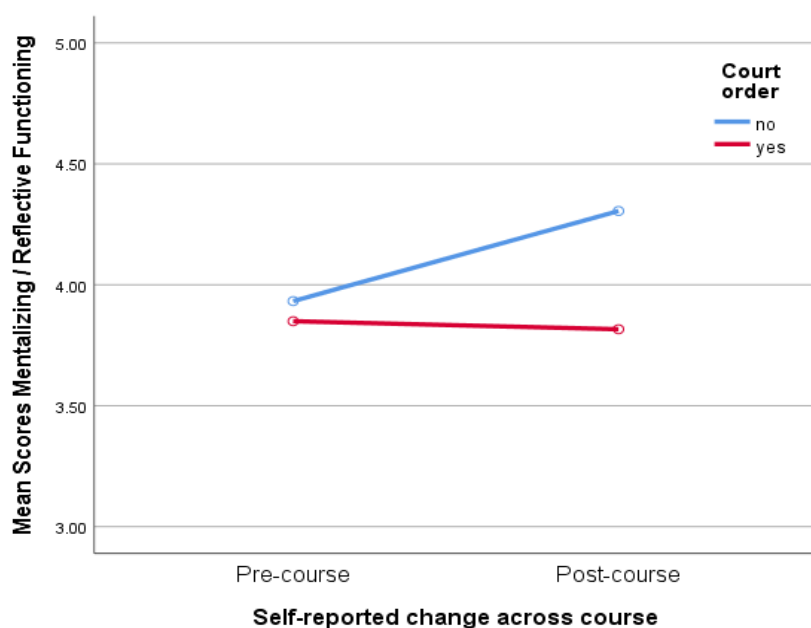


Figure 1: Court order moderating the effect of change over time for Mentalizing

Individual differences in change. Apart from examining change across the sample at the average level (i.e., mean scores), it is also possible to examine change at the individual level that attempts to overcome some of the limitations with creating averages across participants. An individual analysis estimates the number of participants that showed a significant degree of change while accounting for measurement error as estimated by the internal reliability of the measures. These types of analyses can be displayed in scatterplot graphs where each person's pre-course measure is compared with their post-course measure (two examples are provided below in Figure 2 and Figure 3). The pre-course measure is along the horizontal (X) axis, while the post-course measure is along the vertical (Y) axis. If a participant has the same exact score at both times, their score would fall along the diagonal line running through the middle of the graph (called a line of no-change). Those scores below the diagonal indicate higher scores before the course on that measure, while those scores above the diagonal indicate higher scores after the course on that measure.

Figure 2 below displays the change in participants' scores from pre- to post-course for the measure of mentalizing. The numbers represent the participants' case number at the time of analysis. The blue vertical and horizontal lines represent the mean scores at pre- and post-course. In keeping with the results of the mean comparisons reported above, Figure 2 shows how the majority of participants' points on the graph are above the solid diagonal line (line of no-change). The dashed lines on either side represent the reliable change index. Points outside of the reliable change index (either above or below) suggest change was great enough to be outside of measurement error. Points on the graph between the line of no-change and the reliable change index (RCI), suggest that change was not substantial enough to fully discount measurement error. Thus, out of all the participants in this analysis, only four showed substantial positive change above the RCI, and one participant showed a substantial decrease. Those participants highlighted in green are those for whom there was the greatest positive change in mentalizing, and those participants highlighted in red are those who decreased rather significantly in mentalizing.

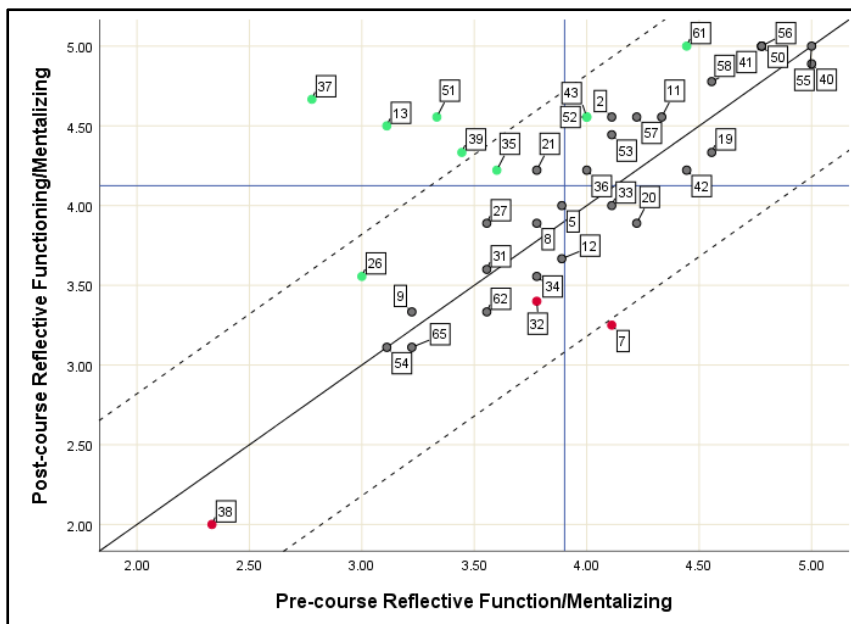


Figure 2. Brinley scatterplot of change in mentalizing from pre- to post-course.

Figure 3 below shows the same analysis for the measure of parenting confidence. The scatterplot shows a higher number of participants with change scores above the RCI (dotted line) compared to the scatterplot for in Figure 1 for mentalizing. This supports the findings for the analysis of mean differences reported above in Table 2, where parenting confidence had a larger effect size than mentalizing. Furthermore, in this analysis, no participants' showed decreases in parenting confidence that were below the RCI. Nevertheless, it would be appropriate to examine more carefully the data from the three participants' identified in red to see if there was a throughout their data that suggested poorer change over time and if the qualitative data revealed any clues as to why.

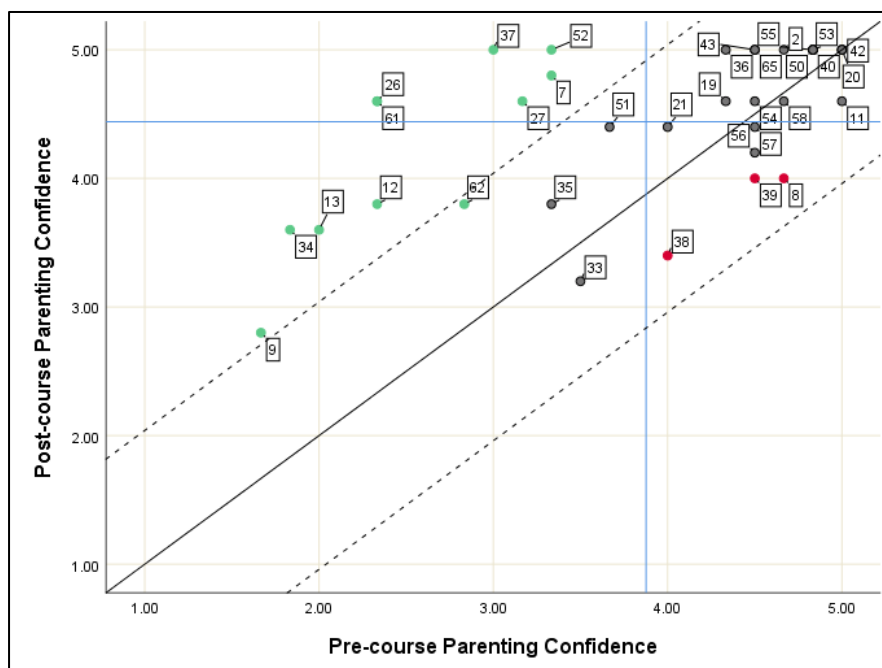


Figure 3. Brinley scatterplot of change in parenting confidence from pre- to post-course.

These analyses were repeated across five of the six variables in Table 2 (it was not possible to do this analysis with Māori identification because the reliability was rather poor). Even though many participants did report positive changes at some level, the results showed that across individual measures, very few participants showed improvement beyond the reliable change index (i.e., greater than change accounted by measurement error), ranging from only 3 to 11 participants for each measure. For example, for whānau relationships over 50% of the sample reported a positive change, but only 3 participants reported a substantial change beyond the reliable change index. There are two reasons for this rather modest result. One is that these tests of individual differences in light of measurement error are highly conservative. Second, because the measures we used were small and customized, our potential for measurement error was higher (i.e., lower reliability). Thus, the boundaries for the reliable change index for each variable was quite large.

To explore how change at the individual level was associated with other sociodemographic factors, I created a variable that summed the frequency that participants reported reliable change across four variables (anger reactivity, parenting confidence, whānau relationships, and mentalizing). Fifteen participants reported reliable positive change (e.g., less anger, increased parenting confidence) across one or more measures. Four participants had a mix of positive change and negative change. Fourteen participants did not show either positive or negative change beyond the reliable change index, and nine participants showed a reliable negative change (e.g., increased anger, less parenting confidence) across one or more measures.

I then examined if there was a difference between the fifteen participants who showed positive reliable change compared to the twenty-three who showed no reliable change or negative change across a number of variables. Participants who reported a positive reliable change across one or more variables were slightly more likely to be Māori (40% versus 32%), were more likely to have their children full-time (60% versus 32%), were less likely to be under a court order (27% versus 41%), and less likely to have participated in a previous violence intervention programme (33% versus 50%). However, the biggest difference was found in the qualitative data. Men who showed reliable positive change were much more likely to be transparent about their need to address anger/temper issues, violence, or emotional regulation problems (73% versus 36%) in their qualitative data. However, there was no difference in the qualitative responses of the perceived benefit of Building Awesome Matua between those who showed positive reliable change compared to those who showed no change or negative reliable change.

Overall course satisfaction. The final quantitative data that was collected was only from the post-course questionnaire and only included rather standard customer satisfaction responses. There were 7 questions that asked participants their general perceptions of the course (e.g., *Overall, I was very satisfied with this course. I believe this course has made a big difference in my life. Since taking this course, I think about how I am parenting more.*), and 7 questions that asked participants about the relevance and application of course information in general (e.g., *The course information was interesting and informative.*) or more specifically about the course manual (e.g., *The course manual was interesting to read and easy to understand.*). The vast majority of the participants agreed with each of these statements (all average scores were above 4.50), with 64% to 94% selecting the highest scale point. Thus, the participants that submitted post-course evaluation forms seemed very happy with the course, felt it made a significant impact on their perspective and approach to fatherhood and parenting, and felt the course curriculum was informative and relevant. However, with such a small percentage of the overall participants returning these surveys it is concerning that these responses represent those participants who really like the course, and we are not hearing from those who are ambivalent or dissatisfied.

RESULTS. Qualitative Measures

As mentioned above in the Methods section, the questionnaires were designed so that the open-response qualitative questions supplemented the scale items, and the original plan was to also analyse and report on the data in that way, with the qualitative measures integrated with the quantitative measures. However, many participants only wrote very short responses to the qualitative questions (frequently only a few words), and for each question several participants failed to answer the question, or the responses were unrelated to what the question was asking. Therefore, the results to the open-response qualitative measures are reported below, separately from the quantitative scale items.

A. Ethnicity & Culture

Pre-course survey:

1. *“What role does your ethnicity and culture play in your everyday life?”*
2. *“How do the members of your family/whānau relate to their ethnicity and culture?”*

Unfortunately, the responses to these two questions at the pre-course survey were so poorly completed that it was possible to code and analyse them together. The most common response to these questions was that culture and ethnicity played no part in participants’ lives ($n = 18$). While this was true for almost all participants’ who identified as European New Zealand / Pākehā, it was also true among men who identified as Māori or from Pacific cultures. The next most common response was a very generic answer with only one or two words, or a short phrase, that suggested anything from a minimal degree of cultural influence (e.g., “Sharing if others need help”; “They like the food”) to a large degree of influence (e.g., “Big role”; [Whānau are] “staunch to the bone”). Only five participants (4 Māori, 1 from the Pacific Islands), shared rather specific ways that culture was strongly important to them and/or their families. Participants shared about the importance of family history, traditions, living on ancestral land, and employment with the iwi. Quotes from these participants are not provided to protect their privacy.

Post-course survey:

1. *In what ways has Building Awesome Matua helped you relate to your culture?*

The post-course responses to this question were much better. More participants responded to the question with richer answers, and fewer responded with ‘none’ or similar ($n = 9$). The theme that captured a variety of different responses was *understanding* ($n = 12$). Participants (both Māori and non-Māori) wrote about gaining a new understanding of their own (or Aotearoa) cultural history, traditional values, and practices related to fatherhood and whanau. For some, this seemed to provide a general understanding of a context of fatherhood and whānau relationships in Aotearoa (e.g., “Understanding history and understanding its strengths and weaknesses”; “Reminds me that my ancestors loved their children”). For others, this understanding was much more personal and was the basis for changing beliefs of fatherhood and whanau (e.g., “It’s dispelled a few myths of what I thought our traditional parenting roles and styles are and allowed me to be loving and spend time with my boy.” “Things like traditions and morals stood out for me to create strong whanau”).

Closely related to this theme of *understanding* were participants who described how the course changed their *perspective* of their personal history in the families of origin. For a few of the men, this brought greater alignment with their current beliefs, or inspired them to try and recover teaching and traditions that they had been raised with but ignored or were forgotten (e.g., “It’s taken me back to what I have lost”). In direct contrast to this, other men realized that their family of origin had not provided them with a good example and needed to be transformed (e.g., “Showing me that I need to break that family culture in order to be a good dad (grew up in violence)”).

2. *How do you feel your relationship to your culture influences your understanding of what it means to be a father?*

This question may have been a bit too abstract for some of the participants as a greater number of men left this question blank or wrote a response that was clearly not relevant to the question ($n = 13$), and several participants wrote a very generic response ($n = 5$; e.g., 'It means everything'). There were also a few men who indicated that culture was not important or only minimally important and that other 'concepts' were more important ($n = 5$). For example, "I don't feel it does influence it. Love influences my understanding of what it means to be a dad." [Pākehā father]; "There are stories I can relate to and put myself in, but being a father is more than culture to me." [Māori father]

Across participants whose responses did indicate some level of influence from culture on their perspectives of fatherhood, there were no clear themes that stood out more than others. Rather, there were a variety of themes that were endorsed by small clusters of 3 to 5 participants. The first two, *connection* and *involvement*, are related but the first was described on an emotional level, whereas the second focused on behaviour. For example, "My growing connection to my culture has become important to me, as I have learnt connection is key" [Māori father], and "Get involved with my community and my own people through cultural activities" [Māori father]. However, the response from one participant nicely combined these themes: "If [culture is] ignored it make me less genuine. Embrace my culture gives me mana/empowerment" [Māori father].

A few participants who were not Māori suggested that the kaupapa embedded within the course was relevant to their own culture or they could find similarities with values from their culture. A few participants also pointed to the role of culture in providing a sense of responsibility to their family, to recognizing and working on their areas of growth, and educating their children on their own personal background or their whakapapa (e.g., "...spending quality times with my tamariki, telling them or helping them understand their roots."). Finally, the responses from a few participants indicated that they had gained a more in-depth understanding of culture that has influenced their overall perspective of fatherhood or has even shaped their identity. For example, two Māori fathers wrote the following: "Essentially it [culture] is a framework to reconnect, to balance, a set of guidelines and a support network." "The concept[s] of aroha, tikanga, mana, manakii, kawa have helped me understand who I am and what I want."

B. Family

Pre-course survey:

1. *When you think about your family, what would you say are your strengths? What are the qualities that you want to build on?*

Unfortunately, this question can be answered from 2 perspectives; (a) family strengths, and (b) the family qualities that need building on. Participants not only answered from these different perspectives, but several participants also provided responses that were rather unrelated to the question at hand. If used again, this question needs to be simpler and just focus on strengths.

Even though we received 31 responses, over a third of these did not address the question. In fact, the most common response was not in relation to the family, but identified a personal strength or aspiration of the participants (e.g., good provider, hard worker, good father, or good partner). Responses that more adequately addressed the question were quite diverse and only a few small categories were identified. The most frequently identified strength was that families were considered to be loving and/or caring ($n = 16$; e.g., *loving each other, showing love, caring deeply for each other*), followed by good *communication* ($n = 4$), strong *commitment* ($n = 4$), *respectful* ($n = 3$)

and a category labelled *participation* ($n = 4$) that included comments such as “hanging out together” and “spending time with each other” and “fun activities”.

2. *When you think about your family, what would you say are your challenges? What are the areas that need working on?*

Once again, when answering this question, the most common response was not focused on family level challenges, but were personal challenges, and although none of the participants mentioned anything about violence, participants did mention issues around anger, conflict resolution, tolerance, patience, and stress both at the personal and family level ($n = 9$). After that, there were only three categories that were mentioned by more than a few participants. Several participants ($n = 7$) mentioned *communication* issues (e.g., “Listening and hearing what the kids are expressing; Communicating and accepting different perspectives”), and *interparental differences* were also mentioned ($n = 6$), including the challenge of managing partner relationships within a current relationship and after partner separation. Finally a few participants ($n = 3$) described their family challenge as a need for greater understanding of their children.

Post-course survey:

1. *Now that you have completed Building Awesome Matua, how do you see your role in contributing to your family’s strengths, those things you do well as a family?*

Seven different roles were identified by three or more participants as important for their contribution to their family’s strengths. First, several men ($n = 11$) pointed to the importance of being *present* or facilitating family *participation*, and this was most frequently described in relationship to spending ‘more time’ or ‘quality time’ with whanau. Second, several men ($n = 7$) mentioned their responsibility in becoming a better *role model* for their family. For example, “All I can say is, when I get my kids back I’m gonna try all that I’ve learnt from the program and apply it to be a role model to my kids.” After these two themes, the importance of being *loving* and *supportive* was emphasised ($n = 4$ each), and then providing positive *communication* and maintaining good *self-regulation* ($n = 4$ each).

2. *Now that you have completed Building Awesome Matua, how do you see your role in helping to change or improve the things about your family that are limitations, those things you do not do well as a family?*

There were much fewer responses (1/3 less) and less consistency in the various themes that participants described for their role in addressing family limitations or challenges. Only three themes were identified by more than three participants. First, a latent theme was related to participants’ need for personal *emotion regulation* or to facilitate the emotion regulation of their family ($n = 5$). For example, “I now have the skills to see [the] importance in de-escalating situations, building up family members, and not sweating the small stuff”, and “I have learned to put my emotions aside and deal with the issue at hand, calmly.” A second theme included participants’ concerns around *communication* in their family, both receptive (e.g., listening) and expressive. This was generally expressed quite simply, such as “Listen more”, “Communicate more”. A third latent theme included participants’ own need for *agency* in addressing family challenges. For example, “We have the biggest role/influence. We are the ones who can bring about change.” All the remaining responses were only identified by one or two participants.

C. Fatherhood

Pre-course survey

1. *What do you think your strengths are as a father? What are the positive things you do with your children that you want to build on?*

Five different themes accounted for just over 75% of participants' responses, with participants identifying love/loving/love and care most frequently ($n = 16$) as their strength, and often expressed in a single word or two ('love' or 'showing love'). The second theme is titled *presence* ($n = 11$) and includes those responses where participants' referred to their strength as spending time with family, being with family, being there for children. The key word 'Time' (i.e., 'Spending time') in this theme was mentioned by nine participants. For this question, *participation* ($n = 8$) is distinguished from *presence* in that participants described actual activities that they felt were important for their family or which they led themselves. In addition to specifically mentioning participation (e.g., 'I participate in their day-to-day lives'), additional key words in this theme included 'Play' (e.g., 'Play ball', 'Messing around'), 'Fun' (e.g., 'Thinking of new and fun things to do on the weekend') and 'Support' ('Giving support and building them up') were specifically mentioned by three or more participants. Three or more participants also described that being a *provider* for their children/family, and their communication skills were their strengths.

2. *What do you think are your limitations as a father? What areas do you need to work on and improve?*

Participants described fewer limitations than they did strengths, and these limitations tended to be more idiosyncratic with only three themes representing more than five participants and two other themes representing only three or four participants. Because Building Awesome Matua is specifically a course for addressing family violence, it is somewhat surprising that no participants mentioned anything about violence. Instead, the first and largest theme was related to *emotion* ($n = 8$), and most participants tended to describe this as a need for greater emotion regulation (e.g., 'Need to control my temper; 'Anger problems', etc.). A few participants also mentioned problems with suppressing emotions or a lack of awareness of emotion. In a similar vein, five participants identified limitations with *conflict resolution* or behaviour management, either specifically or indirectly (e.g., 'How to discipline my son without smacking'; 'Handling my son in a better matter. Having a better understanding of when my son is upset and emotional').

In contrast to the question about strengths as a father, where several participants indicated that the time they made available for their family was a strength, two groups of men indicated that they were too busy or had too little time for their children ($n = 6$) or that their work ($n = 4$) was their biggest limitation, interfering in their participation with their children. Finally, a few men ($n = 3$) indicated that 'everything' about them was a limitation (e.g., "Everything I've done needs to be improved").

Post-course survey

1. *Now that you have completed Building Awesome Matua, what do you think your strengths are as a father? What are the positive things you do with your children that you want to build on?*

The themes from the post-course survey generally overlapped those from the pre-course survey, with an even greater tendency for participants to describe strengths that coalesced along three major themes relating to *love and care* ($n = 12$), *participation* ($n = 11$), and *presence* ($n = 8$). There was also a single minor theme related to *communication* ($n = 5$) that included both expressive (e.g., "Talking with them") and receptive (e.g., "Willing to listen instead of going off") communication strengths. Another noticeable difference between the pre-course and post-course results is that participants tended to provide more detail in describing these themes. Once again, the distinction between the theme of *presence* and *participation* is in the level of detail. Presence, relates to participants' generic descriptions of 'being there' or 'spending time' with their children. Participation relates to a wide variety of often specific activities that fathers described, from play and having fun to physical fitness and outdoor recreation. A few fathers also described their participation as

'making memories', building or maintaining family traditions, and providing support (both practical and emotional). A few quotes that capture the blending of these three themes include the following: "Loving, caring, invested in my daughter's development." "Showing the aroha. Be there with them and create memories." "My love for them (unconditionally). Traditions. Protect them (physically/emotionally). Encouragement. Create memories. Grab times to talk with my boys." "Being with my eldest when she is having a meltdown and being able to create a safe and loving space for her to work through it."

2. *Now that you have completed Building Awesome Matua, what do you think are your limitations as a father? What areas do you need to work on and improve?*

The results for the post-course survey on participants' limitations largely reflected the pre-course survey. Once again participants identified fewer limitations than strengths and these were more idiosyncratic (fewer themes were identified). The themes were generally similar, with the largest theme still related to *emotion regulation* ($n = 8$) and several of these participants mentioning anger problems. In general, participants still described these limitations in generalities, but one participant was particularly forthcoming and said, "I get angry sometimes – it's my shit I can't take that out on my family; they are rangatira and deserve better. I need to maintain an open mind to others' plans, ideas, and opinions."

There was again evidence of a distinct contrast across the fathers when comparing strengths and limitations. Where a small group identified *communication* as their strength, a few more identified communication as their limitation ($n = 7$), both expressive (e.g., "I do need help with the way I talk to my kids") and receptive (e.g., "Listening more to my children"). Finally, there was once again a small group of participants ($n = 5$) who identified their major limitation as a lack of time with their children.

3. *Now that you have completed Building Awesome Matua, have you noticed any changes in your relationship with your children? Please describe.*

Across all the participants who responded to this question ($n = 33$), only three wrote that there had been no changes in their relationship with their children, and none of the participants reported any negative changes. Although the focus of this question was on relationship changes, almost a third of participants ($n = 10$) wrote about their personal changes and did not describe any emotional or behavioural change at a relationship level (e.g., dyadic). These personal changes that participants felt were enhancing their relationship with their children included being more loving, reductions in anger and reactivity and improvements in patience, and a better focus on children's needs.

Four additional themes were identified that included three or more participants. The largest theme focused on improved positive *emotions* for children and/or reduction in negative emotions in relationships ($n = 11$). Men most frequently and simply described this as their children being happier and/or more laughing in their family. For example, "Yes, things are more calm in all ways, better ways of interacting, especially on my behalf. We're happy." "Definitely. Kids are more happy and I'm not showing any signs of anger." The next theme focused on improved *communication* ($n = 8$), with men identifying reductions in negative communication (e.g., "Less yelling") and increases in general communication (e.g., "We are talking more"). A few men provided greater detail or were able to attribute their personal changes with the changes in communication. For example: "My son has said to me that he thinks I am a great dad because he can talk to me and trust me. Some days it takes more than others. I was very proud in that moment and touched." "I can communicate with my child without them being afraid." "Just one aspect would be asking about her day differently. Giving her another chance at conversation, and that has made her more confident."

The last two themes focused on improved *presence* and interaction (i.e., more harmonious; $n = 8$) and a closer *bond* and more affection between participants and their children ($n = 4$). Spending more time together and quality time dominated the *presence* theme, and one participant also described the increased time was spent doing things his children wanted. Increased presence was also accompanied by better quality interaction (e.g., “We get along heaps better”). A couple of examples of the *bonding/affection* theme include, “Yes, My daughter seems a lot more attached to me, and is always smiling.” “Yes we have bonded closer, he can trust me. We talk more.” “More laughs, conversations and hugs.”

D. Partner Relationships & Co-parenting

Pre-course survey

1. *How well do you and your partner work together as a team in parenting your children and making decisions about your family?*

Post-course survey

1. *Now that you have completed Building Awesome Matua, have you noticed any changes in how you and your partner work together as a team in parenting your children and making decisions about your family?*

I made the decision to analyse the results from these two questions together as several of the participants left this question blank, or reported that they were currently single. In addition, participant’s responses were easily coded according to the state of the relationship and co-parenting at the beginning of the course (positive, neutral, or negative) and then any change in that relationship and co-parenting after the course (positive, no-change, or negative).

For the pre-course survey, fourteen participants reported that their co-parenting and partner relationships were positive, and of these, eight reported additional positive change at the end of Build Awesome Matua (5 participants did not answer the post-course question, 1 reported no change, but no participants reported negative changes). Of the eight participants who reported further growth in co-parenting with their partner, this ranged from slight changes (e.g., “Yes a little, but not too much only because I’m still learning and building as I go”) to more substantial change (e.g., “Yes, things are a lot more civil if an issue arises, we table it for a suitable time to discuss it”).

At the pre-course survey, eight participants reported that their co-parenting and partner relationships were negative, with participants commenting on arguments, different perspectives on parenting, very different families of origin, and problems related to participants’ anger and self-regulation problems. For the post-course survey, one participant did not answer this question, two reported no changes, and five reported positive changes. The responses primarily focused on better team work and communication, less tension, and fewer arguments, and are provided in Table 3 below. Finally, six participants did not answer this question at the pre-course survey, but for the post-course survey described a variety of positive changes that covered similar themes as described above around improved team work and communication. One participant wrote, “Everyone is always interested in what we discussed on the night. My fiancé is also implementing the things that we discuss. It takes time but you can see the progress. It’s rewarding!”

Table 3. Five examples of co-parenting and partner relationship changes from negative to positive, pre- to post-course.

Pre-course survey	Post-course survey
Sometimes hard, but sometimes we good. Want better ways to work together.	Now we are a team.
Not very well only because I've paid no attention to them before. Now me and their mum are apart.	Working really well together now.
Quite difficult because the partner thinks she knows everything.	Yes, my partner is around more often and we get along. Being able to argue with each other and making the right decisions.
We try and hold the line, but often my temper means I'm just another child for my wife to manage.	Yes, less tension, more communication. Less arguments, more inclusion in events.
Usually good unless blame or fault comes into the communication then it can turn to custard for up to a couple of weeks.	Yes, she reckons I don't react to her as easily. She reckons I love my boy more and lets me look after him, play with him etc by myself.

Biggest Impact from Building Awesome Matua

Post-course survey

1. What will you take away from Building Awesome Matua that will have the biggest impact on your parenting?

This was one of the last questions from the post-course survey and the themes from participants' responses largely replicated the majority of themes that have been consistently found throughout this evaluation including *emotion, communication, presence, love, and role modelling*. Two additional themes not consistently mentioned in response to the previous questions were *parenting skills* and *social support*. The *emotion* theme was the largest ($n = 9$) and primarily included a focus on the acquisition of emotion regulation skills (e.g., "staying calm"), along with a few comments on the importance of encouraging and supporting positive emotion in the family. For example: "Skills and tools how to control your anger when disciplining your child." "Be happy towards my family with positive attitudes." The *communication* theme was the next most frequently mentioned ($n = 6$), once again with a focus on both expressive and receptive communication. For example: "How to talk to my tamariki. How to not judge but listen. Heaps of good tools I will be sure to use." "How to communicate with my kids and be all I can to my kids, and have tools to progress in life." "Awareness around language with my kids, with everyday talking, discipline and love." "Sometimes I need to approach situations differently and listen, talk, touch, a safe place for our kids, and gift quality time. Let them know it matters."

Presence ($n = 5$) again included a major focus for participants on spending quality time with their children. For example: "Reminded me I need regular one-to-one quality time with each of my kids." There was an interesting mix in the responses that focused on *love* ($n = 5$). One participant just wrote, 'Aroha'. Whereas another seemed to have an egocentric view of love; "How to give love to children and you will be loved back by them." This is contrasted by a third participant who seemed

to grasp more fully the type of love that Building Awesome Matua was teaching; “Love unconditionally; focus on children's needs”. The theme of being a *role model* was closely related to prioritizing children and family, which is also seen in this last quote on love ($n = 5$). Two participants expressed this nicely: “Reinforced importance of my role as father. This is now at the forefront of my everyday thinking, over other commitments such as work.” “Look after my family first and be a great role model to my children.”

The *parenting skills* theme included a mix participants who described these skills quite generically (e.g., “The skills, knowledge, tools and strategies that I will apply to being a better father for my kids”), and others who spoke of specific parenting strategies from the curriculum (e.g., The tools that I have learnt, i.e., love languages, [and] firm, fair, fun.”). Finally the *social support* theme came from a small group of participants ($n = 3$) who wrote that the biggest impact from Building Awesome Matua was knowing they “were not alone”, that “it’s alright to ask for help” and their appreciation of the support from their course facilitators.

DISCUSSION

Summary

Taken together, both the quantitative and qualitative results from these surveys tell a similar story regarding the preliminary efficacy of the Building Awesome Matua course. However, these positive results must be considered in light of the substantial limitations inherent with such a restricted group of survey respondents (approximately 22.5%) out of the total number of men who completed the course.

In general, when participants began Building Awesome Matua, the majority could not articulate a cultural frame of reference for understanding fatherhood, and many were reluctant to be transparent about the issues they were facing with their parenting and in their family’s lives. For example, of the fourteen participants with court orders, only four discussed any issues around anger, violence, conflict, emotional regulation, or self-control; and although the largest theme of limitations in the family or as a father focused on emotional regulation issues, this was identified [in](#) only 25% of the responses to these questions. There could be a variety of reasons for this reticence, such as social desirability, a lack of trust and manaakitanga in the relationship with the facilitator, or perhaps participants struggled with the ability to take a third person perspective and reflect on such questions¹. Participants did find it easier to identify their strengths as a father and in their families, with most of these strengths coalescing across themes of love and care, spending quality time together, participating in a variety of activities, and good communication.

When participants completed Building Awesome Matua, the open-response qualitative questions revealed that many participants had developed a new (or revitalized) understanding of culture and how it can shape beliefs about whānau and fatherhood (especially Māori fathers). Unfortunately, participants still struggled with relating their experience to a bigger perspective on family, but this difficulty could have been partly due to the nature of the question, or the fact that over a third of participants were not with their family in a full-time capacity and therefore had not had enough opportunity to see change at a family level. At a personal level, most fathers still identified their strengths with the same themes as before the course (love and care, presence, participation, communication). There were also no substantive shifts in men’s responses to their limitations as a father, but there still seemed to be a reluctance or inability to be reflective on this topic with almost one in four of the men pointing to external factors as their biggest limitation (e.g., access to children, work demands, partner relationships).

¹ This issue is discussed in a variety of studies with clinical samples and participants who have experienced trauma. For a review see: Camoirano, A. (2017). Mentalizing makes parenting work: A review about parental reflective functioning and clinical interventions to improve it. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 8, 14. doi:10.3389/fpsyg.2017.00014

At the end of the course, participants reported a wide variety of personal, relational, and family level changes. Many of the participants felt that the course helped them address their need for greater emotional and behavioural regulation and reported that they were less reactive, more calm, had a better perspective about their relationships with their family (both children and partners or ex-partners), were more child-centric in their parenting, and were now focused on being a better role model for their children. They reported that their children seemed happier, there was less tension and conflict in the home, better communication, and increased team work with their partners.

The quantitative scales showed that on average participants reported significant reductions in anger, improved parenting confidence, whānau relationships, and mentalizing. Māori fathers reported strong shifts in their cultural identification. Most of the changes in self-reported parenting and family relationships were in the small to medium range for effect sizes. Inspection of individual level change against a reliable change index confirmed these rather small effects, and showed that while most participants were reporting positive changes, there were far fewer participants where this change went beyond what could be accounted for by measurement error. There was very little evidence that these positive changes were moderated by participant sociodemographic characteristics, except in two areas. First, participants who were under court orders reported very little change in mentalizing compared to participants not under court orders. Second, participants who experienced reliable change on one or more outcome variables were more likely to be transparent in their qualitative responses about the violence and self-regulation issues they were facing, were more likely to be full-time with their children, and less likely to have previously attended a family violence intervention or course. I believe these findings on how individual differences may moderate the effectiveness of the course have the clearest implications for course facilitation and will be addressed further below.

In terms of participant satisfaction, the vast majority of respondents rated this course highly, reporting that it had an important impact on their understanding of fatherhood and parenting, and felt that the course materials and curriculum were interesting and relevant. There were no significant differences in these positive evaluations across sociodemographic characteristics. The distinction in the results from the two sets of quantitative scales reveals the importance of rigorous evaluation studies. If retrospective reflections of course satisfaction and impact were the only form of evaluation, Building Awesome Matua could be considered a great success. The more stringent test of change over time (still relying on self-report), certainly constrains the positive results that the course is achieving, but also provides a more nuanced perspective of how much change is taking place, in which outcomes, and for whom.

Strengths & Limitations

As mentioned above, the results from this evaluation need to be considered in light of the strengths and limitations of the participant sample and the methodology. There are three strengths in this evaluation: (a) we employed a longitudinal design to assess change over time; (b) we employed a mixed-methods questionnaire that allowed participants to respond to both quantitative scales, and also provide their individual perspectives (honouring their voice) through open-response questions; and (c) we attempted to embed the evaluation process within the participant-facilitator relationship to maintain manaakitanga.

There are a variety of limitations to this evaluation, but I will focus the discussion to the top three. The first limitation to this study is the very small and restricted sample that could suggest the men who completed the evaluations were those who were most happy with the course and more likely to show positive results. A second limitation was the sole reliance on participant self-report in a questionnaire format, which limited dialogue, enhanced the threat of social desirability, and did

not include more objective or third-party measures of change. A related limitation to this is that the quantitative scales utilised in this study were very brief assessments of the outcomes from the theory of change rather than previously validated scales. Finally, there was no way to assess programme fidelity nor evaluation fidelity in this study. Much of the effectiveness of Building Awesome Matua rests with the competency of the facilitators, both in their ability to effectively run the course and build relationships with participants, but also in their ability to encourage and facilitate participants' engagement with the evaluation process. Based on the limited data returned and the substantial gaps in the information received, it seems facilitators may have significantly struggled with this process.

Implications & Applications

I believe the results from this study point to a variety of recommendations that may be helpful in the further development of Building Awesome Matua, if Parenting Place, Salvation Army, and the other valued community partners choose to continue offering the course. First, although less than half of the participants in this study were Māori, no one objected to the Māori cultural framework which was the foundation for the programme, and several non-Māori reported that this explicit focus on culture provided a way to understand their own culture, or they could see parallels between the kaupapa of the course and morals and values that they were raised with. Given the substantial shift in cultural identification for participants who were Māori, I believe this provides good evidence for why it is important to retain this focus on te ao Māori.

Second, a variety of results, both quantitative and qualitative, suggest that men who were experiencing more substantial challenges in their lives, such as court orders, previous family violence intervention, or partner separation, were less transparent about their challenges and limitations and reported less positive change from pre- to post-course. This suggests that the current design of Building Awesome Matua may not be sufficient for men who have greater needs in order for them to experience the same level of change, and additional support may be necessary. Compared to other programmes such as Caring Dads Safer Children², Building Awesome Matua is relatively short and focuses more on psychoeducation than skill development.

Third, I do believe the current evaluation plan (pre- post-course surveys) is neither sustainable nor ethical. In many ways it has provided good evidence of preliminary efficacy. However, given that Building Awesome Matua is a course based on kaupapa Māori principles, the evaluation should also strive to uphold such principles, and in this regard, I believe we have substantially strayed. The decision for the current evaluation strategy was largely based on logistics and budget constraints. Moving forward, there would need to be much greater consideration of how to balance the need for more objective assessments of behavioural and relational change over time, while upholding the course kaupapa and Te Tiriti obligations.

² For more information about Caring Dads Safer Children, please visit <https://www.caringdads.org/about-caring-dads-1>. The programme leaders from CDSC generously provided the curriculum team for Building Awesome Matua many of their resources and research.