

Desistence From Violence

Understanding How
Men Negotiate
Nonviolent Identities

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Personal Background

- Treatment for men convicted of spousal violence in prison and community settings.
- Individual and group treatment modalities
- Treatment for women who have been victimized by violence in intimate relationships
- Participation in local coordination committee and provincial Community Coordination for Women's Safety-Working Group
- President of the Ending Relationship Abuse Society of British Columbia (www.erabc.ca)
- Visiting Expert for UN institute program for the prevention of crime and the treatment of offenders

Definition

- Spousal Violence refers to physical or sexual violence or psychological or financial abuse within current or former marital or common-law relationships regardless of sexual orientation.
- Violence is linked to inequalities and power imbalances in society.

Extent of the Problem

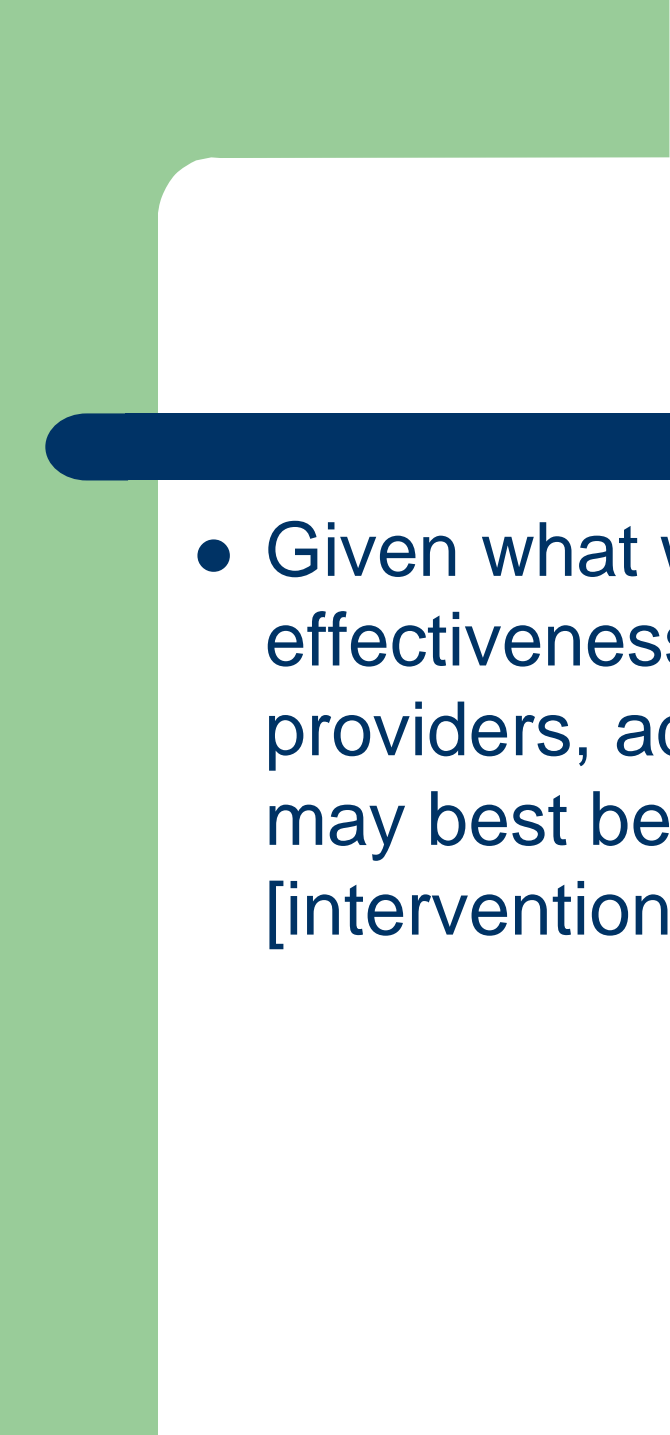

- Spousal violence represents about 20% of violent crime in Canada
- Females accounted for 85% of all victims of spousal violence reported to police; Men represent about 90% of alleged perpetrators.
- Women are the victims of the more severe, frequent and injury causing violence.
- Children are victimized either directly or indirectly by witnessing violence against a parent.
- One in three women will experience violence by an intimate partner at some point in their lives.

Stopping Domestic Violence

- Research suggests that a coordinated community response is most effective in reducing re-offending.
- Intervention programs for male offenders are one part of this overall response.
- Research suggests that programs for offenders do contribute to reducing re-offending.
- Not all programs are equally effective.

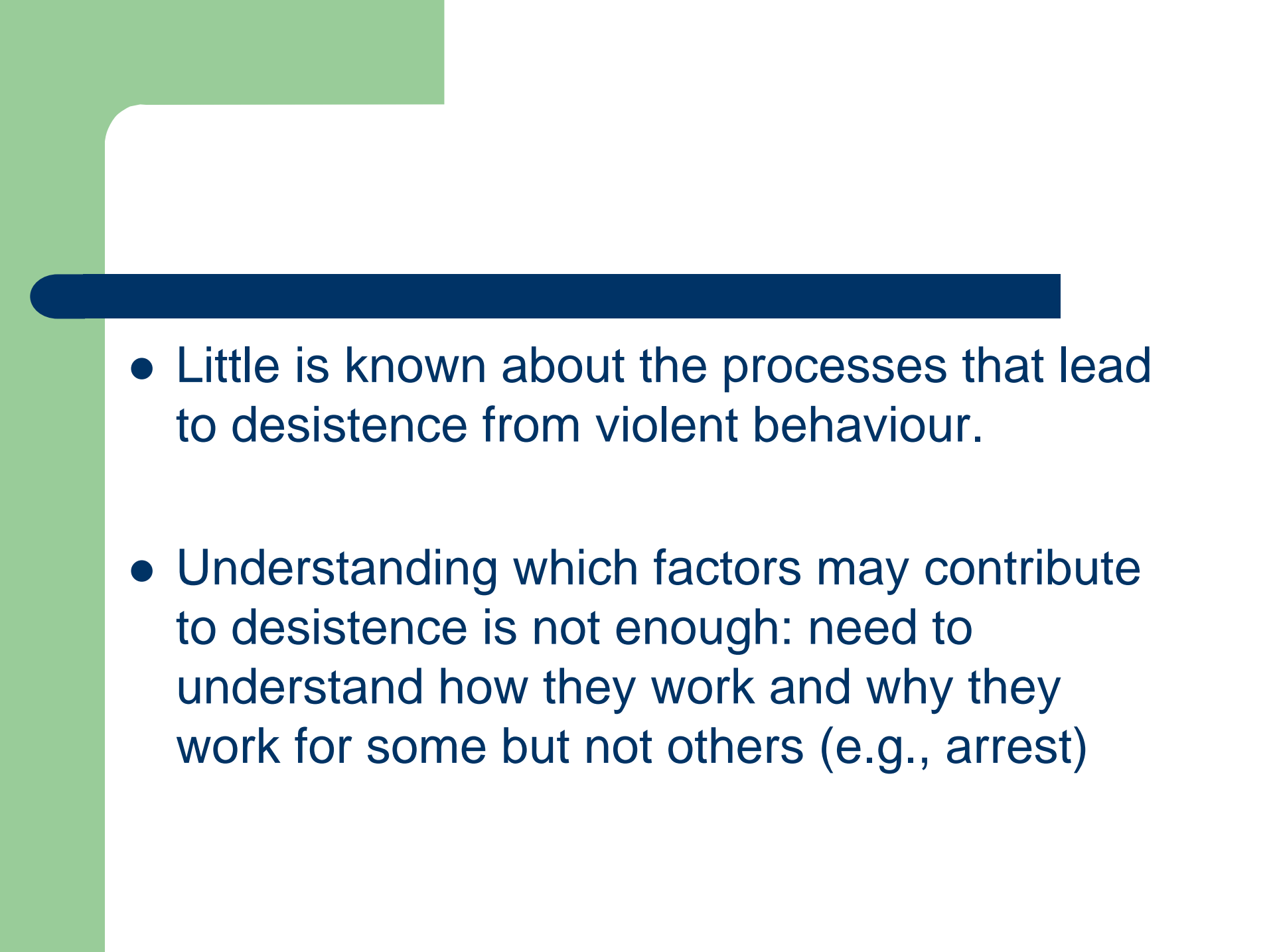
Barrier to Treatment effectiveness: Drop-Outs

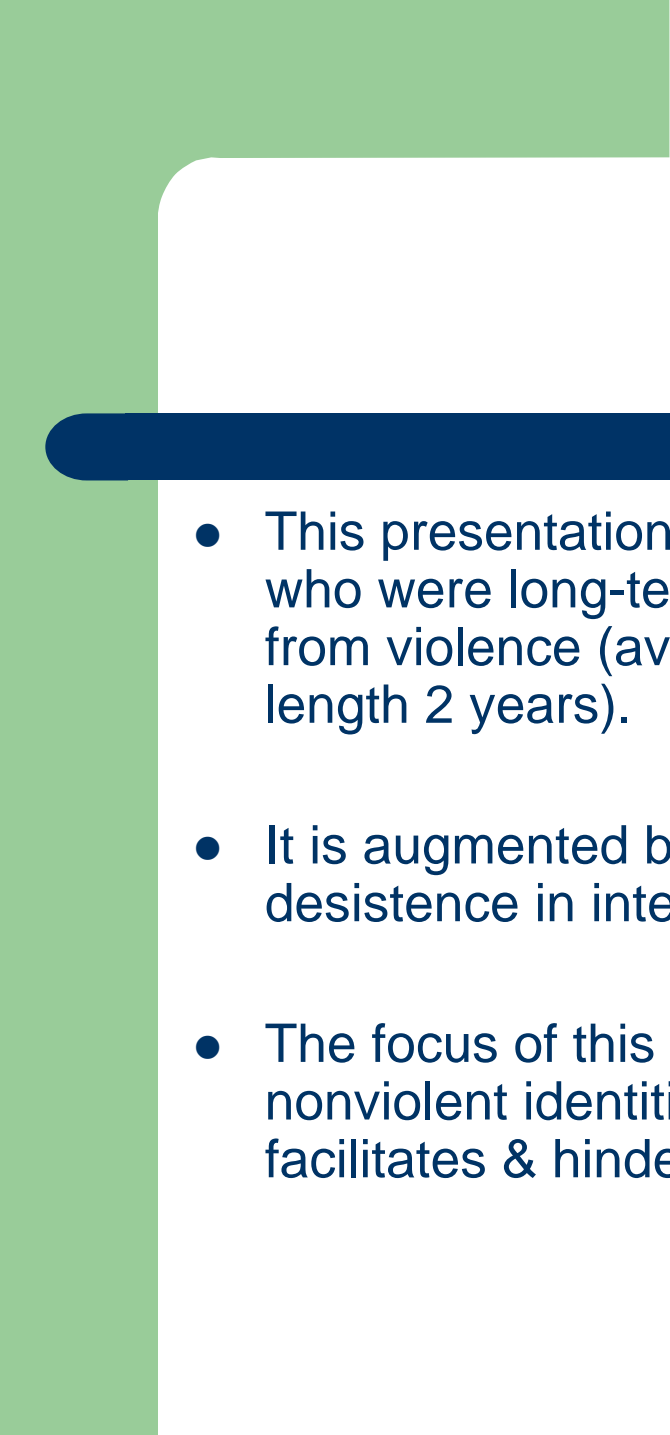
- 20% attrition is common in most fields due to dual-diagnosis and should be expected to be the same in DV offender groups
- The rate of attrition in DV offender groups has been in the order of 50%
- Those who drop-out tend to be younger, single, unemployed and generally a higher risk for re-offending.

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- Given what we know about treatment effectiveness, “the energies of treatment providers, advocates and researchers alike may best be directed at ways to improve [intervention] programs” (Babcock et al 2004).

A Focus on Desistence

- Previous efforts at addressing men's violence have focused on identifying and addressing perceived underlying causes of violence (e.g., misogynistic attitudes, communication skill deficits, etc.).
- The means for stopping certain behaviours may, however, be independent from its causes (i.e., why a man abuses others may not be the same as how he stops the abuse).
- Research exploring the processes of desistence is therefore an important priority for reducing re-offending.

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- Little is known about the processes that lead to desistance from violent behaviour.
 - Understanding which factors may contribute to desistance is not enough: need to understand how they work and why they work for some but not others (e.g., arrest)

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- This presentation is based on research interviews with 20 men who were long-term high-risk offenders and who had desisted from violence (average length of desistence 5 years; minimum length 2 years).
 - It is augmented by clinical experience in applying principles of desistence in intervention programs for offenders.
 - The focus of this research was on how men negotiate nonviolent identities while maintaining accountability; and what facilitates & hinders this process.

Framework of Change

(Stefanakis, 1998, 2000)

Concepts

- Context
 - Contextual factors can facilitate violence or inhibit change to nonviolence
- Stages of Change
 - Desistence involves movement through various transitional stages
- Processes of Change
 - The processes of change involve socially negotiated transitions

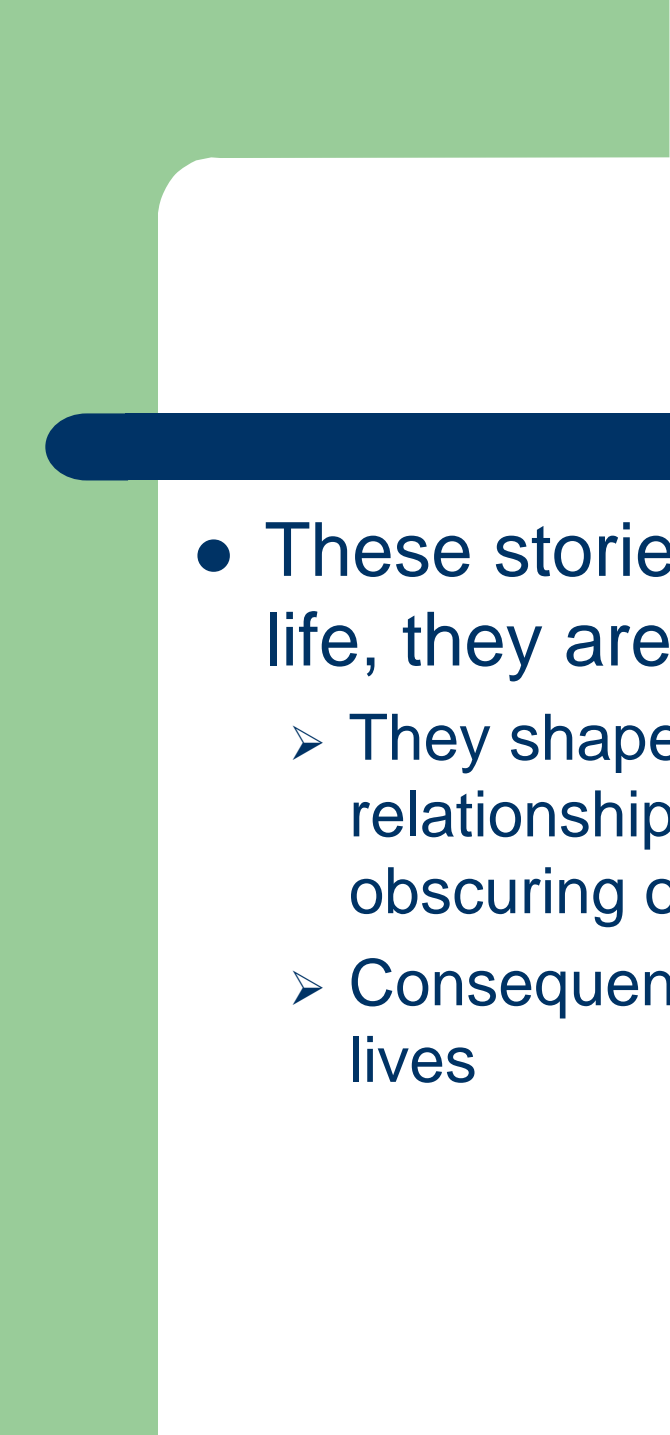
Context:


Meaning and Identity Perspective

- Violence is far from inconsequential and as such it cries out for legitimization or explanation.
- People attempt to position themselves in relation to acts of violence that they have committed or are going to commit.
- Desistence from violence also needs to be made plausible if it is to be accepted.

Importance of Language

- Reality is socially constructed through language and organized and maintained through stories.
 - Language is a central tool through which we negotiate meaning

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- These stories are not merely descriptive of life, they are constitutive of life.
 - They shape lives by making certain forms of relationships and certain actions visible, while obscuring other types of relationships and actions
 - Consequently they have real effects on peoples lives

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- **Stories of violence and transitions in life trajectory are set within culturally and historically situated discourses that set the norms for what can be claimed.**
 - often invisible and taken for granted.
 - therefore need to make visible the implicit, taken for granted standards that facilitate some tellings (violence) and inhibit others (change)

Discourse of Disorder

- Violence that cannot be accounted for in acceptable way puts one at risk for being ostracized and pathologized.
- You are either:
 - BAD (evil – demonized)
 - MAD (sick – pathologized)
 - Objectified and Dehumanized e.g., Cobras and Pit bulls
- Most people try to avoid being positioned in this way. This becomes a barrier to change.

Continuity and Unity in Personality

- The best predictor of future behaviour is past behaviour.
- Repeat domestic violence offenders are “particularly bad apples in an already rotten group” (Jacobson et al., 1996)
- Can a rotten apple ever become healthy?

Dilemmas

- How do you acknowledge abuse while protecting self from pathology/objectification (Mad or Bad)?
- How do you take responsibility for using violence/abuse and still remain redeemable as a person?
- If you have acknowledged and taken responsibility for abuse, how do you make change comprehensible to self and others?

Stages of Change

Stages of change for spousal abuse offenders are consistent with **Transtheoretical Model of Change stages** (Prochaska, Diclemente & Norcross, 1992).

Pre-contemplation (PC)

No acknowledgment/ not ready

Feel coerced to change

Contemplation

Some awareness; thinking bout change; no commitment

Preparation

Commitment to change

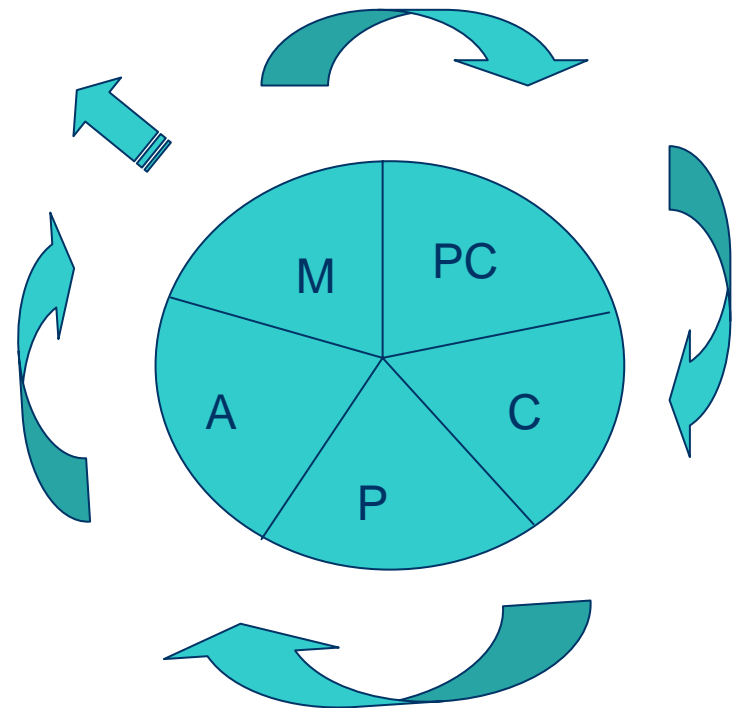
Plans and small steps

Action

accepting full responsibility; taking consistent steps to change

Maintenance

Relapse prevention



Identifying men at different stages

Precontemplation	Deny event Deny harm Deny pattern	Men at PC and C stages are most likely to drop out of treatment (O'Hare 1996; Scott, 2004)
Contemplation	Excuses Justification	
Preparation	Oscillating: concessions/responsibility & excuses/justifications	
Action	Choice dialogue	
Maintenance	Attend to healthy life not just nonviolence	

Men who use abuse use common cultural linguistic resources to account for their actions

- Denial: If event did not occur or is not constructed as a violent act then non deviant
- Justification: violence necessary to address injustice therefore non deviant
- Excuses: Could not control self – normal human reaction that everyone occasionally succumbs to therefore non deviant

Processes of Change



Acknowledge Abuse Acknowledge abuse while protecting self from being pathologized or demonized	Creating Commitment Accept responsibility and remain redeemable Construct transition point	Stopping the Violence Claim new nonviolent identity	Sustaining Nonviolence Moving past nonviolent identity to healthy person
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Acknowledging Abuse

Major Challenge: Acknowledge abuse while protecting self from being pathologized or demonized

- Remain respectful: tough focus on naming abusive behaviour without pathologizing the person
- Create a distinction between responsibility and blame
- Help the men identify how they have resisted violence in the past (invitations to be part of the solution instead of the problem)
- Define range of abusive behaviours & Teach basic safety tools
- Allow men to be both victims and perpetrators (without allowing them to use a victim stance as an excuse or justification)
- Use metaphors/stories that :
 - hold men accountable but separate the person from the problem
 - the men can relate to when discussing concepts in order to draw them into the dialogue
- Acknowledge courage in coming to and staying in group process; Frame change as act of courage
- Use challenging comments as an opportunity to engage the men in a dialogue as opposed to seeing it as resistance

Creating Commitment

Major Challenges: Accept responsibility for abuse and remain redeemable; Need for a meaningful transition point (make past and need for change meaningful)

- Invite the men to identify and live up to their own values
- Construct meaningful transition points:
 - identify consequences of abuse across contexts and invite them to take a position on these effects
 - compare abusive actions and their consequences with their espoused values
- Invite them to consider what kind of relationship they really want and compare it to the one they are creating when they use abusive behaviours
- Identify and support valued identities that are incompatible with violence (e.g., being a good father)
- Deconstruct excuses and justifications (e.g., anger, power, losing control, gender socialization)
- Name and deal with challenges of change (dealing with separation and loss issues)
- Encourage articulation of covert fears
- Help men create a network of support for change

Stopping Violence

Major Challenges: Claim new, nonviolent identity in a convincing way; deal with (internal and social) pressure to maintain status quo.

- Skill building (communication and negotiation skills)
NOTE: This should be conceptualized as building choices not filling deficits
- Identify what they are doing that is constructive and nonabusive. Construct meaning around these new choices
- Help the men identify what else they would be doing to remain accountable

Sustaining Change

Major Challenges: Re-invest in new identity (move past nonviolent identity to a healthy person identity); negotiate meaning of setbacks and imperfections of new life; become part of the solution

- Relapse Prevention Planning
- Discuss meaning of setbacks as opportunities to learn without ever minimizing the effects of the abusive acts
- Help the men identify ongoing dilemmas (living in a culture of violence, being abused oneself, anger from their partner)
- Help them become part of the solution (volunteer work, white ribbon campaign, etc)
- Review signs of a healthy man and discuss
- Document the effects of the positive changes

Facilitating Change

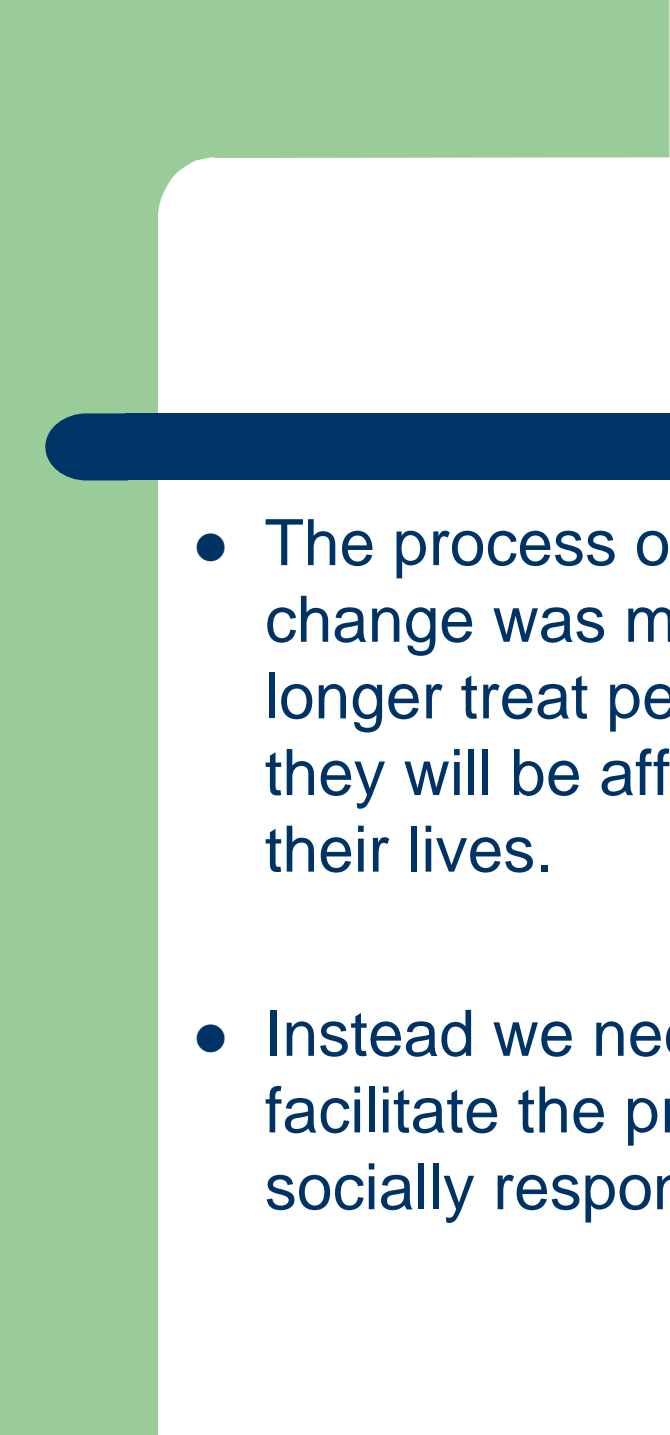
- Create therapeutic engagement by facilitating negotiation through dilemmas in ways that promote change.
 1. Understand dilemmas and stages of change
 2. Understand complexity of human experience
 3. A process built on Respect and Compassion
 4. Turn down invitations to negotiate dilemmas in ways that do not lead to change
 5. Offer invitations that attend to dilemmas and responsibility
 6. Interventions are most effective when matched to individuals place in change process

Two Year Evaluation

- Voluntary Attrition = 9% (most non-voluntary attrition of 13% was due to early release)
- Using Survival Analysis: Program completion was associated with reduced recidivism when compared to no-treatment control group [$X^2=7.41$, $p<.01$] (Stefanakis 2001)

More Results: Factors of Change

- Meaning of factor is more important than any particular factor that was described as initiating or promoting change
- Different factors were associated with similar meaning (e.g., existential crisis, child witness of violence)
- The same factor was associated with different meaning (e.g., arrest, incarcerations)

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- The process of negotiating meaning that facilitated change was most important, therefore, we can no longer treat people as objects with no say in how they will be affected by events or interventions in their lives.
 - Instead we need to begin to work with people to facilitate the processes that encourage adaptive and socially responsible behaviours.

Summary

- Any program is only as good as the manner in which it is facilitated.
- While content is important, the process of interaction between the intervener and the participant is of critical importance.
- A process built on compassion for the individual along with invitations to change behaviour based on an understanding of what individuals need to address given the stage of change they are at.

Conclusion

- Responsibility for ending violence in our culture lies with everyone. Individual responsibility by perpetrators of violence does not excuse social or community responsibility for creating and reinforcing beliefs and institutions that support, legitimize and sustain violence in relationships or inhibit change to nonviolence.

Thank You

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Desistence from Violence: Understanding how Men Negotiate Nonviolent Identities

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There is agreement in the literature that the process of cessation from disparate behaviours is characterized by various transitional stages. Based on research and clinical experience with men who have desisted from violence and the current literature on desistence, a framework for change was developed (Stefanakis, 1998). This framework is presented as a useful heuristic to summarize what we know about men's transitions from violence to nonviolence. The term heuristic is chosen in order to highlight that the framework is not seen as the best or only way to understand how men stop using violence in their relationships. Instead, as a heuristic, this framework serves to stimulate investigation by highlighting certain understandings of men's violence. In other words, it is useful because it makes visible specific obstacles to change and highlights certain interventions that may facilitate change.

The framework consists of three key concepts (see appendix A for a summary diagram of the Framework for Change). The first concept represents the personal-historical and socio-cultural contexts in which men use violence and in which they attempt to change. The context includes the men's personal experiences with violence (e.g., childhood witness or victimization), the institutions which have a direct (e.g., justice system, work settings) or indirect (e.g., media) impact on men's lives and the larger system of cultural values and norms. By examining these contextual factors we can make visible some of the obstacles to change and the dilemmas that men need to negotiate through in order to make these changes.

The second concept is the stages of change (see appendix B). The stages that I have identified were consistent with the stages identified by Prochaska, DiClemente and Norcross (1992) in their Transtheoretical Model of Change (TMC). The five stages are referred to as the *Precontemplation* (lack of awareness or acknowledgement of the problem, feel coerced into changing, no intention to change), *Contemplation* (some awareness/acknowledgement of the problem but no commitment to change, not accepting responsibility), *Preparation* (accepting responsibility, intention to change), *Action* (accepting full responsibility, taking consistent steps to change) and *Maintenance* (relapse prevention) stages.

Men entering services for assaulting their partners usually enter in the precontemplation or contemplation stages. This is evident in the vast repertoire of denial, excuses and justification strategies that they offer when accounting for their violence against their partners. An examination of the cultural context highlights that these responses reflect the common social myths and excuses present in society in general (Davidson, 1998; Stefanakis, 1998). Men in the preparation stage may still offer some excuses and justifications but they are also beginning to claim agency and responsibility for their actions. In addition, they are beginning to talk about the need to change their lives in some way. In the action stage men are taking full responsibility for their actions and actively using nonviolent strategies (e.g., time-outs, appropriate listening and assertiveness skills, respecting boundaries). Their dialogue about violence begins to centralize around the idea of

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having choices across most contexts and situations. Finally, the maintenance stage is characterized by men's active involvement in relapse prevention efforts. These efforts may include ongoing involvement in men's treatment groups or finding other ways of becoming part of the solution instead of the problem.

The stages identify how the men are thinking about their actions at a particular time and what obstacles may be most prevalent at that time. This concept highlights the importance of doing the right thing at the right time. In addition, Prochaska and his associates (1992) note that people recycle through the stages several times before entering long-term maintenance. This cyclical process appears to occur with men trying to stop violent and abusive behaviours (Dutton, 1995; Jennings, 1990; Stefanakis, 1998). Thus, the process of change is not linear but rather is frequently exemplified by a series of advances and setbacks.

It is important to highlight that the stages of changes, as I have identified them, differ somewhat from how the authors of the TMC describe them. Most significantly, I view the stages as social psychological phenomena that also reflect how cultural forces and specific relationships operate to sustain certain stages and inhibit change. As a society it has been argued that we are in the precontemplation stage in relations to our understanding of men's violence against women (Davidson, 1998). Thus, we need to understand men's experience of change in this current cultural context.

Expanding from an individual orientation to include a conceptualization of change at the social or community level of analysis changes how the processes of change are understood. The processes of change, from this perspective, are not merely individualized cognitive processes and behaviours; they are also socially negotiated transitions. Below I will offer a few examples of how this framework may be useful in recognizing obstacles to change and creating interventions strategies to address these obstacles and facilitate change (see appendix C for more examples of intervention strategies).

Movement past the precontemplation stage involves *Acknowledging the Abuse*. Here the men need to negotiate and have accepted the notion that they are responsible for their acts of violence while remaining redeemable as people. This negotiation occurs in a context that tends to either legitimize violence, power and control for men (e.g., war, state sanctioned punishment, sports, business ethic) or demonizes/ pathologizes men (e.g., using labels such as abuser, criminal, or monster to describe perpetrators) when the violence is not perceived as justified by others. This creates strong disincentives for men to claim responsibility for their acts of violence and abuse (Jenkins, 1991).

As helpers we can engage men in the process of change by recognizing this dilemma. This involves naming the abuse explicitly and educating the men around the various forms of abuse without judging the character of the men. This can be accomplished through the use of stories and metaphors in which the individual is held accountable for his actions but is more than those specific actions (Stefanakis, 1997). In addition, we need to begin speaking about actions rather than identities. For example, we can explicitly label a man's actions as abusive without labeling him as an abuser. The difference in emphasis may seem minor but I have found that it is an essential component to engaging men in the early stages of treatment because it reduces the men's resistance to accountability. Another useful strategy involves helping the men to identify how they have resisted the use of abusive and controlling behaviours in the past. This exercise helps the men identify that they are not simply seen as abusive men and it challenges the common excuse of "losing it" since, by their own accounts, they have demonstrated control in difficult situations. Furthermore, a discussion of resisting abusive behaviours is a discussion of personal responsibility because it focuses attention on one's personal choices.

Movement to the preparation stage involves *Creating Commitment* to change by the men. One barrier to creating commitment involves the struggle the men face in accounting for the change in their lifestyles and behaviour. This barrier exists because, in our society, continuity in behaviour and personality is assumed, especially for offenders of crime and violence. Thus, the men need to account for their changes to themselves and others by identifying some reasonable transition point in their life story. In my research and clinical work, I have found that the construction of personal crises of meaning act as necessary transition points for men and thereby help create commitments to change. One way to help co-create personal crises of meaning is to begin to document the effects of the violence and abuse across all areas of life. The men are often surprised by the extent of the harm and the amount of people affected by their acts of violence and abuse. This creates a reasonable justification to change that is acceptable to themselves and others. In other words, with the current knowledge of the far-reaching impact of violence any reasonable person would move towards change. The decision to change, in the context of this new knowledge, has the ancillary positive effect of supporting a positive identity for the man while allowing him to accept responsibility for his past violence.

Another barrier to commitment involves the search for the causes of violence, a barrier that is often supported by well-meaning professionals. Thus, the men identify many theories that explain their violent behaviours. These may include anger management problems (e.g., impulse control disorder), substance abuse or family upbringing. Although an identification of these issues is important, treating them as causes tends to excuse the men from taking full responsibility for their actions (Jenkins, 1990). I find it useful to deconstruct many of these misconceptions with the men. The process of debunking these misconceptions is best done using strategies in which the men are actively involved in challenging these notions rather than providing the evidence in a lecture format. The end result is that the men will recognize that these explanations are untenable. Consequently, violence, as an inevitable response to certain circumstances or experiences, cannot be as easily justified or excused and, therefore, becomes less likely.

Another way to help the men take a stand against violence and abuse involves helping them identify their own personal values and then contrasting these values with the abusive behaviour in which they have engaged. Similarly the men can be invited to identify with valued identities that are incompatible with abuse (e.g., a caring father). These strategies serve several goals. First, they move the men away from feeling coerced into changing by the system because they are invited to live up to their own values. Thus, the men begin to argue for their own change rather than having others argue for them to change. Second, the explicit recognition that their actions are incompatible with their values creates a personal crisis in meaning that acts as a catalyst for change. Third, the process of identifying positive values helps the men claim a positive identity even as they accept responsibility for their abusive behaviours. Thus, they can distance themselves from pathological labels. Finally, a discussion of personal values brings forth, in a secular way, aspects of spirituality into the discussion of change. This spiritual dimension can be a powerful resource for the men, for ourselves and for the change process (see Dale Trimble's article in these proceedings).

Movement to the action stage and *Stopping the Violence* involves helping men make nonviolent choices and helping them claim nonviolent identities. Skill development is most appropriate at this stage (e.g., communication skills, stress management techniques, etc.) with an emphasis on the meaning of the skills taught. For example, in our discussions I guide the men to the recognition that having/learning these skills means that they have choices and, therefore, excuses for using violent or abusive behaviours become untenable. In addition, I have found it useful to have the men bring forth situations when they have not acted abusively. This is useful in

terms of identifying and reinforcing skills and also in terms of reinforcing the claims of a new nonviolent self.

As the men begin to demonstrate changes peer pressure to maintain the status quo may begin to act as an obstacle to ongoing change. The men may also be dealing with personal barriers such as the belief that their changes will have an immediate positive effect on their relationships. Thus, helping the men form new supportive relationships that sustain nonviolent norms and supporting them in dealing with daily challenges and unrealistic expectations can be very beneficial.

Finally, *Sustaining Change* involves helping the men stay active in the process of change. Setbacks need to be talked about, not as failures of character, but as opportunities to learn. This needs to be done without minimizing the impact of an act of abuse on another person. The men will also face ongoing challenges in dealing with contradictory cultural expectations (requirements to be aggressive at work or in sports) and personal difficulties that may have been hidden through the use of violence and controlling behaviours (e.g., personal experiences of victimization). Current and future issues need to be identified and discussed. If necessary, other resources need to be made available to the men. Strategies that help the men become part of the solution instead of the problem are also useful. These can include helping other men stop violence or volunteering in other domains of life. Helping others becomes a wonderful reinvestment in self and society.

Conclusion

The strategies discussed here are not meant to be an exhaustive list nor are they meant to represent the best strategies of change. This framework of change is most useful as a tool that helps the facilitator explore and identify potential barriers to change and potential interventions to facilitate change. In addition, the framework highlights that the responsibility for ending violence in our culture lies with all of us. Individual responsibility by perpetrators of violence does not excuse social or community responsibility. After all, we all share responsibility for creating and reinforcing beliefs and institutions that support, legitimize and sustain violence in our communities. Therefore, although we need to continue to hold men accountable for their actions, it is incumbent on all of us to create change by challenging notions that sustain violence (e.g., anger causes violence, male-to-male violence is normal) or inhibit change to nonviolence (e.g., freezing people with labels).

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Appendix A

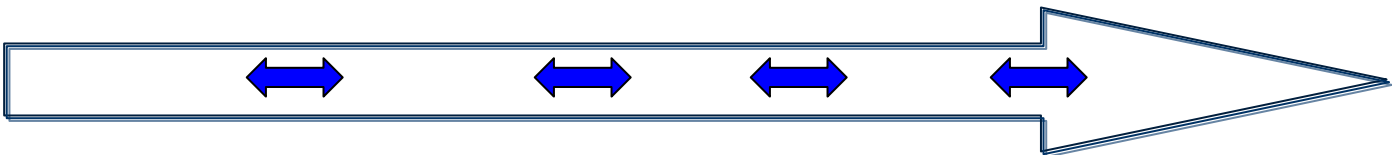
Framework for Change: Stopping Violence

Context	
Nonresponsive community Notions of unity, continuity and causality in personality Social contexts that legitimize violence, entitlements over and power and control	Disincentives to responsibility from justice system Pathologization/individualization of violence: victim/perpetrator dichotomy; discourse of disorder



Stages of Change

Precontemplation	Contemplation	Preparation	Action	Maintenance
No acknowledgment Feel coerced Not ready to change Act constructed as nonviolent	Acknowledge abuse May think about change No commitment Responsibility for violence misattributed	Commitment to change Man is clearly responsible; some oscillating	Consistent action taken Clear responsibility and boundary development; Safety is a priority	Focus on relapse prevention and healthy lifestyle Identifies ongoing challenges



Processes of Change

Acknowledging Abuse Acknowledge abuse while protecting self from being pathologized or demonized	Creating Commitment Accept responsibility and remain redeemable; Construct meaningful transition point	Stopping the Violence Claim new nonviolent identity	Sustaining Nonviolence Moving past identity based on violence/nonviolence to healthy person
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Appendix B

Identifying Men in the Stages of Change

Stages	What they say
<p>Precontemplation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The meaning of the act is constructed as nonviolent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Deny event: She lied; I hugged her and she fell ➤ Deny harm: She bruises easily ➤ Deny pattern (construct violent act as an aberration): It was only one time; I didn't hit her ➤ Deny relevance: This is a woman's world; It's a feminist conspiracy to call what happened abuse
<p>Contemplation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acknowledge violence but responsibility for it s constructed as ambiguous or misattributed • Exploratory thoughts of need for something to change 	<p>Excuses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Anger causes violence (I have a short fuse) ➤ A&D causes violence (It only happens when I'm drunk) <p>Justifications:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Blame her (She pushes my buttons) ➤ Share blame (We fight a lot; We need couple's counselling) <p>Exploratory Thoughts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ How will I save my relationship; How will I get her back
<p>Preparation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responsibility for violence is claimed but still oscillate sometimes • Commitment to change • Practical question regarding what to change 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Concession accounts (regrets, admissions, empathy) mixed in with excuses and justifications) ➤ Focus on the best interest of the kids (I need to stay calm because otherwise the kids are the one's that get hurt) ➤ May begin describing plans to make changes (stop A&D use; follow no contact order)
<p>Action</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear acceptance of responsibility for own actions • May oversimplify solution 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Choice dialogue (acknowledge that there are choices regardless of the situation) ➤ Unique outcomes: Begin to describe changes in behaviour (I had this challenge where I usually would go off and instead I...) ➤ Public disclosure of own violence ➤ Why can't she accept that I've changed
<p>Maintenance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear acceptance of responsibility • More realistic regarding his ongoing challenges and her process • Focus on healthy lifestyle not just absence of abuse 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Acknowledges ongoing challenges & dilemmas (wanting to fit in with old friends but avoid stereotypes) ➤ Wants to help others; wants to be part of solution ➤ Identifies and pursues other concerns (e.g., childhood trauma issues)

Caution: Do not turn the stages into categories of identity. In other words, people are not precontemplaters or contemplaters. We need to acknowledge the multiplicity of men's experience and identity constructions.

Stefanakis, 2000

Examples of Strategies Identified for Processes of Change

Acknowledging Abuse

Major Challenge: Acknowledge abuse while protecting self from being pathologized or demonized

- Remain respectful: tough focus on naming abusive behaviour without pathologizing the person
- Create a distinction between responsibility and blame
- Help the men identify how they have resisted violence in the past (invitations to be part of the solution instead of the problem)
- Teach basic safety tools
- Define range of abusive behaviours
- Allow men to be both victims and perpetrators (without allowing them to use a victim stance as an excuse or justification)
- Use metaphors/stories that :
 1. hold men accountable but separate the person from the problem
 2. the men can relate to when discussing concepts in order to draw them into the dialogue
- Acknowledge courage in coming to and staying in group process; Frame change as act of courage
- Use challenging comments as an opportunity to engage the men in a dialogue as opposed to seeing it as resistance

Creating Commitment

Major Challenges: Accept responsibility for abuse and remain redeemable; Need for a meaningful transition point (make past and need for change meaningful)

- Invite the men to identify and live up to their own values
- Construct meaningful transition points:
 1. identify consequences of abuse across contexts and invite them to take a position on these effects
 2. compare abusive actions and their consequences with their espoused values
- Invite them to consider what kind of relationship they really want and compare it to the one they are creating when they use abusive behaviours
- Identify and support valued identities that are incompatible with violence (e.g., being a good father)
- Deconstruct excuses and justifications (e.g., anger, power, losing control, gender socialization)
- Name and deal with challenges of change (dealing with separation and loss issues)
- Encourage articulation of covert fears
- Visualize positive change
- Help men create a network of support for change

Stopping Violence (although this has been the focus throughout, at this point the men are more amenable to alternative behaviours and are less likely to use these skills manipulatively)

Major Challenges: Claim new, nonviolent identity in a convincing way; deal with (internal and social) pressure to maintain status quo.

- Skill building (communication and negotiation skills; stress management skills, etc) NOTE: This should be conceptualized as building choices not filling deficits
- Identify what they are doing that is constructive and nonabusive. Construct meaning around these new choices
- Help the men identify what else they would be doing to remain accountable

Sustaining Change

Major Challenges: Re-invest in new identity (move past nonviolent identity to a healthy person identity); negotiate meaning of setbacks and imperfections of new life; become part of the solution

- Discuss meaning of setbacks as opportunities to learn without ever minimizing the effects of the abusive acts
- Help the men identify ongoing dilemmas (living in a culture of violence, being abused oneself, anger from their partner)
- Help them become part of the solution (volunteer work, white ribbon campaign, etc)
- Review signs of a healthy man and discuss
- Document the effects of the positive changes

Caveat: This is not meant to be an exhaustive list of treatment approaches nor is it meant to imply that the strategies identified are only valid at one particular time. The framework of change is best used as a heuristic device which can be applied by therapists to explore the potential obstacles to change and the issues that may be most relevantly addressed at a particular time. It is particularly useful when therapists feel stuck regarding how to intervene with a particular client or group.