



# Engaging men who use violence: Invitational narrative approaches

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ANROWS acknowledges the traditional owners of the land across Australia on which we work and live. We pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander elders past, present, and future, and we value Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures, and knowledge.

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# Engaging men who use violence: Invitational narrative approaches

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Caution: Some people may find parts of this content confronting or distressing. Recommended support services include: 1800 RESPECT – 1800 737 732 and Lifeline – 13 11 14.

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# Definitions and concepts

**Domestic violence** The National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children defines domestic violence as follows: “acts of violence that occur between people who have, or have had, an intimate relationship. While there is no single definition, the central element of domestic violence is an ongoing pattern of behaviour aimed at controlling a partner through fear, for example, by using behaviour which is violent and threatening. In most cases, violent behaviour is part of a range of tactics to exercise power and control over women and their children, and can be both criminal and non-criminal. Domestic violence includes physical, sexual, emotional and psychological abuse” (Council of Australian Governments, 2011, p. 2).

An intimate partner relationship is an interpersonal relationship that involves physical, sexual or emotional intimacy.

**Engagement** Engagement is commonly defined as the initial stage/s in a “planned change process” (Kirst-Ashman & Hull, 2006, p. 138), in which the core focus is on establishing a professional working relationship, or partnership, between worker and client. In this report, however, the term engagement is used more broadly, recognising that engagement can also be understood as an ongoing and collaborative process that extends beyond the first contact.

**Narrative practice** Narrative practice engages with people by exploring the ways in which they make sense of their lives through stories. People’s stories reflect the meanings they attach to lived experiences and these stories, in turn, influence their lives in significant ways. Recognising that people’s own stories exist within the context of the “broader stories of the culture in which we live” (Morgan, 2000), narrative practice seeks also to explore the stories that people believe about themselves and the world (Wever, 2019). The aim of narrative practice is to enable people to “re-author” their stories and, in doing so, enhance their sense of agency and capacity for change. The origins of narrative practice lies in the seminal work of Michael White and David Epston, as outlined in *Narrative means to therapeutic ends* (White & Epston, 1990).



<b>Invitational practice</b>	<p>Invitational practice originates in the work of Alan Jenkins as outlined in his 1990 book <i>Invitations to responsibility: The therapeutic engagement of men who are violent and abusive</i>. Building upon narrative therapy concepts but focusing specifically on work with adolescents and men who perpetrate violence, Jenkins (1998, p. 164) described his approach as “a model of engagement by invitation”. Reflecting his emphasis on responsibility, Jenkins (1998) argued that practitioners should work with men to “develop practices of self-confrontation, rather than relying on external confrontation” (p. 189), by helping them to “discover their own preferences and capacities for respectful ways of being and relating” (p. 163). Jenkins’ contributions have been recognised as adding significant value to perpetrator interventions in the narrative therapy tradition.</p> <p>As used in this report, invitational practice describes forms of intervention that seek to engage perpetrators in an ethical journey toward respectful relationships, thereby supporting them to change and take responsibility for their behaviours.</p>
<b>Invitational narrative practices</b>	<p>Invitational and narrative practices, while closely related, are separate approaches with distinct origins. Both were developed in the early-mid 1980s by practitioners associated with the Dulwich Centre in Adelaide, South Australia.</p> <p>The term “invitational narrative” is used in this report to refer to models of intervention that incorporate aspects of both Jenkins’ (1990) invitational practice and White and Epston’s (1990) narrative therapy.</p>
<b>Perpetrator accountability</b>	<p>The meaning of perpetrator accountability, as highlighted by Vlasis (2016), varies according to the context in which it is used. In this report, the term refers to the “process of an individual man’s journey” towards non-violence and includes taking responsibility for his actions and being “accountable to the experiences and needs of family members affected by his use of violence” (Vlasis, 2016, p. 33).</p>

# Executive summary

## Background

The need to understand “how to better engage men in the context of perpetrator programs” (Mackay, Gibson, Lam, & Beecham, 2015, p. 48) is widely acknowledged, however, there remains limited research and knowledge in this area. The engagement of men who use violence in their intimate partner relationships is viewed as an important component in ending domestic and family violence (Donovan & Griffiths, 2015; Gray, Lewis, Mokany, & O’Neill, 2014; Kozar & Day, 2017; McMaster & Gregory, 2003; Nahon & Lander, 2008). However, engagement remains a poorly understood concept in men’s behaviour and attitudinal change. The position taken in this study is that engagement is likely to *contribute to improved outcomes* but that it cannot be assumed that increased engagement, in itself, means safer outcomes for family members (Higgins, Larson, & Schnall, 2017).

Many family relationship agencies and practitioners are involved in responses to domestic and family violence, including work with families and behaviour change intervention with male perpetrators. Exploring the specific approaches used by practitioners who work in voluntary, community-based agencies provides a valuable opportunity to examine different ways of engaging men with the potential to lead to change. Invitational narrative approaches have been identified as an emerging means for engaging with male perpetrators of violence (Mackay et al., 2015). It has been argued that the invitational narrative commitment to helping men uncover their beliefs and assumptions about using violence provides a foundation for exploring the ways in which violence is enacted and supported in the context of daily life (Katic, 2016). This is in contrast to the emphasis of psychological explanations on individual motivation, cognition and decision-making. The application of invitational narrative approaches to work with men who use violence against women and children is, however, very much under-researched. However, the limited evidence that does exist indicates the value of invitational narrative approaches for engaging men and points to some promising results (Busch, 2007; Erbes, Stillman, Wieling, Bera, & Leskela, 2014).

This study contributes to the limited evidence available on how invitational narrative approaches are used in the domestic and

family violence field. It focused on invitational narrative ways of engaging and working with men who perpetrate domestic and family violence. Focusing on the processes and skills of practice embedded in invitational narrative ideas enabled the examination of different ways of engaging men that have the potential to lead to sustained change. Accordingly, the main aim of this study was to explore invitational narrative ways of working in order to build an understanding of the processes and skills that engage men and enable behavioural and attitudinal change.

The study sought to document:

- how invitational and narrative approaches have been taken up in the field of domestic violence;
- the journey of engagement from the viewpoints of men, women and practitioners; and
- invitational and narrative practice principles that enable behavioural and attitudinal changes in men.

The following research questions guided the study:

- How do invitational narrative ways of working engage men who use violence in their intimate relationships?
- How do invitational narrative ways of working understand men’s behavioural and attitudinal change?
- How do invitational narrative ways of working promote safety for women?
- How do invitational narrative ways of working support perpetrator accountability?
- What is it about invitational narrative approaches (when used with perpetrators of domestic violence) that work, for whom, and in what circumstances?

## Methodology

The theoretical framework for this project was informed by post-structuralist and feminist ideas (Wendt & Zannettino, 2015). Together such ideas view gender relations between men and women as being constituted in language and discourse, therefore gender inequalities are seen as the product of dominant discourses. Gender is contested, fluid, unstable and open to change (Wendt & Zannettino, 2015,

p. 30). Post-structural and feminist ideas informed the project because they allow a focus on the complexities and nuances of gender positioning in experiences of domestic and family violence, including how gender interacts with multiple social conditions, processes and discourses in the lives of men and women (Wendt & Zannettino, 2015, p. 32). Furthermore, invitational and narrative practices incorporate post-structural and feminist ideas (Payne, 2014, p. 257) to explore with clients how meanings of gender and domestic and family violence are constructed in their lives and society more broadly (Connolly & Harms, 2015) as well as how dominant discourses normalise certain “truths” about gender and domestic and family violence (Connolly & Harms, 2015, p. 143).

The task of this project was not to determine a truth about invitational narrative practice. Instead, it was to describe, as accurately as possible, the use of invitational narrative ideas in practice with men who use violence for the purpose of understanding how it enables engagement, behaviour and attitudinal change. Using a layered, qualitative design, this project partnered with Uniting Communities Adelaide to explore key principles and skills used in invitational narrative practice to engage men who use violence in their intimate partner relationships. The qualitative design was influenced by participatory action research ideas and developmental evaluation principles that enabled the research team to work closely with managers and practitioners at Uniting Communities throughout the project to plan, conduct and reflect on the research. Participatory action research principles (Baum, MacDougall & Smith, 2006; Neuman, 2006) were combined with Patton’s (2011) developmental evaluation approach to guide the conduct of this research. A developmental evaluation approach was taken because it was not the intention of the project to evaluate any one particular men’s behaviour change program in terms of its success, but rather to explore a particular way of working (invitational narrative) across different stages of intervention. The study had two stages:

- **Stage 1:** A deductive method was used to purposively search literature to extract the key principles and skills of engagement embedded in invitational narrative approaches. Because of the lack of literature specifically on invitational narrative approaches, Stage 1 also included conversations

with seven key informants regarding the history of invitational narrative approaches in South Australia. For the purpose of this study, key informants were those individuals selected for a conversation on the basis of their role, expertise and/or recognised contribution to the field of invitational narrative approaches in South Australia. Stage 1 produced a State of knowledge review which informed Stage 2.

- **Stage 2:** An exploratory and inductive method was utilised, which enabled practitioners, men and their ex/partners to talk about their experiences of invitational narrative practice. This study was not an evaluation of invitational approaches or narrative therapy, but an exploration of how practitioners use invitational narrative ideas in their practice with men, how men experience and notice this themselves, and how ex/partners regarded changes in men’s behaviour and attitudes. A total of five invitational narrative practitioners, 11 men who use/d violence, and five women (ex/partners) participated in Stage 2 of the study through in-depth face-to-face interviews. Transcribed interview data were interpreted using narrative analysis guided by thematic and structural coding to enable commentary on the key principles of invitational narrative practice in engaging men and its implications for both men’s change and the safety of women and children. Qualitative validity and reliability of the narrative analysis were achieved through cross-checking across multiple researchers.

## Key findings

This study focused on the use of invitational narrative approaches in work with men who use violence against women and children. While closely related and underpinned by shared post-structuralist and critical feminist ideas, narrative therapy and invitational practice are two separate approaches with distinct origins in South Australia. The literature reviewed highlights the key principles, processes and skills of both approaches to engaging men in work towards behavioural and attitudinal change.

## Stage 1: How does invitational narrative practice engage with men?

The histories of narrative therapy and invitational practice are intertwined with a shared goal of engaging men in respectful conversations that enable them to see themselves differently—in ways that do not countenance violence—and, ultimately, to behave and think differently. Both approaches are underpinned by the assumption that, with skilled and careful facilitation, men are capable of generating their own commitments to non-violence and to honouring the needs, rights and interests of others. Notions of responsibility, power and gender are also central to both approaches, based on the recognition that violence is a choice and reflected in its strong orientation towards behavioural change. Broadly understood, the process of invitational narrative engagement concerns the work associated with men locating responsibility for their own realisations and achievements within themselves. The basic premise of this work is that change is more likely to occur when clients own the solutions and when those solutions have real meaning in their lives.

Invitational narrative practice has a commitment to the power of narratives and storytelling to engage men who use violence. Practitioners use the metaphor of stories to challenge minimisation, denial and apathy in men's accounts of their use of violence against women and children. Through storytelling and purposeful conversations, men are encouraged by practitioners to uncover their assumptions and look for inconsistencies and contradictions in their own stories, thereby enabling the potential for alternative narratives through attitudinal and behaviour change.

The invitational narrative approach to engaging men is informed by core principles including, an emphasis on respect and competency. Individualised explanations of violence as the outcome of skills/knowledge deficits or personality traits are seen as inherently problematic, serving to both undermine personal agency and exclude possibilities for other ways of being. Instead, in its focus on competency, invitational narrative practice views men as inherently capable of engaging in conversations about cultural contexts, ideology, personal choice and responsibility. A concern

with ethics and ethical behaviour, emphasising men's own potential for ethical reflection and realisation, is also central to invitational narrative practice. A focus on restraining ideas, rather than causes of violence or *why* men use violence, further distinguishes invitational narrative practice from other individually-focused interventions and is evident in the attention paid to what *stops* men from behaving respectfully. The exploration of restraining ideas is used to open up conversations about dominant (hegemonic) forms of masculinity in the context of gender, power and control. Furthermore, the experience of shame is central to invitational narrative practices: supporting men to reflect upon their shame is seen as an important step towards naming violence and acknowledging its effects on other people. Conversations about shame are also seen as a key forum for men exploring their ethical preferences, which, in invitational narrative practice, are seen as the crucial foundation for behavioural change.

An emphasis on responsibility and change is central to invitational narrative practice and is reflected in its overriding commitment to women and children's safety and its accountability to their perspectives and experiences. The role of the practitioner in assisting men to develop the competencies necessary to change their behaviour further exemplifies the invitational narrative focus on active change. Crucially, invitational narrative approaches are directed towards social transformation, not merely personal or individual change, by drawing attention to the structural and socio-cultural context that both shapes and transcends men's individual choices to use violence. An analysis of gender-based power, privilege and entitlement is foundational to invitational narrative approaches and is carried through into its key skills and practices.

## Stage 2: What works for engagement?

This study found that, in order to engage men who use violence, invitational narrative practitioners seek to form a respectful alliance, making it possible to work constructively with men without positioning them as intrinsically problematic or deficient. Seeing men as competent, rather than deviant or hopeless, thus enables engagement. Practitioners were able to open up conversations with men about their use of violence

by adopting a stance of curiosity. Specifically, analysis of the interviews with men and practitioners showed that exploring men's ethical preferences can enable constructive and non-defensive conversations and, moreover, that by paying attention to perceived restraints, men can be positioned as agentic and capable of change. Practitioners demonstrated their skill in their attention to hearing men's perspectives and lived experience, not as "truth" or excuses, but rather, by exploring shame, as a way to connect with men's ethical preferences and the potential for change.

Key findings of this study included the significance of understanding restraining ideas, as well as examining men's experience of shame and the importance of naming violence and its effects for perpetrator accountability in invitational narrative practice. Exploring what restrains men from living in accordance with their ethical preferences provided practitioners with a critical point of engagement, enabling the men to realise and reconnect with principles of responsibility and accountability. The act of naming violence and articulating its effects on women and children, in the context of deep reflection and the articulation of shame, was seen by the invitational narrative practitioners as a key indicator of change. Perpetrator accountability was conceptualised in relation to the interweaving of men's realisation of their preferred ethics, their insights into the influence of societal and cultural stories concerning gender and violence, and their recognition of the harms done to others. Accountability, in invitational narrative practice, is thus positioned as a political project, not one that resides solely within the individual, reflecting its orientation to a broader social movement of accountability.

The invitational narrative focus on men's particular stories and backgrounds, rather than universally applicable generalisations, makes the approach a potentially powerful intervention for achieving deep and sustainable change. In order to achieve this potential though, time and space is required by practitioners to focus on contextualised meaning-making; invitational narrative practice is slow work. The building blocks for responsibility-oriented work include slowed-down conversations, curiosity about men's stories and the contradictions within these, and the deliberative working through of men's routine explanations for their violence. The

closely considered, iterative nature of the work represents the deep engagement that makes it possible for men to experience difficult feelings, such as shame, without judgement, in order to realise their ethical preferences. Invitational narrative approaches may thus be distinguished by the commitment to open, contextualised and responsive practice in which men are supported to reach their own realisations within the context of their individual lives. While time-intensive, the creation of a richer story informed by ethical preferences can provide men with an anchor, both in terms of accountability and as the basis for sustainable, long-term change.

The specific philosophical underpinnings of invitational narrative practice, influenced by post-structural, feminist ideas, distinguish it from more conventional approaches such as those associated with psychological and other individually-focused interventions. Post-structural feminist ideas draw attention to the exercise of power through "socially available discourses" (Barrett, 2005, p. 88) which normalise certain "truths" about gender and domestic and family violence (Connolly & Harms, 2015, p. 143). Effective invitational narrative practice thus relies upon highly trained practitioners who are well-versed in such ideas and committed to a critical understanding of structural power relations as the context for gendered privilege and entitlement. A thorough and well-developed understanding of dominant discourses, cultural norms and gendered expectations is necessary to engage men in conversations about their individual beliefs, intentions and actions.

Effectiveness, in invitational narrative approaches, is conceptualised in terms of moments of (or movements towards) change that are unique to men's own journeys. Change may thus be evidenced in men's articulation of their key learnings and in specific attitudinal and behavioural shifts observed and confirmed by significant others, most notably women and children. As a non-standardised approach, invitational narrative practice, while highly responsive, is less amenable to measurement and quantifiable evaluation. Rather than quantitative data, the body of evidence for invitational narrative approaches encompasses the contextualised articulation of ethics and shame, together with recognition of the impacts of violence and substantiated moments of change. Claims about the effectiveness of invitational narrative practice,

as contingent on the combined insights of women and practitioners, are thus likely to be better captured by qualitative methods of inquiry.

## Implications for practitioners and policy-makers

Based on the findings of this study, there are four main implications for practitioners and policy-makers as follows:

1. Invitational narrative approaches require formalised governance arrangements that provide an authorising environment, ensuring a whole-of-agency “buy-in” that includes managers, supervisors and practitioners. This formalises the invitational narrative approach inside an agency so that is consistent across work teams and systems rather than an isolated practice used by individual practitioners. Formalisation also enables data collection, monitoring and evaluation over time, ensuring a continuing focus on effectiveness in work with men.
2. The authorising environment must encompass the larger political project of invitational narrative practice, constituting a socio-cultural gendered analysis of violence against women.
3. Ongoing training, supervision and support in invitational narrative practice enables practitioners to develop their practice over time, thereby sustaining the ethos of the invitational narrative approach. Agencies can also support practitioners in their work with men by ensuring that they have opportunities to advance their skills and work flexibly with a diversity of men.
4. Agencies adopting invitational narrative practices must invest in parallel women’s safety programs to ensure that invitational narrative practice with men is both accountable to, and supported by clear structures and systems for supporting, women and children.

narrative commitment to the power of narratives and storytelling for engaging men who use violence against women and children. The study found that invitational narrative approaches are distinguished by the commitment to open, contextualised and responsive practice in which men are supported to reach their own realisations within the context of their individual lives. It is for this reason that invitational narrative approaches can be responsive to men who use violence in their intimate partner relationships. The positioning of (perpetrator) accountability as a political project is also noteworthy, reflecting the grounding of invitational narrative approaches in a critical understanding of structural power relations as the context for gendered privilege and entitlement. The gendered analysis of power in the approach also ensures the privileging of women’s voices and centring of women and children’s safety. Given their emphasis on rich, contextualised conversation, invitational narrative approaches are relatively time and resource intensive but provide the potential for longer term, sustainable change among men who use violence in their intimate partner relationships.

## Conclusion

This study investigated invitational narrative ways of working with the aim of better understanding its use with perpetrators of domestic and family violence. It highlights the invitational



# Introduction

The effective engagement of men provides an important foundation for work to end violence against women and children. Understanding the range of strategies used by practitioners to engage men who perpetrate violence is important for informing appropriate policy and best practice in perpetrator intervention. Invitational narrative practice is identified as an emerging approach to working with male perpetrators of violence (Mackay et al., 2015). Its proponents argue that the invitational narrative commitment to helping men uncover their beliefs and assumptions about using violence provides them with a foundation for exploring the ways in which violence is supported in the context of their daily life (Katic, 2016). This is in contrast to the emphasis of psychological explanations on individual motivation, cognition and decision-making. However, the application of invitational narrative approaches to work with men who use violence against women and children is very much under researched. The limited evidence that does exist indicates the value of invitational narrative approaches for engaging men and points to some promising results (Busch, 2007; Erbes et al., 2014). In the ANROWS State of knowledge review *Perpetrator interventions in Australia: Part one – Literature review* (Mackay et al., 2015), narrative therapy was identified as a form of psychotherapy that has been adopted by some non-government organisations in Australia. In the review, narrative therapy features as an “emerging and evolving approach to family and domestic violence”, and is discussed alongside restorative justice as an approach that is not “generally accepted or used in the field of perpetrator interventions programs” (Mackay et al., 2015, p. 17).

This study focused on invitational narrative ways of engaging and working with men who perpetrate domestic and family violence. Focusing on the processes and skills of practice embedded in invitational narrative ideas enabled an examination of different ways of engaging men that have the potential to lead to sustained change. Accordingly, the main aim of this study was to explore invitational narrative ways of working in order to build understanding of the processes and skills that engage men and enable behavioural and attitudinal change.

The study sought to document:

- how invitational and narrative approaches have been taken up in the field of domestic violence;
- the journey of engagement from the viewpoints of men, women and practitioners; and
- invitational and narrative practice principles that enable behavioural and attitudinal changes in men.

The following research questions guided the study:

- How do invitational narrative ways of working engage men who use violence in their intimate relationships?
- How do invitational narrative ways of working understand men’s behavioural and attitudinal change?
- How do invitational narrative ways of working promote safety for women?
- How do invitational narrative ways of working support perpetrator accountability?
- What is it about invitational narrative approaches (when used with perpetrators of domestic violence) that work, for whom, and in what circumstances?

Using a layered, qualitative design, this project had two stages:

- **Stage 1:** involved a State of knowledge review which incorporated a deductive purposive literature review to identify key principles and skills of invitational narrative approaches in engaging men who use violence in their intimate partner relationships. Conversations were also held with seven key informants to complement the literature review and assist the researchers to understand the origins and history of invitational narrative approaches (see Appendix A for the conversation guide). Key informants were selected for conversations on the basis of their role, expertise and/or recognised contribution to the field of invitational narrative practice in South Australia. The purposive literature review and conversations with key informants which constituted the State of knowledge review also informed the construction of an interview schedule which was pivotal for Stage 2 of the project.
- **Stage 2:** engaged with practitioners, men and their ex/partners to inductively explore invitational narrative approaches. Five invitational narrative practitioners, 11 men who use or have used violence, and five women

(ex/partners) participated in the study through in-depth face-to-face interviews. Interviewing a triad (practitioners, men and ex/partner) enabled triangulation for the analysis of accountability, responsibility and women's safety. It also enabled the identification of key practice skills and principles of invitational narrative approaches from different points of view.

build greater understandings of invitational narrative ways of working in relation to the engagement of men who use violence in their intimate partner relationships.

## Rationale for the study

Debates about the effectiveness and success of invitational narrative approaches in men's perpetrator intervention programs are needed to ensure evidence-based measurements of attitudinal and behavioural changes. However, engaging and partnering with men is also an important component in ending violence against women (Donovan & Griffiths, 2015). Practices that engage men and broader facilitative approaches are being refined over time (Casey & Smith, 2010; Gray et al., 2014). There are many family relationship agencies and practitioners engaged in identifying domestic violence, working with families, and trying to engage men who use violence and motivate them to change their behaviour. Exploring the specific approaches used by practitioners who work in voluntary, community-based agencies provides a valuable opportunity to examine different ways of engaging men that have the potential to lead to change.

The study focused on invitational narrative approaches due to their particular emphasis on engaging men by drawing upon their motivations, desires, beliefs and values. The focus on men's ethics in the context of individual (one-to-one) and group work both enables and provides the basis for a shared commitment to challenging the justification or minimisation of their violence. In this context, the work of engagement centres on men taking responsibility for their own realisations and achievements so that they can more readily "own" these and enact their capacity for change (Jenkins, 1990; Katic, 2016). Violence is recognised as a choice but one that is aligned with particular beliefs and assumptions. Thus it is argued that change (behavioural and attitudinal) is more likely when men are supported to explore alternative explanations and perspectives in ways that resonate with their individual lives (Cagney, 2010). The rationale for this study was therefore to



# State of knowledge review

The State of knowledge review investigates current research and practice regarding the effective engagement of male perpetrators of family and domestic violence. The particular focus of this review is invitational narrative approaches to working with men and the ways in which engagement is understood and practiced in this context.

The ways in which practitioners conceptualise and navigate the complex terrain of men's violence and engage with men, while maintaining a focus on women's safety, are central to this research project. Serving to inform the study's key theoretical and methodological approaches to data collection and analysis, this state of knowledge review was conducted in two parts. The first part explores the current literature regarding the role and nature of engagement in direct practice settings including both generic services and perpetrator intervention services. The second part focuses on the invitational narrative approach and presents a comprehensive overview of its origins, distinct principles and specific contributions to working with perpetrators of domestic and family violence. Because of the limited range of literature focusing specifically on invitational narrative approaches in this field, the second part of the State of knowledge review draws upon conversations with seven key informants regarding the history of invitational narrative approaches in South Australia.

## Methodology for the State of knowledge review

### Literature search strategy

The State of knowledge review was informed by a methodology that allowed for a purposive sampling of literature (Cooper, 1988). Given its focus on the engagement of male perpetrators of domestic and family violence, as well as invitational narrative approaches to working with such men, the scope of literature reviewed for this project was broad, extending across research and practice realms. Despite its overall breadth, however, there were clear differences between the respective bodies of literature. For example, while engagement was mentioned frequently, this was only in general terms, and only in relation to other concepts or topics—that is, as a secondary, not a central focus of analysis. In contrast, the literature on invitational practices and narrative therapy

approaches was smaller and tended to be highly specialised in terms of both the content itself and the range of publications. Thus in planning the literature review, a mapping process was undertaken to capture the project's particular emphasis on three core, interrelated themes:

- engaging men;
- working with perpetrators of domestic and family violence; and
- invitational narrative approaches (See Figure 1).

While searching for literature in relation to any one of these areas was relatively straightforward, locating material with a focus on all three themes was significantly more challenging. It was therefore apparent from early in the literature search process that a “bottom-up”—and highly iterative—search strategy would be necessary.

Databases used to locate relevant academic literature included:

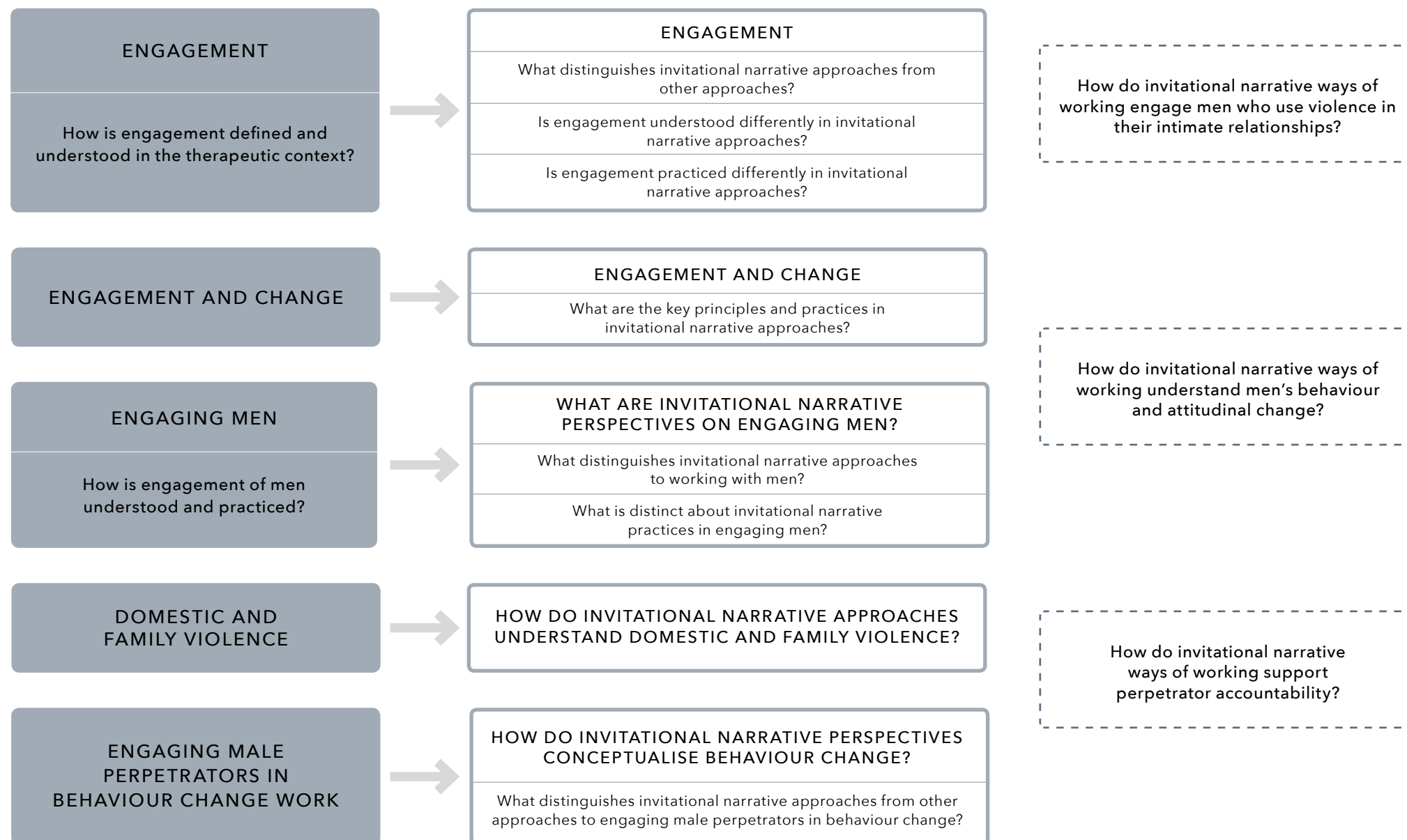
- ProQuest;
- Informit Search;
- Informit Social Science Database Collection; and
- Google Scholar.

Search terms included:

- “men's engagement”;
- “perpetrator intervention”;
- “batterer intervention”;
- “perpetrator programs”;
- “engaging men”;
- “therapeutic intervention”;
- “violence intervention”;
- “men's behaviour change”; and
- “therapeutic engagement” AND “narrative therapy” OR “invitational practice”.

The initial date range was 2000–2017, however, given the relatively small number of search results and the subsequent discovery of significant works published during the period 1990–2000, this was extended to 1990–2017 (up until 11 July 2017, the date of last search).

FIGURE 1 Literature search methodology



The scope of the review encompassed both literature with a theoretical focus, regarding the origins and principles of narrative and invitational perspectives, and grey literature with a focus on application and practice in the form of commissioned reports and issue papers produced by research centres and professional/practitioner networks. Search results included national and international sources from a range of disciplines and fields, including:

- health and social care;
- feminist/gender studies;
- violence and abuse studies; and
- therapy/counselling (narrative, family, systemic therapies).

The approach to selection for this State of knowledge review is best described as a process of “purposive sampling” (Cooper, 1988) in which the focus was on locating and reviewing only the central or key articles in the area. It is in this respect that the involvement of experts in the field (including the research partners and key informants) was critical for ensuring a comprehensive coverage of key—that is, widely known and used—works that might have otherwise been missed. “Expert sampling” (Patton, 2015) is a type of purposive sampling that is especially useful in the earlier exploratory stages of research and when there is a lack of empirical evidence in a specific topic area. Expert input therefore also ensured that contemporary and highly relevant reports, specialist agency materials and government/non-government policy and practice documents were included in the literature review. As argued by Benoot, Hannes and Bilsen (2016, p. 2), a purposeful sampling approach, such as that used here, is “not meant to be comprehensive” but instead aims to represent the “complexity of different conceptualisations”. Thus, rather than focusing on generalisability—as is the case for an exhaustive review—the “divergent and iterative” nature of the literature search process is understood as being crucial to ensure a literature review that is conceptually both rich and “robust” (Benoot, Hannes, & Bilsen, 2016, p. 10).

This methodology permitted a review of the origins and principles of invitational and narrative perspectives. The following research questions specially guided the review:

- How do invitational narrative ways of working engage men who use violence in their intimate relationships?

- How do invitational narrative ways of working understand men’s behavioural and attitudinal changes?
- How do invitational narrative ways of working support perpetrator accountability?

The identified principles informing the answers to these questions were vital in forming the interview guides and analysis frameworks, ensuring a focus on their application in the practice of working with men who use violence.

In the ANROWS State of knowledge review, *Perpetrator interventions in Australia: Part one – Literature review*, Mackay et al. (2015) identified narrative therapy as a form of psychotherapy adopted by some non-government organisations in Australia. Narrative therapy was described—alongside restorative justice—as an “emerging and evolving approach to family and domestic violence” that has not generally been “accepted or used in the field of perpetrator interventions programs” (Mackay et al., 2015, p. 17). Consequently, the State of knowledge review for this study was also informed by seven conversations with invitational narrative key informants (hereafter, key informants) in South Australia.

## Key informant conversations strategy

Conversations with key informants enabled both the compilation of a brief history of the use of invitational narrative therapies in South Australia, and an exploration of hindrances to their greater uptake in the perpetrator intervention field. The conversations were guided by the following questions:

- Why have invitational narrative approaches been constructed as “emerging and evolving” in engaging perpetrators of domestic and family violence?
- What are the influencing factors that have hindered the take-up of invitational narrative approaches in work on men’s perpetration of domestic violence?

In recognition of the general lack of knowledge about the origins and take up of invitational and narrative practices, conversations with key informants provided a primary source to complement the search for literature in the State

of knowledge review. The key informants included founders, writers, educators and eminent practitioners providing services to men who use violence in their intimate partner relationships. They were identified in consultation with managers and practitioners at Uniting Communities Adelaide (partner organisation for this study) because it has a long history of engaging with invitational narrative ideas and practices in its work with men. Prospective informants were sent an email on behalf of the research team explaining the purpose and nature of the research project and inviting them to participate. Each was provided with an information sheet and consent form (see Appendices B and C). Of the seven informants approached, all agreed to participate in the research.

The conversations with key informants focused on the history of invitational and narrative ideas in South Australia and, in particular, their application in work with men who use violence against women and children. With the exception of one telephone conversation involving an interstate informant, all interactions were conducted in person (face-to-face), audio-recorded and transcribed.

The data from conversations were analysed with a view to achieving a rich, detailed and applied understanding of the invitational narrative approach, in both principle and practice (Pawson, Greenhalgh, Harvey, & Walshe, 2005). A basic thematic analysis, using open, axial and selective coding<sup>1</sup> (Braun & Clarke, 2006), was conducted to draw out common themes, recollections and histories of invitational narrative ideas in South Australia. Analysis was grounded in the two questions above, that is, concerning the “emerging and evolving” status of invitational narrative approaches and the influences on broader take-up of invitational narrative approaches in men’s perpetrator intervention work. The key informant data also provided key contextual information regarding the structural and socio-cultural conditions in South Australia that contributed to the rise (and relative “fall”) of invitational narrative approaches.

<sup>1</sup> Open coding is the first reading of the data to condense it into preliminary analytic themes. Axial coding is the second reading in which the first themes are re-organised some more, linking them and refining them. Selective coding is the last stage where each theme is examined again to identify and select data that will support the conceptual theme (e.g. quotes).

## Findings of the State of knowledge review

This State of knowledge review findings section presents the results from both the literature search and the key informant conversations. The findings are discussed in four sections:

- **Section 1: Engagement** reviews the literature and aims to understand engagement both broadly, in generic services, as well as those involved in work with men who use violence.
- **Section 2: The invitational narrative approach** specifically explores the origins and application of invitational narrative approaches as well as their core assumptions and underpinning epistemology.
- **Section 3: Key principles for skills and engagement** discusses the key ideas, practice principles and skills for engagement of invitational narrative ways of working. This section also summarises the key tenets of the invitational narrative understanding of behavioural and attitudinal change and approach to women’s safety, and perpetrator accountability.
- **Section 4: Hindrances and learnings** from South Australia considers the hindrances identified by the key informants as influential in limiting the broader take up of invitational narrative practices.

Input from the key informants was drawn upon to provide clarity and context, as needed, throughout the preparation of the review. As a whole, the State of knowledge review—and Sections 2 and 3 in particular—informed the design of the interviewing guides (see Appendix D, E and F) and the narrative analysis protocol (Appendix G) for Stage 2 of the project.

### Section 1: Engagement

In the therapeutic domain, while the concept of engagement is neither clearly defined nor universally understood (Staudt, 2006), it is generally looked upon as an ongoing process that extends from an initial contact between service provider and client, through to the maintenance of a working relationship over time and/or the span of an intervention. Despite

variations in the definition and usage of the term (see Staudt, Lodato, & Hickman, 2012), scholars have identified the core themes of engagement as including a focus on participation, relationship and sustainability. McGinty, Diamond, Brown and McCammon (2003, p. 489) suggest that engagement is evident when “families and providers develop and maintain a connection, while simultaneously demonstrating and communicating information, needs, attitudes, and values”. Clarkson et al. (2013, p. 148) argue that engagement can be identified by “ongoing connection and participation over the course of the program of treatment”. Other scholars, such as Prinz and Miller (1991, p. 382), suggest that effective engagement begins at intake and continues through to aftercare, is responsive to changing situations and needs, and is “necessary to obtain optimal benefits from an intervention”. Engagement, it is argued, enhances client motivation through its focus on joint responsibility and collaboration (Prinz & Miller, 1991).

Although the term “engagement” is poorly defined, it is widely agreed that it involves much more than just turning up and is, in fact, central to the change process. For example, in their systematic review of engagement measures in psychosocial treatments, Tetley, Jinks, Huband and Howells (2011) identified 40 different measures across 47 studies conducted in the United States, United Kingdom (UK), Holland, New Zealand, Canada and Hong Kong and published between 1980 and February 2010. Due to a range of factors including specific design features (that is, being tailored for a specific treatment modality or clinical population), definitional variations and conceptual ambiguity, less than half of these measures were generalisable across treatment settings. They further found that the studies provided little information concerning indices of reliability and validity. Tetley et al. (2011, p. 937) thus concluded that there is a pressing need to develop measures that are both sound and comprehensive, and premised on a “scientific understanding of the construct of treatment engagement”.

Staudt, Lodato and Hickman (2012) asked service providers about their understandings of the engagement process, in particular, the definition of engagement, barriers to engagement and strategies to enhance engagement. Six focus groups were conducted with 41 community mental health

therapists, which found that while therapists saw parallels between engagement and the idea of a “helping alliance”, they nonetheless framed engagement as encompassing much more than just the client/therapist relationship. Instead, engagement was seen as a complex process affected by diverse factors relating to client characteristics—for example, prior service experiences, motivation and commitment to therapy—as well as the community and social context including the accessibility, affordability and availability of services, transportation and child-care (Staudt et al., 2012, p. 217). Importantly, Staudt et al. (2012, p. 217) emphasised the need for further research that conceptualises engagement more broadly by moving away from a focus on client attitudes and behaviours to “also include therapist and agency characteristics”.

In an earlier paper, Staudt (2006) focused on engagement with caretakers of at-risk children in order to disentangle the behavioural and attitudinal aspects of the process. Staudt (2006) described attitudinal engagement as an emotional investment on the part of the client, based on their expectation that treatment or counselling will be of benefit to them. Without attitudinal engagement, it is possible for clients to attend, comply and complete treatment without any intention to engage in a process of change. Staudt (2006) observed that attitudinal engagement tends to increase when the service provider seeks to develop a collaborative relationship by both explaining the process and their role and listening to the client’s story. Staudt (2006) also argued that, while behavioural engagement may result from attitudinal engagement, “behaviours alone do not constitute engagement” (p. 189).

Attitudinal engagement is therefore especially critical to efficacious change, and although attitudes and behaviours are distinct they are not separate domains of engagement. Rosen, Hiller, Webster, Staton and Leukefeld (2004, p. 387) argue that:

Individuals with higher behavioural and cognitive engagement in treatment attend sessions more frequently, form better therapeutic relationships, have more confidence in treatment, report more favourable perceptions of treatment, and have better treatment outcomes than do those who are less engaged in the treatment process.



Behavioural and attitudinal (or cognitive) engagement are therefore seen as intrinsically intertwined. Further, while attendance is a basic prerequisite for engagement, clients who do engage in intervention are likely to be those that perceive it as in their interest to do so.

### Purpose of engagement

Client engagement encompasses both behavioural and attitudinal aspects that have a specific purpose. For Prinz and Miller (1996), in their research on family-based treatment for child behaviour problems, the primary purpose of engagement is to retain a client in treatment so that they have an optimal chance of recovery. Engagement is characterised as ongoing, responsive to changing needs and circumstances and, crucially, is “consistently related to positive therapeutic outcomes across different psychotherapy orientations” (Boardman, Catley, Grobe, Little, & Ahluwalia, 2006, p. 330). Similarly, Rosen et al. (2004, p. 387) argue that therapeutically engaged individuals are more likely to recognise the need for treatment, desire or welcome help, and be motivated for and about treatment.

Engagement is seen as a “consistent predictor of overall therapeutic improvement” (Boardman et al., 2006, p. 330), and a mutually generated process that evolves between service provider and client. Importantly, as emphasised by Rosen et al. (2004), engagement exists on a continuum rather than in binary terms; this means recognising that engagement is not an absolute (either engaged *or* not engaged), but instead, is dynamic and fluctuates over time and at different points and stages.

### Levels of engagement

Clarkson et al. (2013) consider engagement to involve three interconnecting levels, namely, the behavioural, the affective and the cognitive. In their study of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal young people in residential substance abuse treatment, they observed an association between “proper” engagement and increased “self-esteem, competence and control, personal and social skills, greater sense of self-direction, and a reduction in problem behaviour” (Clarkson et al., 2013, p. 148). Level of engagement is, however, influenced by numerous variables including “therapeutic alliance,

accessibility of care, and a client’s trust that the treatment will address his/her own unique goals” (Dixon, Holoshitz, & Nossel, 2016, p. 13). Prado et al. (2002), for example, highlight the significance of therapist qualities and behaviour and, in turn, the relationship between client and therapist, for levels of engagement. In their study of HIV-affected African-American women, Prado et al. (2002) also refer to the impact of factors such as “daily hassles, available social support, disagreements with significant other, and psychological distress” (p. 148) but note the ability of service providers to positively influence engagement by maintaining an open and respectful stance of “unconditional positive regard” while refraining from “evaluative (negative or positive) feedback” (p. 145).

### Engagement with men

Additional complexities and challenges are associated with the process of engagement in certain contexts and with certain groups. Men’s “underutilization of psychological services and psychotherapy” (Nahon & Lander, 2008, p. 649), for example, is well documented, and options for addressing this—including by enhancing men’s engagement—have been widely canvassed. Focusing on group settings, Andronico (1996) emphasises honouring the values of individuals as well as the importance of respectful approaches in the recruitment and engagement phases of therapeutic programs. In finding a “strong correlation” between engagement and “treatment progress”, Levenson and Macgowan (2004, p. 60) demonstrated the potential for measures of engagement to inform treatment through early identification and mitigation of “engagement difficulties” (p. 61). Using the Group Engagement Measure (GEM) to assess behavioural components of engagement such as attendance, contributing to the group, relating to the worker and other group members, and working on their own and others’ problems, Levenson and Macgowan (2004, p. 59) emphasised the significance of engagement-enhancing techniques such as positive encouragement to “support client ownership of change”.

In their research on men in heterosexual couple counselling, Samman and Knudson-Martin (2015) refer to “relational engagement” as “The ability to demonstrate commitment to one’s relationships and actively participate in the therapeutic process through acknowledging and intentionally attending to their female partner’s experiences” (p. 79). Samman and

Knudson-Martin (2015) further highlighted the value of focusing on gendered socio-cultural context while paying attention to the effects of the man's behaviour on his partner. While not specific to domestic violence intervention, Samman and Knudson-Martin's (2015) observations nonetheless point to the importance of relational engagement in enabling men to both hear women's experiences and explore alternative responses and reactions. In concluding that "what therapists do matters", Samman and Knudson-Martin (2015, p. 88) highlight the limitations of an individualistic focus on men's "own thoughts and feelings". Thus, while men's experience of "personal and relational validation" is important for engagement, this must be accompanied by work that focuses on men being "able to recognize and take accountability for the impact of their behaviors on their partners" (Samman & Knudson-Martin, 2015, p. 88).

### Engaging men who use violence in behavioural change

The need to understand "how to better engage men in the context of perpetrator programs" (Mackay et al., 2015, p. 48) is widely acknowledged, however, there remains limited research and knowledge in this area. For example, in a review of 769 abstracts published in major domestic and family violence journals, Campbell, Neil, Jaffe and Kelly (2010) found that less than 1 percent of these had a focus on engaging men in treatment.

For Berkowitz (2004), best practice in perpetrator intervention requires that men are actively engaged in interactive sessions over a sustained period of time, delivered in the context of a coordinated community response that includes bystander interventions and awareness/violence prevention campaigns. Berkowitz (2004) highlighted, in particular, the importance of promoting positive messages that can contribute to men seeing themselves in new and different ways. Kozar and Day (2017, p. 216) understand engagement in this context as a way of working that is tailored to individual "literacy, cognitive capacity, and mental health symptoms" and sensitive to "factors such as levels of defensiveness, anti-authoritarian attitudes, self-entitlement, and interpersonal problems". Research has found that a key factor enhancing men's motivation to engage with services is often their own desire to be "better people" and take control of their behaviour (Mackay et al.,

2015, p. 26). Programs that embed individual goal-setting and address issues of choice, attitudes and motivations during early contacts are likely to positively influence men's engagement in the process of change. For example, in their study of a men's perpetrator (community) program, Campbell et al. (2010) found that the men were more likely to engage when they perceived the group facilitator/s to be knowledgeable, trustworthy, non-judgemental about domestic and family violence and willing to maintain confidentiality. In other research, a qualitative study of program facilitators and male perpetrators (program participants) by Chovanec (2014) found that a focus on active learning, through strategies such as "small group exercises [and] dyadic discussion" designed to stimulate learning, was important to engaging men. Consistent with a mutual-aid group approach, listening to "other men's stories" was also identified as a key "motivator for change" (Chovanec, 2014, p. 346).

While research into the factors influencing male service users' engagement in therapeutic group work is limited, it does exist (for example, see Mason & Adler, 2012). However, there is a genuine dearth of research concerning the link between perpetrator engagement in programs and behavioural and attitudinal change. Thus, although men may seem to engage well in group or individual intervention, it is not currently possible to be definite regarding whether and how this influences or translates into increased safety for women and children. For example, while it has been argued that men who form good relationships with their therapists within the first 6 months of contact are significantly more likely to remain in therapy (McAndrew, Chambers, Nolan, Thomas, & Watts, 2014), this tells us little about the achievement of specific outcomes. More generally, despite the oft-repeated claim that therapeutic relationships are the lynchpin for effective interventions, the ways and means for measuring this are the subject of much debate (McAndrew et al., 2014). In sum, engagement remains a poorly understood concept in men's behaviour and attitudinal change. The position taken in this study is that engagement is likely to *contribute to* improved outcomes but that it cannot be assumed that increased engagement, in itself, means safer outcomes for family members (Higgins et al., 2017).

### Perpetrator programs: Models and approaches

Most group work that addresses male abuse identifies coercive control as the overarching pattern that underpins men's use of violence towards their female partners (Westmarland, Kelly, & Chalder-Mills, 2010). In such groups, facilitators aim to engage with men about issues of power and control, usually within a gender-based, cognitive behavioural approach (Babcock, Green, & Robie, 2004). The feminist-informed Duluth model is widely-used and seeks to engage men in order to challenge their beliefs regarding their right to control and dominate female partners (Pence & Paymar, 1993). While, in practice, many perpetrator programs are likely to "combine elements of several models" (Ferraro, 2017, p. 3), the Duluth model is commonly described as psycho-educational in that it emphasises both educating men about domestic violence dynamics, and men's responsibility for change. Accordingly, it is understood, not as treatment, but as an "educational intervention" that sits within a broader "community coordinated response" (Ferraro, 2017, p. 4). In contrast, cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT) based groups focus on changing behaviours by working with men to develop skills of non-violent behaviour. In practice, however, not all CBT groups are "strictly 'cognitive' or 'behavioral'" (Dunford, 2000 as cited in Babcock et al., 2004, p. 1026) and, increasingly, most do incorporate a focus on attitudes and beliefs about women. On this basis, Babcock et al. (2004) argue that the distinction between CBT and Duluth group models may be less significant than is often assumed.

Babcock et al. (2004) conducted a meta-analysis of court-mandated programs for abusers in the United States. The aim of the meta-analysis was to compare the recidivism rates of two group approaches, one based on CBT and the other applying the Duluth model, by measuring post-program changes in the incidences of violent acts based on victim/survivor reports and police records. The findings revealed that only 22 of the 68 programs reviewed were deemed to have used sufficiently rigorous evaluation for inclusion in the study. In their findings, Babcock et al. (2004) reported that the group programs had minimal impact on reoffending, and that there was no significant difference in effectiveness between the Duluth and CBT approaches. A comprehensive response subsequently released by Paymar and Barnes (2007)

countered these findings as well as other critiques of the Duluth model. In rebutting "inaccurate assumptions and myths", Paymar and Barnes (2007, p. 1) argued that "much of the criticism [of the Duluth model] is based on flawed research that is contradicted by other better-designed, more comprehensive studies".

More recently, Ferraro (2017) has highlighted the continuing limitations of research in this area. Pointing to "inconsistent evidence" regarding effectiveness and the significant "barriers to conducting rigorous evaluations", Ferraro (2017, p. 16) concludes that existing research is an inadequate base for recommending "one form of treatment over others". Similarly, in a systematic review of perpetrator program evaluations across six European countries, Akoensi, Koehler, Lösel and Humphreys (2012, p. 1206) observed that the "methodological quality" of these were "insufficient to draw firm conclusions". While noting high attrition rates as a common concern and arguing for a greater focus on both engagement and responsiveness to individual characteristics and learning styles, they concluded that evaluation research is "still at an early stage": "we do not yet know what works best, for whom and under what circumstances" (Akoensi, Koehler, Lösel & Humphreys, 2012, p. 1220). Further collaboration between policy-makers, service providers and researchers is thus critical to building an evidence-base for strengthening perpetrator intervention programs.

A UK study by Phillips, Kelly and Westmarland, in 2013, sought to delineate the evolution of programs for male domestic violence perpetrators in the region. Highlighting the diversity of perspectives on the role and purpose of perpetrator programs, they observed the importance of "processes of adaptation, amalgamation and innovation" (Phillips et al., 2013, p. 10) in response to "changing policy landscapes and political debates" (p. 15). The safety of women and children has nonetheless been an enduring focus, along with an emphasis on men taking responsibility for their violence and abuse. The group setting was seen as particularly appropriate for engaging men, exploring their beliefs, fears and feelings, and enabling mutual learning and peer challenges. However, concerns were raised regarding the potential for group programs to become "over-manualised" due to prescriptive standardisation or insufficient responsiveness, and delivery



by unskilled or inexperienced workers (Phillips et al., 2013, p. 13). Women's support services, working alongside perpetrator group programs, were seen as imperative. Overall, the authors noted that a "rich diversity of practice" exists that is "underpinned by a gender-based analysis of domestic violence" which informs "therapeutic understandings" (Phillips et al., 2013, p. 15).

In a briefing paper for Respect, the UK accreditation association for domestic violence perpetrator programs, Westmarland et al. (2010) considered what counts as "success". They interviewed 22 perpetrators of domestic and family violence who had engaged in behavioural change programs, 18 partners of men who had participated in such programs, 6 program funders and 27 program workers including facilitators, women's support workers and managers. The perpetrators who participated in the programs were either required to do so by child protection agencies or family courts, or had self-referred. In all, 73 semi-structured interviews were conducted to elicit information on the meaning of success for various stakeholders. A thematic analysis of all interviews found six overarching criteria for success that applied whether or not the couple stayed together. These included: an improved relationship between men and their ex/partners underpinned by effective communication and respect; increased empowerment of ex/partners through restored voice and choices; freedom from violence and safety for women and children; positive, shared and safe parenting; enhanced awareness of self and other men, including more understanding of the effects of violence on women and children; and safe, healthy childhoods for children who felt heard and cared for (Westmarland et al., 2010, p. 16).

Westmarland et al. (2010, p. 16) concluded, on the basis of their study, that success "means far more than just ending the violence". Ensuring a focus on the enhanced wellbeing of children, women and men implied a broader understanding of success, encompassing less visible forms of abuse as well as improved relationships and, for women, "having a voice and more space for action" (Westmarland & Kelly, 2013, p. 1108). Seeking to change "men's ways of engaging with others, through self-reflection, more open and honest communication" is therefore important, both in its own right and because it "removes some of the barriers" to engagement for perpetrators (Westmarland & Kelly, 2013, p. 1108). Thus

although cessation of violence is critical, identifying this as the only measure of "success" overlooks the broader hopes for change envisioned by men, their partners and their service providers (Westmarland et al., 2010; Westmarland & Kelly, 2013).

### Other forums for engaging men

Many accounts of perpetrator intervention in the literature concern programs based on a gender-based, cognitive behavioural model (Brown & James, 2014; Chovanec, 2014; Ferraro, 2017; McMaster & Gregory, 2003; Murphy & Baxter, 1997; Päivinen & Holma, 2017; Phillips et al., 2013). Group work is popular because it is believed that the peer context is important for enabling men to engage and challenge each other with regard to victim-blaming and denial (Murphy & Baxter, 1997). Engaging with men to address their violence is not, however, confined to group work and programs; in practice, this can take place in a range of other forums including individual and/or couple counselling and other settings. Thus, the pathways for engaging men to address their use of violence do not necessarily begin with their mandatory or voluntary involvement in a behavioural change program.

McCollum and Stith (2008, p. 187) acknowledge that the use of "conjoint couples treatment" for domestic violence is contentious but point to a "growing body of research and practice experience indicating that it can be effective and safe". In explaining their own commitment to couple therapy, McCollum and Stith argue that paying attention to "individual and social context" makes it possible to "both hold violent partners accountable *and* examine couple interaction" (2008, p. 188, emphasis in original). This is especially important given the relatively high proportion of women who either choose not to leave, or to return to, violent relationships. While emphasising the importance of "start[ing] where the client is at" (Stith & McCollum, 2011, p. 314), they are nonetheless clear that work with couples is not always appropriate in this context and must be accompanied by careful screening, ongoing safety assessment and contingency planning (McCollum & Stith, 2008, pp. 197-198).

Karakurt, Whiting, van Esch, Bolen and Calabrese (2016) and Päivinen and Holma (2017) reach similar conclusions,

emphasising the necessity of selection criteria—which should include severity of violence, issues of consent and safety, and perpetrator readiness to take responsibility—to inform decision-making regarding the suitability of the couple treatment modality. Päivinen and Holma’s (2017) focus on “gender awareness” in couple therapy, or ensuring that gender and power are addressed in therapeutic conversations, is particularly relevant. Highlighting the lack of “wider acceptance and inclusion of feminist ideas” (Päivinen & Holma, 2017, p. 224) in therapeutic training, theory and practice, Päivinen and Holma argue that clinicians involved in work with couples must both “acknowledge and address the gender order and embedded gendered power” (2017, p. 229) and engage in ongoing self-reflection with respect to their own gender positioning.

Couple counselling when domestic and family violence is present remains a contentious issue. However, Wendt, Buchanan, Dolman and Moss (2018) presented practice principles and skills informed by narrative ways of working that can be used to engage in conversations about domestic violence when it is noticed in the couple counselling context. The study provided insight into the levels of intensity and knowledge required by counsellors to recognise, engage and navigate safety concerns when domestic violence is noticed; yet they also recommended that further research is needed in this space.

### The National Outcome Standards for Perpetrator Interventions

Paying attention to the delivery and outcomes of perpetrator interventions is imperative because, without this, “[m]en who use violence can become invisible within the system that is supposed to hold them to account” (Council of Australian Governments, 2015, p. 4). An initiative of the Commonwealth of Australia, the *National Outcome Standards for Perpetrator Interventions* (NOSPI) focuses on the standards for engaging men who perpetrate domestic and family violence while also identifying the range of services, including justice and legal services, behavioural change programs (mandated or voluntary) and counselling services, involved in this work. The NOSPI’s specification that services “respond effectively to perpetrators and circumstances at all the key points of

engagement with them in the perpetrator accountability system” (COAG, 2015, p. 8) reflects the recognition that engagement is an active and ongoing process, not a “one-off” task.

The NOSPI also outline the services that may be involved, in a range of ways, with a perpetrator client-group, including mental health services, drug and alcohol services and family relationship services. In Standard 2: Perpetrators get the right interventions at the right time, it is emphasised that engagement of perpetrators can be enhanced through the provision of a broad range of services that are accessible, offer the right intervention at the right time, and are integrated with other treatment and support services. This ensures that “the right parts of the system can engage with the perpetrator at the most effective times to reduce the risk of him committing violence and minimise the impacts of any violence that does occur” (COAG, 2015, p. 8).

In addition to the responsibility of services to engage with men who perpetrate violence against women, the NOSPI also addresses issues that are specific to male perpetrators. For example, Standard 6: People working in perpetrator intervention systems are skilled in responding to the dynamics and impacts of domestic, family and sexual violence, relates to the need for services and programs to be adaptable to the needs and interests of men from diverse cultures, circumstances and communities. Engagement here relates to perpetrator attendance, active participation and the completion of intervention programs. Confirming the observation made earlier in this report, the NOSPI also alludes to the lack of clarity concerning engagement, instead referring to the various tasks and actions associated with both services engaging men and men engaging with services.

It is evident that engagement in the therapeutic setting plays an important role in enabling the potential for behavioural change outcomes. Engaging men in this context, however, requires a clear and unambiguous focus on both men’s responsibility for their violence and the immediate implications for women and children’s safety. Further research is necessary to understand more fully the nature and limitations of engagement with male perpetrators as well as the specific implications for and in practice.

## Section 2: The invitational narrative approach

Gaining an understanding of effective ways to engage men within a therapeutic setting was a central goal of this research project. Specifically, the study aimed to explore and build greater understandings of invitational narrative approaches to engaging men who use violence in their intimate partner relationships. Section 2 of this State of knowledge review is therefore devoted to discussing the origins and key principles of invitational and narrative ideas and practices, with a particular focus on the dynamics of engagement in scaffolding men's attitudinal and behavioural change.

### Origins of invitational narrative practice in South Australia

While closely related, narrative therapy and invitational practice are two separate counselling approaches with distinct origins. Both were developed in the early-mid 1980s by practitioners associated with the Dulwich Centre in Adelaide, South Australia. Michael White (then Director of the Dulwich Centre) created narrative therapy in collaboration with David Epston, as outlined in their co-authored book *Narrative means to therapeutic ends*, published in 1990. White continued to write about and present his evolving ideas regarding therapeutic applications of the narrative metaphor—working with clients to “place the events of their lives into storylines” (White, 2001, p. 135)—extensively until his death in 2008.

Incorporating but also expanding on narrative therapy concepts, Alan Jenkins set out an “invitational practice” model, focusing specifically on work with male perpetrators of violence, in his 1990 book *Invitations to responsibility: The therapeutic engagement of men who are violent and abusive*. After further developing the invitational model, he went on to write and publish another book, *Becoming ethical: A parallel, political journey with men who have abused*, in 2009. Jenkins's emphasis on responsibility and practices of accountability is recognised as adding significant value to perpetrator interventions in the narrative therapy tradition. For example, Brown (2016, p. 135) notes that Jenkins's work, while “philosophical and theoretical”, nonetheless “provides very practical ramifications for therapeutic intervention in

interpersonal violence”. In this context, the term “invitational narrative” is used to refer to models of intervention that incorporate aspects of both White's narrative therapy and Jenkins's invitational practice.

Invitational narrative key informants who were consulted as part of the State of knowledge review for this study, described in their interviews a time in the 1980s when there was growing concern from police, corrections officers, the courts and practitioners in South Australia that confrontational, legalistic responses to men who perpetrated domestic and family violence were not achieving behavioural change. Psychologically based explanations and interventions for men's gendered violence were also being critiqued. Some practitioners, educators and theorists perceived that psychological approaches lacked political explanations and understanding of the social context of gendered violence, and underlying considerations of a need for new responses was the understanding that until men took responsibility for their violence nothing would change. Informed by the work of the women's movement, family therapists who identified strongly with such political perspectives and those who saw their work as engaging in partnerships identified the need to incorporate a feminist-informed standpoint in work with individual men and men's behavioral change groups. Simultaneously, a loose community of counselors and men's group work facilitators from government and non-government services and private practice were questioning, what they perceived as, the punitive approach of the widely adopted Duluth model (Pence & Paymar, 1993). They wanted to explore new ways of working with men that were neither punitive nor based on a psychological deficit model, arguing that it was possible to establish a therapeutic partnership with men that both engaged *and* encouraged them to take responsibility for their actions.

Work with men was increasingly being constructed as a political project. Narrative practice, as Michael White and his colleagues envisaged it, brought together the political and the personal, framing social change and individual change as interconnected and mutually constitutive. It is noted here that “narrative practice” rather than “narrative therapy” is the preferred term used by Dulwich Centre educators because it speaks to the collaborative, non-hierarchical

forms of engagement that narrative practice embraces (see White, 2007). Based on the recollections of key informants, White and Epston's (1990) narrative practice encompassed the broader theoretical/philosophical framework for this work, while Alan Jenkins's (1990) invitational approach was recognised as a way to engage men in practice by focusing on their capacity for change. Because the invitational approach also incorporated explicitly political elements—for example, in the emphasis on structural power as the context for men's use of power—the two approaches were seen as fitting well together.

Narrative therapy and invitational practices can be distinguished from other approaches on the basis that they both link “therapeutic psychological models of practice” (Payne, 2014, p. 257) with post-structuralist ideas and feminist principles. The influence of social constructionist thinking is evident in narrative and invitational practice because both have an emphasis on the systems of shared meaning that shape people's interactions, expectations and internalised experiences, as well as the construction of dominant stories that influence the direction of people's lives in important ways (Connolly & Harms, 2015, p. 141). The influence of post-structural perspectives is evident in the attentiveness to matters of power and knowledge, and in particular “in relation to the normalisation of certain ‘truths’ and the silencing of others” (Connolly & Harms, 2015, p. 143). Narrative therapy and invitational practices are generally grouped together with strengths and solutions-based approaches to practice (Connolly & Harms, 2015; Payne, 2014) on the basis of their collective origins in “social construction theory in social psychology” (Payne, 2014, p. 261). Reflecting their shared focus on “the stories we live by”, Connolly and Harms (2015, p. 135) describe these practice approaches as “story-telling” theories, grounded in both social constructionist and “systems theories, anthropology, feminism, postmodern, [and the] post-structural” (Connolly & Harms, 2015, p. 139). These influences inform the invitational narrative emphasis on the careful balance between education and therapy, the collaborative nature of the therapeutic relationship, and the ethical responsibilities of workers.

The philosophical and ontological foundations of narrative and invitational approaches were emphasised by the key informants,

along with the ways in which these translate in practice to nuanced, skillful forms of ethical engagement. Reflecting a social justice orientation, power relations in the therapeutic relationship are acknowledged and mitigated by practitioners who seek to build more egalitarian connections with their clients. The narrative and invitational approaches share a common goal of engaging men in respectful conversations that enable them to see themselves differently—in ways that do not countenance violence—and, ultimately, to behave differently.

In summary, the histories of narrative practice and invitational ideas may be seen as intertwined. Although educators at the Dulwich Centre do not identify with the word “invitational”, in the course of discussion the key informants found it difficult to distinguish between the two, observing that the approaches have developed alongside each other, with a shared basis in non-hierarchical perspectives. Notions of responsibility, power and gender are also central to both. Together, Jenkins's emphasis on inviting men to take up responsibility combined with narrative principles and practices led to a rethinking of how services were delivered, with a focus on men's preferred ways of being. Originally based on the narrative concept of alternative stories, the incorporation of invitational practices added a focus on engaging men to conceptualise alternative (self) identities. Further, while inviting men to speak about and reflect upon their values and ethics is consistent with narrative ideas, this was a key element in the blueprint for invitational practice. As explained by one of the key informants, the initial focus of narrative approaches on dealing with men's trauma in the context of dominant (societal) ideas provided the foundation for the invitational emphasis on men's accountability for the impacts of their issues on other people.

### Invitational narrative approaches in practice

Between the 1980s and 2000, the context for domestic and family violence prevention and intervention in South Australia was marked by an openness to experimentation and innovation. Under a (then) Labor state government, local community health centres played an active role and, together with non-government agencies, had a remit to address local community issues. Feminist practitioners from domestic violence shelters throughout the metropolitan area played a



prominent role in robust discussions about service provision, keeping issues of women's safety firmly on the political agenda. Networks of Domestic Violence Action Groups were established to share knowledge and coordinate approaches to working with women, children and men. Making women's and children's experiences more visible in work with men encouraged vigorous discussions concerning issues of gender accountability. The development of a sophisticated training program by the first of these Domestic Violence Action Groups led to the spread of specialised knowledge across government and non-government agencies. The greater emphasis on, and funding for, community health services at the time also provided a context in which it was possible for practitioners to position men's use of violence as a significant community issue. Thus support for narrative and invitational ideas grew as these were incorporated into program models for men's groups offered in community health centres, non-government (such as Uniting Communities)—and later, government—agencies.

Alongside this evolution in practice, in the early-mid 1990s, specialist family violence courts and aligned violence intervention programs (VIPs), based centrally and in the northern suburbs of Adelaide, were also being established. While the Courts Administration Authority had overall responsibility, the VIP services for both men (case management and perpetrator intervention) and women (victim support, advocacy and liaison) were outsourced via contracts with external agencies. Around this same time, the South Australian state government, through the Domestic Violence Unit located within the Office for Families and Children, formed a working group culminating in the development of the *Competency standards for intervention workers: Working with men who perpetrate domestic abuse and violence* (South Australia. Office for Families and Children, 1997). In addition to the standards, the document outlined guiding principles for practice in line with the narrative and invitational focus on accountability, respect, responsibility and fairness. The VIPs, amongst other service providers, were expected to adhere to these competency standards. The 24-week Stopping Violence groups for court-referred men were central to the VIP. As “a model of best practice for group work with men who wish to stop violent and abusive behaviour towards their women partners and family” (Northern Metropolitan Community Health Service [NMCHS], 1997), the Stopping

Violence program was developed by a committee, including narrative and invitational practitioners, and accompanied by specialised training and a 210-page manual. Stopping Violence remained the model of practice, in both the VIPs and other settings, including community health services, until 2011. At that time, the contract for perpetrator (men's) services was moved to a new provider who replaced it with a new program model based on the North American “moral reconnection therapy” (Little & Robinson, 1988). Drawing upon Kohlberg's stages of moral development, moral reconnection therapy shares with cognitive-behavioural therapy a focus on reasoning but, unlike CBT, is focused on moral reasoning (Fraser & Seymour, 2017, p. 177). The aim of the moral reconnection approach is to “move offenders from a lower, hedonistic level of moral reasoning (pleasure vs. pain) to a higher level where social rules and others become important” (Ferguson & Wormith, 2013, p. 3).

Influenced by the narrative work of the Dulwich Centre and the invitational practices developed by Alan Jenkins, the political contexts for personal change, resistance to dominant-culture ideas, and notions of responsibility have nonetheless continued to be explored as the foundations for practice with men. As emphasised by the key informants, despite significant shifts in South Australia's political and service delivery context, there remains a critical mass of people committed to the sharing and promulgation of narrative and invitational ideas and practices. Commenting on South Australia in the 1980-90s, one of the key informants observed that:

[there] always seemed to me to be, kind of, a real breeding grounds for people who had interest in alternative types of therapies and often people with really strong political understandings of the world which were probably conducive to narrative ideas or invitational ideas.

Other informants remember this period as revolutionary in terms of both the growth of narrative and invitational practices and approaches to perpetrator intervention, and point to the coming together of a range of factors including a receptive state government, broader recognition of the personal/political nexus, a strong community development focus, and interest in invitational and narrative ideas.

### Assumptions of invitational narrative practice

Invitational and narrative practices assume that education and therapy can, and do, co-occur in perpetrator work (Augusta-Scott & Dankwort, 2002). As Vlasis (2014, pp. 3–4) states, both approaches emphasise critical consciousness raising and active engagement with men to develop their ideas around power, ethics and fairness. It is presumed that through skilled and careful facilitation, men who use violence in their intimate partner relationships can generate their own ideas and commitments concerning non-violence and the injustices caused by the oppression of others (Vlasis, 2014, p. 4).

It is increasingly recognised that confrontational methods are “not helpful in assisting motivation and change” (Maruna & Mann, 2006, p. 167, cited in Todd, 2010, p. 68) and may instead serve to reinforce “old and destructive ways of coping” (Augusta-Scott & Dankwort, 2002, p. 799). Confrontational methods can be seen to support the client’s view that relationships are inevitably grounded in coercion and control, rather than in understanding, trust and support (Murphy & Baxter, 1997, p. 609, cited in Augusta-Scott & Dankwort, 2002, p. 800). Greenwell (2016, p. 45), for example, points to the risk that by engaging in confrontational work with perpetrators, workers may reproduce the “same culturally-sanctioned ideas of coercion and control [that] the man has participated in”. As an alternative to “authority-based” (Todd, 2010, p. 67) and confrontational approaches, invitational and narrative practices are distinct in their emphasis on “men’s desires for equal, loving, caring relationships” (Augusta-Scott & Dankwort, 2002, p. 788). The “assumption that men prefer non-abusive relationships with partners who are with them out of love rather than fear” (Augusta-Scott & Dankwort, 2002, p. 788) thus represents a crucial point of difference in relation to invitational and narrative practices of engagement.

Invitational narrative approaches advocate that workers be both “empathic and curious” in their work with clients, arguing that “understanding [men] is not the same as countenancing their actions” (Augusta-Scott & Dankwort, 2002, p. 792). Whereas in other program approaches, efforts to explore men’s feelings of helplessness, confusion and shame are “more likely to be regarded as a way a man can avoid taking responsibility”, invitational narrative practices

emphasise the “possibility of utilizing the men’s justification narratives as strategic entry points”, allowing for “effective reconstruction of blaming toward the development of new, non-abusive lifestyles” (Augusta-Scott & Dankwort, 2002, p. 792). Conventional notions of “client resistance” and avoidance are thus reframed as “evidence of men’s preferences for equal, just, and respectful relationships” (Augusta-Scott & Dankwort, 2002, p. 789–90).

Importantly, while both invitational narrative and other models of perpetrator intervention share a commitment to challenging men who justify or excuse their violence, the skills necessary to achieve this are seen differently. With its focus on working with men in ways that draw upon their motivations and “desires for equality, respect, and love”, invitational narrative practices seek to engage men in collaborative exploration by asking, for example, “why men would *want* to stop the abuse” (Augusta-Scott & Dankwort, 2002, p. 790, emphasis in original). In seeking to reduce the potential for oppositional, adversarial encounters, practitioners also try to avoid alienating and silencing participants or fostering polarised sessions ridden with counsellor-client tensions (Augusta-Scott & Dankwort, 2002, p. 790).

It is well recognised that a “strong therapeutic alliance” is critical to the “therapeutic transformation” (Kozar & Day, 2017, p. 13) that underpins behavioural change. This is no less relevant for work with male perpetrators, in which the therapeutic relationship is widely understood as “the central vehicle of change” (Kozar & Day, 2017, p. 13). As discussed earlier, the worker-client relationship in invitational narrative practice represents an important point of difference, emphasising a stance that is “respectful of the man who has abused” and “lays the foundation for promoting respectful relationships” (Katic, 2016, p. 5). Worker and client are positioned as “fellow traveller[s]” in a “side-by-side” (Weingarten, 1998, cited in Hunter, 2001, p. 87), rather than hierarchical, relationship. Instead of the “provider of a ‘therapeutic’ relationship”, the invitational narrative practitioner is seen as facilitating the “therapeutic actuality and potential of real-life relationships” (Payne, 2000, p. 212). At its heart then, invitational narrative practice is a process of deep exploration in which the worker plays a central role, using the “exploration to draw [the man] down

a pathway to reflection and greater personal responsibility” (Brown, Flynn, Arias, & Clavijo, 2016, pp. 70–71).

The ethical role and commitment of the therapist is critical to invitational narrative practice and informs the nature of the worker-client alliance. The influence of post-structural thinking is evident in the focus on power relations, both those that “people negotiate in their everyday lives and social relationships” and those implicit in the therapeutic relationship, that is, the “objectifying professional gaze” (Besley, 2001, p. 81). In acknowledging that “some voices have more meaning-making power than others” (Speedy, 2000, p. 365 cited in Besley, 2001, p. 81), invitational narrative approaches privilege neither the client’s, nor the worker’s, voice. Rather, promoting and role-modelling “respect for self, as well as respect for others” (Katic, 2016, p. 5) is a key responsibility. Indeed, the personal and the professional merge for invitational narrative practitioners via the expectation that they too engage in “continuous reflection of their own ethics and the effects of actions upon others” (Katic, 2016, p. 3). Not surprisingly then, rather than just a “set of skills or techniques”, invitational narrative approaches have been described as a “lifestyle and political project” based on the “interlocking nature of theory, ethics and skills” (Besley, 2001, p. 78). Practitioners are seen as “engaged in a parallel struggle” (Vlais, 2014, p. 19) with respect to their own uses of privilege, both professionally and personally.

### Men’s behavioural and attitudinal change

Invitational narrative practices represent a significant shift away from a focus on problems to one that emphasises, and seeks to build upon, clients’ capacity to change. Put simply, it assumes that “people can change if their understanding of their social experience changes” (Payne, 2014, p. 269). The recognition that violence is a *choice* is fundamental to invitational narrative practice with male perpetrators, and this is reflected in its strong orientation towards behavioural change. Nonetheless, the basic premise of this work is that change is more likely to occur when clients own the solutions, and when those solutions have real meaning to their lives (Cagney, 2010). Moreover, when practice centres on and acknowledges a “man’s expertise in his own life”, it is considered more likely that he will “commit to following through with changes that are congruent with [his] preferred

way of being” (Béres & Nichols, 2010, p. 61). This recognises that men “often have an internal dialectic (an unspoken tension reflecting competing responsibilities and social roles) about being dominant and controlling” (Payne, 2014, p. 258). Unlike other perspectives, invitational narrative approaches draw primarily on “outer-world” rather than “inner-world” theories “in order to understand the inner worlds of individuals” (Connolly & Harms, 2015, p. 139). Focusing on the “stories we live by, as individuals, families and communities” (Connolly & Harms, 2015, p. 135), alongside a critical understanding of “dominant discourses and the ways in which they shape experience” (p. 143), the invitational narrative approach thus provides a foundation for men to develop new “capabilities” (Katic, 2016, p. 2) and ways of living.

This emphasis on a “political stance of understanding, rather than a solely psychological explanation” (Katic, 2016, p. 2) lies at the heart of invitational narrative practices. The invitational narrative approach seeks, uniquely, to address “power and ethical issues through harnessing the metaphor of narrative” (Besley, 2001, p. 72). In this respect invitational narrative practices reflect both a social constructionist understanding of the importance of shared meanings and a post-structural perspective on power and knowledge. Story-telling and the “critical examination of such stories”, as the core of invitational narrative practice, provide a “particularly potent means of challenging the heterosexist dominant discourse” (Croteau, Lark, & Lance, 2004, p. 8). The recognition that violence, as an “expression of power relations”, is essentially “political in nature” (Katic, 2016, p. 2) represents a key point of difference from traditional therapeutic approaches. The assumption that people’s identities “change and are contradictory” (Besley, 2001, p. 79) is thus the foundation for “emancipatory change” in that, as “counter stories” emerge and are “circulated beyond individuals”, the potential exists for these to be “taken up more broadly in social discourse” (McKenzie-Mohr & Lafrance, 2017, p. 201). A focus on the practitioner as activist represents a further point of difference, expressed in an understanding of the practitioner role as including the creation of “discussion within the community” (Katic, 2016, p. 4) and other opportunities for challenging cultural and institutional practices.

Instead of focusing on individual men's "psychological shortcomings", invitational narrative approaches direct their attention towards exploring and understanding the ways in which "violence is supported in the context of daily life" (Katic, 2016, p. 3). Michael White, for instance, was highly critical of, and distanced himself from, approaches "associated with traditional therapeutic practice" (Furlong, 2008, p. 411) that sought to "privatise" social problems. Similarly, Jenkins understands "developmental issues, sociocultural factors, family of origin, history of abuse, gender roles, personality characteristics, addiction, financial and/or marital stressors, and individual psychology" (Béres & Nichols, 2010, p. 61) as factors, or "influences", supporting the "values and ways of thinking that promote abusive behavior". The invitational approach is thus based on the idea that such "traditions, values, and paradigms" function as restraints, "inhibit[ing] the establishment of respectful, mutual, non-abusive ways of being in and relating to the world" (Béres & Nichols, 2010, p. 61).

The application of invitational narrative approaches to work with male perpetrators of violence "continue[s] to be very much under researched" (Béres & Nichols, 2010, p. 61). While establishing the effectiveness of perpetrator interventions is, on the whole, extremely challenging (see Urbis, 2013), "non-cognitive behavioural approaches", in particular, "have not yet received the empirical investment required" (Urbis, 2013, p. 21). This is due, in part, to the "fact that they less readily lend themselves to experimental or quasi-experimental designs" (Urbis, 2013, p. 21). As observed by Busch, Strong and Lock (2011, p. 54), invitational narrative, as a "post-positivist epistemology", makes it "difficult, if not impossible" to evaluate using "evidence-based standards" without "violating its premises".

The limited evidence that does exist, however, appears to confirm the value of narrative therapy in general therapeutic work. In his study of six "peer-reviewed narrative therapy case articles", for instance, Busch (2007, p. 8) concluded that "five out of six case studies coherently demonstrated the effectiveness of narrative therapy with positive outcomes for clients". The "promising results" of an evaluation of narrative therapy with veterans diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) demonstrated high rates of satisfaction

and retention, as well as "clinically significant" changes "from before to after treatment on measures of PTSD symptoms" (Erbes et al., 2014, p. 732). Of specific relevance to engagement, Young and Cooper (2008, p. 79) found that narrative therapy contributed to "the kind of 'being' with people in therapeutic conversations that most participants commented on as engaging, collaborative, and facilitating of learning/discovering". They concluded that narrative therapy "provides a way to enter into rich, meaningful, and useful conversations with people quickly" (Young & Cooper, 2008, p. 79).

Although limited, research into the effectiveness of invitational narrative practices with men who use violence in their intimate relationships, suggests that their contribution to the engagement process is likely to be especially valuable. Ricks, Kitchens, Goodrich and Hancock (2014) found that narrative therapy is especially valuable for group work with men, both "challenging the men to participate in a positive manner" and "decreasing the potential for oppositional and defiant exchanges" (Ricks et al., 2014, p. 102). Béres and Nichols' (2010, p. 60) exploratory study of invitational narrative practices in perpetrator intervention groups showed that these do "in fact, result in interactions that engage". Lastly, in a study of invitational narrative group facilitators' perceptions and practices, Augusta-Scott and Dankwort (2002, p. 800) observed how multiple and often contradictory stories can be used to explore men's desires in ways that effectively "embody the multifaceted nature of interpersonal violence". This research provides useful insights, supporting the argument that men who form good relationships with their therapists are more likely to remain in therapy and interact with invitation narrative ideas, however, like other research regarding engagement of men, it is difficult to conclude positive outcomes for the safety and wellbeing of women and children (McAndrew et al., 2014).

While research exploring the influences on men's engagement in therapeutic group work exists (Mason & Adler, 2012), there is significant lack of research concerning the link between engagement and behavioural/attitudinal change. Thus, although men may seem to engage well in group or individual intervention, it is not currently possible to be definite regarding whether or how this engagement influences



or translates into increased safety for women and children. More generally, despite the oft-repeated claim that therapeutic relationships are the lynchpin for effective interventions, the ways and means for measuring this are the subject of much debate (McAndrew et al., 2014). In sum, while engagement remains a poorly understood concept in men's behaviour and attitudinal change, it seems likely, within the context of invitational narrative practices in particular, that it does *contribute* to improved outcomes.

### Section 3: Key principles for skills and engagement

In invitational narrative practice, engagement and assessment are seen as intertwined, and together are oriented towards understanding the problem from the man's point of view, as well as his history with, and personal experiences of, violence—both his own violence and that perpetrated by other people. Broadly understood, the process of invitational narrative engagement concerns the work associated with men “locating responsibility” for their own “realisations and achievements” within themselves, so that they “can more readily own and incorporate [their] capacity for change” (Jenkins, 1990, p. 62). In short, it describes a way of working that seeks to promote men arguing *for*, rather than *against*, change. To this end, practitioners adopt an “optimistic, respectful but ‘not-knowing’ or tentative or curious stance” (Besley, 2001, p. 81) and focus on “positive outcomes that clients desire rather than their problems or deficits” (Payne, 2014, p. 269). The practitioner role, then, centres on promoting the “discovery and construction of an alternative story of identity” (Jenkins, 1998, p. 164) that is grounded in the man's “own realization and desire to ‘become ethical’” (Katic, 2016, p. 7). Accordingly, the emphasis on “invitations” reflects the assumption that if “invited to engage”, men “can gradually discover and develop [their] own integrity and responsibility” (Jenkins, 1990, p. 72).

A commitment to the power of narratives and storytelling to “access emotionality” (Croteau et al., 2004, p. 8) lies at the core of invitational narrative practice. The use of narratives makes it possible to break through “minimisation, denial, and apathy” and “confront and challenge oppression” (Croteau et al., 2004, p. 8). Through purposeful conversations, men are

encouraged to look for “inconsistencies and contradictions” in their own stories, to “unmask hidden assumptions and to open up new possibilities” (Besley, 2001, p. 81) for alternative narratives.

In this respect, engaging men encompasses showing respect for their own perspectives but also connects these up with “wider social outcomes” (Payne, 2014, p. 269). Thus, while invitational narrative approaches are person-centred, they are also nonetheless directive (Besley, 2001, p. 81), relying on “flexible and interpretive techniques” to ensure that work remains focused on “specific behaviours and individual behavioural change” (Payne, 2014, p. 258). Indeed, while oriented more towards future goals than problem behaviours, invitational and narrative practices are recognised as being broadly compatible with CBT approaches, reflecting their shared rigour and focus (see Payne, 2014). Invitational practice, in particular, as envisaged by Jenkins, is far from formless, seeking to “increase the cognitive dissonance between who the man would like to be ... and who his actions show him to be” (McNally, 2001, p. 11). This may increase the “man's sense of agency and responsibility in his relationships” in line with his preferred self-image (McNally, 2001, p. 11).

The core principles described below reflect key understandings and skills in invitational narrative practice that together characterise an invitational narrative approach, giving insight into how engagement is facilitated with a man who uses violence in his intimate partner relationships.

#### Respect and competency

Invitational narrative practitioners position their work as an important counter to the deficit-based approaches associated with conventional, individually-focused therapies. They argue that such therapies can “inadvertently totalise, pathologise and disempower the client, as well as producing social hierarchies that erode notions of community and interdependence” (Besley, 2001, p. 80), thereby reinforcing the “power of experts and institutions” (Besley, 2001, p. 80). Instead, invitational narrative approaches maintain a critical and sceptical stance towards explanations of violence and the assumptions that underpin these. Informed by a critical awareness of dominant discourses, invitational narrative practice is grounded in questions concerning the “self, cultural

contexts, power and the way power relations help to shape, legitimise and constitute personal narratives” (Besley, 2001, p. 73). In this view, it is crucial to resist the objectification and pathologisation of men who use violence, in order to “disrupt the idea that men’s actions speak of their ‘true nature’ or that he is ‘aberrant’ in some way” (Greenwell, 2016, p. 45). Explanations of violence based on the individualisation of violence as the outcome of skills and knowledge, deficits, or individual personality traits are therefore seen as inherently problematic, serving to both undermine personal agency and exclude possibilities for other ways of being. As Jenkins (1991, p. 192) argues:

Such explanations lead abuse perpetrators to attribute responsibility for their behaviour to aspects of their character or personality over which they feel they have no influence or control and none of them help to attribute and promote responsibility for abuse with abuse perpetrators, in a helpful, solution-focused manner.

The recognition that effective work with perpetrators opens up possibilities for responsibility-taking and accountability is, thus, central to invitational narrative approaches. In seeking to “take violence out of a context of pathology”, the aim is contextualise violence by “examin[ing] the ways in which ideology informs behaviour, and invites personal choice and personal responsibility” (Jenkins, 1997, p. 46). In highlighting a “political analysis of violence”, rather than a “solely psychological explanation”, invitational narrative practices aim to illuminate the “everyday acts”, including but not limited to violence, that both express and are “integral to the interplay of power relations” that shape our lives (Katic, 2016, p. 2). Crucially, this shifts the focus away from the (perceived or actual) deficiencies of perpetrators and toward actively exploring and understanding the ways in which “violence is supported in the context of daily life” (Katic, 2016, p. 3).

## Ethics

A concern with ethics and ethical behaviour is central to invitational narrative practice: “becoming ethical is contrasted with being violent” (Brown, 2016, p. 135) and is, therefore, the chief goal of work with perpetrators. Jenkins distinguishes between morality and ethics on the basis that morality relates to “constraining rules” by which “actions

[are] judged according to universal values” (Brown, 2016, p. 135). In contrast, ethics are regarded as “facilitative rules” that are used to evaluate “men’s and boys’ *own* behaviour” (Brown, 2016, p. 135)—what they think, feel, say and do. With a focus on the “ethics of fair relationships”, the priority for intervention is not moral practice but instead a “map for creating ethical practice” (Brown, 2016, p. 135). This constitutes a shift from a context that is restrictive to one that is enabling and “promotes ethical ways forward” (Jenkins, 2009, pp. xii–xiii). In other words, emphasis is placed on men’s “own realization and desire to become ethical” rather than the coercive pressures of “external forces” (Katic, 2016, p. 7).

## Restraining ideas

A focus on restraints to respectful behaviours rather than causes of violence distinguishes invitational narrative from other intervention approaches. McMaster and Gregory (2003, p. 26), for instance, refer to invitational narrative approaches as “restraint-based practice” because, rather than focusing on *why* men use violence (or what causes men to be violent), they are interested in what *stops* men from choosing respectful behaviour. Thus, a key role for the invitational narrative practitioner is the ongoing assessment of the restraining ideas and practices present in men’s lives (see White, 1997; Hunter, 2001; Greenwell, 2016). Supporting men to “reflect on the dominant cultural ideas” connects with questions concerning what might be preventing them from “realizing [their] ethical preferences” (Katic, 2016, p. 12). Men’s values and beliefs, their “sense of entitlement to have power and control”, may be framed as restraints that get in the way of them “accepting responsibility for abusive actions” (Augusta-Scott & Dankwort, 2002, pp. 788–789). In this way, invitational narrative approaches acknowledge the importance of issues of power and control while “also underscore[ing] men’s desires for equal, loving, caring relationships” (Augusta-Scott & Dankwort, 2002, p. 788). A dual focus on both restraint *and* responsibility is nonetheless crucial, countering the potential for perpetrators to use the ways in which they are “restrained from behaving better as an excuse for further violent behaviour” (Hunter, 2001, p. 87).

Originally attributed to Alan Jenkins, the concept of “restraints” is based on Gregory Bateson’s notion of restraints theory, which argues that “events take their course because

they are restrained from taking alternative courses” (White, 1986, p. 169). In this context, restraints relate to “established networks of presuppositions, premises, and expectations that institute certain rules about information and events” (Greenwell, 2016, p. 46), including gendered “discourses of stereotypical masculine and feminine roles” (Béres & Nichols, 2010, p. 61). Invitational narrative practices draw attention to effects rather than causes, to the ways in which “culture, politics of experience, and power relations shape story”, and most critically, to the potential for “alternative stor[ies]” (Greenwell, 2016, p. 46). Jenkins (1990) argues that an invitation to “become pre-occupied with his own competence in challenging restraining habits and ideas and discovering and practicing alternatives to abuse” (Jenkins 1990, p. 32) represents a crucial starting point for work with a man who uses violence. In this sense, invitational narrative practitioners are inviting male perpetrators to “engage in what is quite a radical act”: that of resisting the “cultural and social pressures that have recruited them into living out dominant, hegemonic forms of masculinity” (Vlais, 2014, p. 19).

### Shame, effects on others and naming violence

Closely connected to the invitational narrative emphasis on restraining ideas is its focus on recognition of harm. Indeed, the expectation that male perpetrators work towards broadening their understanding of the harm that they have caused to others, is a key imperative of the work. Providing “opportunities for new realizations and practices” that enable “ethical ways of living”, which Jenkins (2009) refers to as the “restorative project”, involves men engaging in a process of discovery regarding the “kind of person” they want to become (Katic, 2016, p. 2). Identifying and naming abusive practices presupposes both “ethical realization” and a “readiness to understand the implications of such actions”, and requires a “shift from self-centred thinking towards understanding the experience of others” (Katic, 2016, p. 11). To this end, invitational narrative approaches are interested in the experience of shame and the ways in which this can enable male perpetrators to feel “a sense of contradiction between [their] ethics and [their] abusive actions” (Katic, 2016, p. 11). Supporting men to both experience shame and explore their ethical preferences is an important foundation for behavioural change, as men move towards an “ongoing commitment to stand against these abusive behaviours” (Katic, 2016, p. 12).

Brown (2016, p. 134) has argued that viewing perpetrators as either “bad” (as criminals) or “mad”, through reference to past experiences of trauma and abuse, is neither effective nor helpful in responding to men’s violence. Nonetheless, in his later work in which he focused more specifically on the role of shame, Jenkins observed that while shame in and of itself is not necessarily helpful, *facing* shame is a crucial step for perpetrators in “beginning to come to terms with taking responsibility for abusive behaviour” (Brown, 2016, p. 134). In this view, facing the shame associated with their actions as part of ongoing work with a skilled invitational narrative practitioner enables perpetrators to “experience remorse [and] awakened reality providing the context for empathy for the experience of their female or other family victims”, and is “fundamental to any significant change in a perpetrator’s abusive behaviour” (Brown, 2016, p. 134). Naming violence requires sufficient ethical realisation and readiness to both understand and face the implications, including the experience of shame and disgrace that may accompany this (Jenkins, 2009, p. 115).

### Responsibility and change

Jenkins recognised the tendency for perpetrators to feel a “greater sense of entitlement than responsibility” (Brown, 2016, p. 134) and, thus, to shift responsibility for their own behaviour to their victims/survivors. This was an important context for Jenkins’s (1990) model of therapeutic intervention with its focus on engaging perpetrators to take responsibility and ongoing accountability for the experiences of those who have been, or are, at risk of being harmed. Invitational narrative approaches are widely recognised for the strength of their conceptualisation of accountability in work with perpetrators. As observed by Vlais, Ridley, Green and Chung (2017, p. 78), the basic “principles of safety, accountability, responsibility and choice” associated with Jenkins’s work in particular, remain the “fundamental bedrocks of practice today”. Jenkins’s invitational practice is described as a “tangible and compelling approach” that pays attention to the conditions of change and critically engages with questions regarding how “we engage accountability” and what “practices of accountability” might be (Cagney, 2010).

Domestic violence perpetrator work, as Vlais (2014, p. 7) emphasises, is not about “doing *therapy* with the men” nor

is “men’s behaviour change primarily a therapeutic process”. Vlasis (2014, p. 7) discusses the risks associated with approaches that “privileg[e] therapy above the other elements of the work” and, most critically, above the safety of women and children. Vlasis (2014, p. 7) also emphasises the risks associated with overemphasising the importance of a “therapeutic alliance” between workers and perpetrators, noting that while it is both possible and appropriate for program facilitators to “be allies to men in their attempts to change”, this is not the same as an alliance. Moreover, paying attention to “men’s genuine experiences of victimisation (particularly family-of-origin)” risks feeding into perpetrators’ sense of being “victimised based on male entitlement and privilege” (Vlasis, 2014, p. 7). Most importantly, it is vital that men’s “enthusiastic participation” be linked back to, and counterbalanced with, “women’s and children’s voices and needs” (Vlasis, 2014, p. 7). Therapeutic activity must therefore be change-focussed and clearly linked to the “commitments, beliefs and actions that the men can take towards other-centredness” (Vlasis, 2014, pp. 7–8).

Invitational narrative practices are distinctly focused on developing the values, resources and competencies that are “enabling of the goal of stopping violence” (NMCHS, 1997, p. 19). In emphasising the language of choice and competence, invitational narrative work with perpetrators is clearly oriented towards responsibility and change. This work is not open-ended, but rather framed as an “invitation to the men to take responsibility for their violent actions and to take responsibility for embarking on a journey of change” (Brown et al., 2016, p. 9). In this context, the focus on narratives and story-telling, with their ability to “access emotionality”, provides the means of breaking through “minimisation, denial, and apathy” and “confront and challenge oppression” (Croteau et al., 2004, p. 8) in ways that other program approaches may not. For instance, recognising that even blame and excuses may “contain implicit pro-social commitments” means that these can be understood as “potentially rich therapeutic fodder” and the “basis of lasting change” (Todd, 2010, p. 79). As Todd (2010, p. 71) explains:

The very inclination to camouflage such acts indicates a social awareness that may (or may not) indicate the beginnings of a willingness to bring one’s behavioural choices more into line with prevailing social expectations.

Relatedly, the attention paid to language and the ways in which it can be used to minimise responsibility further exemplifies invitational narrative’s change-focus and its orientation towards the facilitation of “new distinctions and metaphors and new ways of talking that promote responsibility and choice” (NMCHS, 1997, p. 30).

Available evidence confirms the importance of targeting interventions at the particular characteristics of perpetrators, and recognises that men who perpetrate violence against women and children are a heterogeneous group (Urbis, 2013). In this context, “targeted” relates to “matching the type of intervention to individual factors such as risk level (e.g., previous criminal history), cognitive capacity, and comorbid conditions” (Urbis, 2013, p. 21). As highlighted by Mackay et al. (2015, p. 25), the process of change is complex, and “each perpetrator has their own triggers and idiosyncrasies” requiring “individual assessment and tailored interventions”. The need for an “individualised or matched intervention approach” (Urbis, 2013, p. 13) fits with invitational narrative practices, most notably in its emphasis on actively working with clients to understand the “discursive conditions and power relations of their lives” and “how they might ‘re-author’ their lives” (Besley, 2001, p. 81). Invitational narrative is thus neither formless nor open-ended, but rather person-centred and directive, working with men to “uncover ... knowledge through self-reflection prompted by a carefully structured series of questions designed to scaffold learning” (Béres & Nichols, 2010, p. 61). Rather than “relying on therapeutic assumptions of what works” (Payne, 2014, p. 265), invitational narrative’s emphasis on a “participant’s own stories” as the basis for planning change ensures an approach to intervention that is tailored to the particular needs of each perpetrator.

### Transformative

Understood as more than just skills or techniques, proponents of invitational narrative approaches see the practice as reflecting the “interlocking nature of theory, ethics and skills”, thus constituting a “lifestyle and political project” (Besley, 2001, p. 78). Michael White, for example, was adamant that “rather than seeking to simply ameliorate, adjust, or even cure the presenting problem, the agenda ought to be to prompt, and work towards, personal and social transformation” (Furlong, 2008, p. 414). Because violence and abuse “occur



in a context of power relations”, perpetrator intervention is equally a political project in which “abusive behaviour becomes understood as complicity with dominant cultural interests” (Katic, 2016, p. 12). Power relations are thus centred, including those inherent in the worker-client relationship, on the basis that all “therapeutic” encounters are “inherently political” (Besley, 2001, p. 78), along with a focus on “narrative ethics” concerning the “political problem of speaking for others” (Besley, 2001, p. 89). Accordingly, the language used by both workers and clients is seen as critical, as is recognising that language can “blur, alter or distort experience ... [and] condition how we think, feel, and act” while also being used “purposefully as a therapeutic tool” (Besley, 2001, p. 82).

The notion of choice—that is, that perpetrators choose to use violence against family members—is fundamental to men’s behavioural change interventions. Vlasis highlights the risk of “conceptualising choice in a decontextualised fashion” should perpetrator work uncritically adopt “a notion of choice based on neoliberalism and individualism” (2014, p. 12). Here Vlasis (2014) draws attention to the structural nature and socio-cultural context of men’s violence that both shapes and transcends individual choices and actions:

By focusing solely on men’s individual acts of choosing, the social and institutional pressures that provide men with unearned privilege, and that support their choices to use violence and gender-based power, fade away from the picture. (Vlasis, 2014, p. 12)

Inviting perpetrators to identify and challenge dominant discourses is crucial, then, not least because it offers the potential for enhanced agency and the possibility of “new realizations and practices” (Katic, 2016, p. 2).

### Women and children’s safety

Invitational narrative approaches are grounded in the twin principles of safety (for women and children) and accountability (for male perpetrators), a point reiterated across the relevant literature. Privileging the “safety of those who are at risk of being abused” for instance, means that if a man “claims to have made significant changes to his behaviour”, the invitational narrative practitioner has a responsibility to “confirm this with his abused partner (or whoever has been

the recipient of his violence in the past)” (Katic, 2016, p. 4). Particular emphasis is placed on the practitioner’s role in: the ongoing assessment of responsibility; “[concern] with safe contact between the man and the individual abused/ community members” (Katic, 2016, p. 5); and accountability to those who have been or are at risk of being abused, for instance through their involvement (“collaboration”) with community groups and services. A focus on responsibility involves remaining vigilant regarding issues of “irresponsible behavior” (such as substance abuse and use), “respect in romantic relationships, and respect in broader social contexts” (Katic, 2016, p. 12) and the man’s use of appropriate treatment or supports.

Vlasis (2014, p. 19) emphasises that losing sight “of who we are struggling for” is not just an issue for certain programs and practitioners; rather, he argues, losing sight of women and children is “a dynamic factor that’s a danger in much of our work, much of the time”. The “intentional weaving” of “adult education skills, therapeutic tools and support processes within accountability and social justice underpinnings” is thus always necessary, in all programs and interventions, in order to ensure that we “notice, reflect on, and minimise this losing sight” (Vlasis, 2014, p. 19). Without a firm grounding in “an analysis of gender-based power, privilege and entitlement”, the voices of women and children can become “de-centred, and possibly lost” in the process of perpetrator work (Vlasis, 2014, p. 9). Bérés and Nichols’s (2010, p. 66) exploratory study of the partner contact element of an invitational narrative informed perpetrator program, in which women reported “more respectful discussions as a result of [men’s] involvement” in the group program, suggests that invitational narrative practices may contribute to women and children’s safety.

## Section 4: Hindrances and learnings from South Australia

As discussed earlier in Section 2, the violence intervention programs attached to the specialist family violence courts in South Australia shared “a model of best practice for group work with men who wish to stop violent and abusive behaviour towards their women partners and family” (NMCHS, 1997). The model was informed by invitational narrative ideas and

was known as Stopping Violence Groups. In 2011, the contract for perpetrator intervention services was awarded to a new organisation and a new program model based on “moral reconnection therapy” was introduced (Little & Robinson, 1988). When asked to reflect on the factors contributing to a shift away from invitational narrative approaches in work with male perpetrators of domestic violence, the key informants highlighted three themes, namely, the shifting priorities of the state government, the rise of, and debates concerning, evidence-based practice, and changes to service delivery and other agency commitments.

Since 2011, the priorities of community health services have shifted towards chronic physical health management and this has impacted on their capacity for involvement in therapeutic work including that associated with invitational narrative practices. Further, the cross-agency development of services has been eroded with the mainstreaming of privatised, individualised, Medicare-funded services. Key informants expressed the opinion that these have contributed to the diminishing influence of local Domestic Violence Action Groups while also impacting on the time that practitioners have available to engage politically with clients and groups. The erosion of such networks has also limited the opportunities for practitioners to both come together, debate and share perspectives, and enter into collaborative work across professions, agencies and sectors. Of key relevance also is the growth of standardised, programmatic and cost-effective interventions, generally cognitive behavioural, that promise particular behavioural outcomes within a set time period. In this context, invitational narrative approaches, with their embrace of socio-political complexity, are “not as easy as a manualised approach” and struggle to find a place.

The key informants also recalled the positioning of invitational narrative approaches as inferior, or not evidence-based, within the context of broader debates concerning empiricism, measurement and the nature of evidence. Closely associated with the growth of standardised programs, the search for uniform, evidence-based interventions that could be delivered on mass, across populations, combined with the increasingly competitive funding environment, meant that “looser”, more time and resource-intensive approaches were not considered to be viable options. In the words of one key informant, the

prevailing view became that “those running programs have to be experts but who do not reflect on their own behaviour”. Therefore, while invitational narrative approaches continue to be influential in particular settings and in the context of values-based practice, broader changes have resulted in a shift in preferred—and funded—models of intervention towards those that are perceived to be readily defensible, efficient and cost-effective. In short, as an individualised approach that is grounded in principles, values and self-reflection, invitational narrative practice does not represent a “quick fix” response.

Some of the key informants referred to the “medicalisation of domestic and family violence and anger”, because the view of domestic and family violence has shifted from a social problem to one that is “located very much within an individual deficit model”. They observed that this has left little room for understanding the socio-political context and structural power relations associated with men’s violence, while also making it increasingly difficult to engage men in conversations about their ethics, everyday use of power, and so on. The medicalisation of domestic and family violence is thus understood as also contributing to a shift of emphasis from change to treatment.

Lastly, some key informants noted that, while invitational narrative practitioners continue to practice across the field of perpetrator intervention, this is difficult to sustain without the context of an agency commitment and clear policies and principles. With its focus on slow, considered, reflective work that centres on engagement with men’s ethics, invitational narrative approaches may seem to be a costly, high-resource investment, particularly given the emphasis on advanced practice skills and flexibility, and the lack of quantitative evidence regarding efficacy.

In summary, changes in the South Australian context, including shifting government support for innovative practices—which have occurred over the past 8-10 years—have led to a reduction in invitational narrative practices and training in work with male perpetrators of violence. Internationally, long-time proponents of invitational narrative approaches, such as David Denborough, Alan Jenkins and Cheryl White, are in high demand, however, locally, the space for this appears to be shrinking. This is evident in the

International Journal of Narrative Therapy and Community Work published by the Dulwich Centre. Some key informants linked this to the diminishment of values-led practice, particularly in the domestic and family violence field:

There doesn't seem to be the same sort of levels of training and promotion of the approach that you would have seen a few years ago.

Addressing men's violence has become professionalised and detached from the broader social movement. Educating men rather than [a] joined in exploration of [ways of] living lives they want to live free from violence.

The Family Counselling Team at Uniting Communities Adelaide, the partner for this study, represents a notable exception, having maintained longstanding relationships with the Dulwich Centre, and having demonstrated a strong agency-wide commitment to invitational narrative practice across its work with individuals and groups, families and male perpetrators. The Uniting Communities' service framework is heavily influenced by invitational narrative, feminist and post-structuralist ideas, thus also shaping organisational policies, supervision and recruitment practices.

Demonstrating the continued appeal of narrative therapy and practices, the University of Melbourne, in partnership with the Dulwich Centre, offers a postgraduate specialist qualification in the Master of Narrative Therapy and Community Work, attracting both international and local (Australian), Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, students. Work with perpetrators of domestic and family violence is the focus for some students and several Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander graduates have gone on to complete PhDs on related issues. As theoretical understandings of intersectionality and other areas of complexity develop, it might be argued that greater attention to the contexts for men's violence should also follow. In the view of the key informants, invitational narrative approaches, with their recognition of the complexity and nuances of behaviour change and respect for individual difference and diversity of experience, enable this capacity.

## Conclusion

There is broad agreement that perpetrator programs constitute just one of "a number of strategic objectives towards the fundamental aim of working towards the safety, wellbeing, human rights and dignity of women and children" (Vlais, 2014, p. 4). Researchers have also argued that interventions focused on behavioural change should be "accompanied by intervention at the broader societal level to address socio-structural factors that reinforce or perpetuate" violence (Urbis, 2013, p. 21). Accordingly, this State of knowledge review has highlighted the invitational narrative emphasis on "discourses of gender, masculinity and violence" (Brown & James, 2014, p. 174), ensuring that the structural contexts of violence, including unequal power relations, social hierarchy and privilege (see Jenkins, 1994, p. 4) and "sociocultural belief systems and structures" (NMCHS, 1997, p. 19), are kept in sight. This recognition of socio-cultural contexts and structural gender power relations was emphasised by the key informants, along with the tensions associated with pursuing structurally oriented practice in an environment dominated by the imperatives of empiricism and quantifiable evidence. This broader vision also links individuals to social change by enabling men to question the "possibilities of how their lives are lived in the present". The key invitational practice of "counter-storying", for example, represents a "central means toward systemic and political change" (McKenzie-Mohr & Lafrance, 2017, p. 201), in that the circulation of "emergent counter stories" beyond the individual makes it possible for these to be "taken up more broadly in social discourse" (McKenzie-Mohr & Lafrance, 2017, p. 202). Moreover, the emphasis of invitational narrative approaches on "communities of action" is critical to broader practices of accountability and ensures that principles of safety (for women and children) and accountability (for male perpetrators) are always central. As noted by the key informants consulted as part of the State of knowledge review for the study, this highlights the necessity of a whole-of-agency commitment in order to sustain such practices. Lastly, exploring the use-in-practice of socio-structural content and social change principles, as is the focus in Stage 2 of this project, provides the opportunity to explore the ways in which this is both experienced by men and translated into their everyday lives.

# Methodology

As indicated earlier, the methodology of this project contained two stages: Stage 1, which included a State of knowledge review and exploration of how invitational narrative approaches have been taken up in the field of domestic violence, using South Australia as a case study site and Stage 2, which explored experiences of invitational narrative approaches using interviews from three different points of view—the man, his practitioner and his ex/partner. The methodology specific to Stage 1 has been reported above. The methodology discussed in this section pertains mainly to Stage 2 of the project.

Using a layered, qualitative design, this project engaged with Uniting Communities Adelaide to explore invitational narrative approaches to engaging with men who use violence in their intimate partner relationships. Influenced by participatory action research principles (Baum et al., 2006; Neuman, 2006) and Patton's (2011) developmental evaluation approach, the research design relied upon open and ongoing dialogue and collaborative enquiry. On this basis, the research team worked closely with managers and practitioners at Uniting Communities—as partners—throughout the research planning and implementation process. A developmental evaluation approach was taken because it was not the intention of the project to evaluate any one particular men's behaviour program in terms of its success, but rather to explore a particular way of working (invitational narrative) across different stages of intervention. Engagement, through the lens of invitational narrative approaches, was the focus of the study. Development evaluation is “purpose-and-relationship-driven not methods-driven” (Patton, 2011, p. 288) and hence the interview guide and analysis framework were constructed with Uniting Communities as part of the research process. This co-design process ensured shared understandings of the practice and therefore research of invitational and narrative ideas. This co-design was vital to enable the project to create an exploration that was useful both philosophically and organisationally (Patton, 2011, p. 25).

## Partnership

The project partnered with Uniting Communities because it has a long history of engaging with feminist principles and

highlighting gendered socio-cultural contexts, as well as of working from invitational narrative approaches (Jenkins, 1990; White & Epston, 1990); specifically with men who use violence in intimate partner relationships. Invitational narrative approaches were developed in South Australia, which offers some explanation for Uniting Communities' engagement with and commitment to these ideas. The project aimed to explore and describe invitational narrative ways of working to engage men who use violence in intimate partner relationships at different stages of their journey with a service.

Since 2001, Uniting Communities has facilitated a Specialised Family Violence Service, and has received Australian Federal Government funding to facilitate individual and group interventions for men who use violence against their intimate partners and children. Group sessions are held weekly throughout the year. The group works through 12 weeks of content but men can enter at any time and can keep attending for as long as necessary. Uniting Communities also offers a women's safety contact program for women whose male ex/partner is engaged with the service. Working alongside Uniting Communities provided the opportunity to recruit men to the study at a variety of stages of engagement, including:

- intake and assessment;
- individual and couple counselling;
- group programs; and
- exiting.

Furthermore, the exploratory and inductive method of the project enabled practitioners employed at Uniting Communities to talk about and describe invitational narrative ways of practicing in the context of their organisation. This study is not an evaluation of invitational approaches or narrative therapy, or of how an organisation works, but an exploration of how practitioners use invitational narrative ideas in their practice with men, and also, significantly, how men experience and notice this themselves. Working alongside Uniting Communities also provided the opportunity for women to share their observations regarding changes in their ex/partners, as well as their perceptions of their own safety and fears.



## Aims

The study sought to document:

- how invitational and narrative approaches have been taken up in the field of domestic violence;
- the journey of engagement from the viewpoints of men, women and practitioners; and
- invitational and narrative practice principles that enable behavioural and attitudinal changes in men.

## Research questions

The project was guided by the following research questions:

- How do invitational narrative ways of working engage men who use violence in their intimate relationships?
- How do invitational narrative ways of working understand men's behavioural and attitudinal changes?
- How do invitational narrative ways of working promote safety for women?
- How do invitational narrative ways of working support perpetrator accountability?
- What is it about invitational narrative approaches (when used with perpetrators of domestic violence) that work, for whom, and in what circumstances?

## Theoretical framework

Invitational and narrative practices can be distinguished from other approaches on the basis that they both link “therapeutic psychological models of practice” (Payne, 2014, p. 257) with post-structuralist ideas and feminist principles. The influence of social constructionist thinking is evident in the invitational narrative emphasis on the systems of shared meaning that shape our “interactions, expectations and internalised experiences” and “constructed dominant stories ... influence the direction of our lives in important ways” (Connolly & Harms, 2015, p. 141). The influence of post-structural perspectives is evident in the attentiveness to matters of power and knowledge, and in particular, “in relation to the normalisation of certain ‘truths’ and [the] silence[ing of] others” (Connolly & Harms, 2015, p. 143).

The theoretical framework for this project was therefore informed by post-structural (Wendt & Zannettino, 2015) and feminist (Wendt & Moulding, 2016) ideas. The task of the research was not to determine a truth about invitational narrative practice. Instead, it was to provide as accurate as possible a description of how invitational narrative ideas and practices are used when working with men who use violence, in order to explore how this practice enables engagement, behaviour and attitudinal change, and women's safety (Berger & Luckman, 1996). A post-structural framework enabled a focus on the relations of power associated with meaning-making within the context of dominant discourse. The exploratory and inductive methodology of the project allowed:

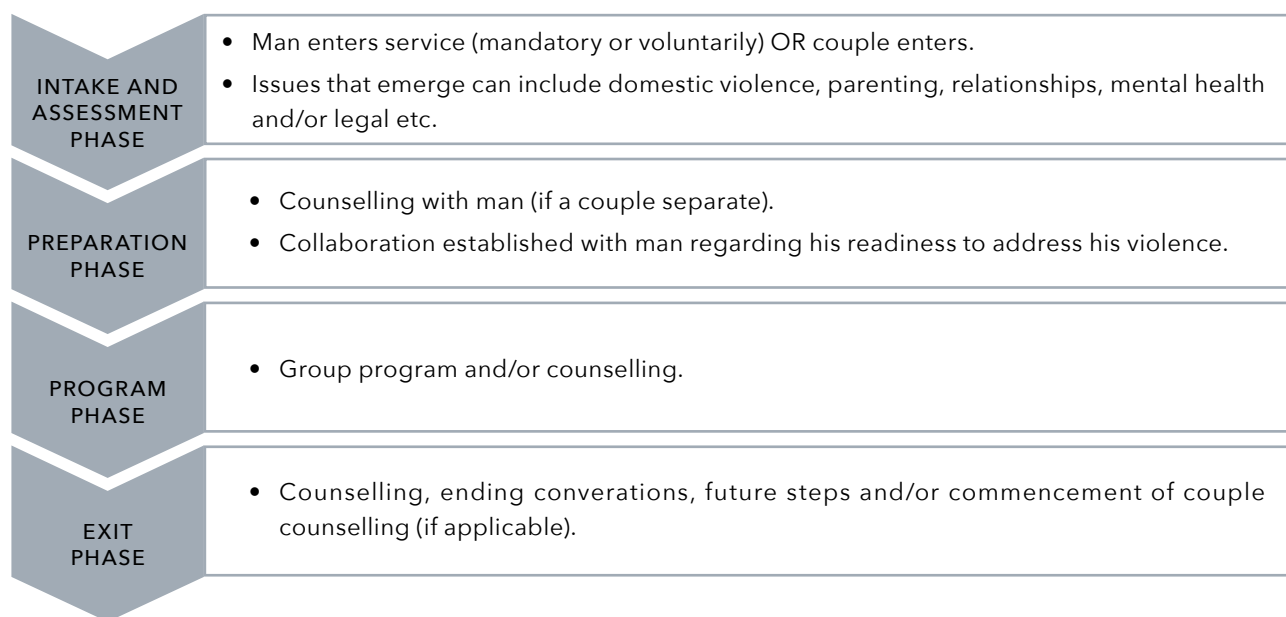
1. practitioners to talk about and describe invitational narrative ways of practicing when working with men who use violence;
2. men to talk about how they experienced and noticed this practice themselves; and
3. women to talk about their safety and perceptions of their ex/partners' changes.

Feminism enabled the research to centre and privilege women's experiences of safety, and to remain aware of dominant discourses concerning assumptions about and explanations of men's violence and how power relations shape personal narratives (Wendt & Moulding, 2016).

## Interviews

Face-to-face interviews with men, women ex/partners and practitioners (a triad) were used to explore experiences of engagement with invitational narrative ideas and practices. The triad enabled triangulation for the analysis of accountability, responsibility and women's safety. It also enabled the identification of key practice skills and principles of invitational narrative approaches from different points of view.

In order to enable a holistic narrative, the same interviewer conducted interviews with men, their ex/partner and practitioners. This also provided the foundation for a holistic analysis of engagement, attitudinal and behaviour change, accountability and responsibility because the one interviewer

**FIGURE 2** Pathways to safety for victims and perpetrator accountability

Note: Additional and concurrent services are offered to women ex/partners and children at these four phases.

was able to hear three experiences of engagement at a particular point. This decision was informed by the belief that parts of something are intimately interconnected and explicable only by reference to the whole. A comprehensive interview schedule for each participant group was produced to create consistency across interviews. The potential for inadvertent collusion with perpetrators is a constant concern in this area of work, requiring a commitment to regular debriefing and/or supervision, support and reflection, as well as a clear process for risk identification/management if required. De-briefing and supervision therefore occurred before and after interviews (amongst the three interviewers), and all interviewers were briefed about the protocols for managing participant disclosures of sensitive or potentially sensitive information.

## Recruitment and sample

To recruit the triads, practitioners employed by Uniting Communities were invited to participate in the study in the first instance. This was followed, in the second instance, by practitioner-facilitated recruitment of men and women clients.

Practitioners who were working in the Adult and Family Counselling Team and specialised family violence services, *and* had a qualification or professional certificate in invitational or narrative therapy, were invited to participate. Approximately ten practitioners worked in this team. A face-to-face information session explaining the project aims and participant expectations was also held with the team in September 2017. Practitioners were provided with an information sheet. Follow-up emails were also distributed to the counselling team, providing potential participants with

electronic copies of the project material. Five practitioners subsequently chose to participate in the project.

Practitioners who consented to participate played a pivotal role in the second stage of recruitment which was a practitioner-facilitated approach for recruitment of eligible men and women clients. This approach was required because practitioners were aware of risk and safety assessments, and researchers would not be cold-calling potential men and women clients. Because cold-calling potential participants can be dangerous, it was decided that the safety of ex/partners could be better assured by working closely with an organisation. For example, Uniting Communities have partner contact programs whereby women are informed their ex/partner has engaged with the organisation and therefore offered on-going support (which they can take up or not). Recruiting through the organisation and practitioners increases the safety of ex/partners because they have knowledge of circumstances. Safety can also be enhanced by researchers knowing and following the safety procedures already in place in the organisation. Recruitment of men and women therefore occurred within the context of a known service and with familiar individuals, ensuring participant privacy and confidentiality. By working with the organisation, no identifying, personal material needed to be collected or recorded.

Practitioners were also asked to consider inviting men at different stages of engagement and intervention, to capture a range of experiences that would lead to better understanding of invitational narrative approaches to engagement. As Figure 2 shows, men were recruited across the four phases of intervention at Uniting Communities.

Practitioners introduced eligible male and female participants to the study and provided them with information sheets and verbal explanations. This procedure gave men and women the chance to discuss possible participation with the practitioner first, explore questions and concerns, and have time to consider being involved. The right to withdraw at any stage without penalty was explained to all potential participants multiple times during recruitment and participation, and this detail also featured in the information sheets and consent forms (see Appendices B and C).

Men who were interested in being involved in the research provided their consent for the practitioner to share their contact details with the research team. A nominated member of the research team then contacted the potential man and invited him to participate in the research. An interview time was arranged at the man's convenience and an office space at Uniting Communities was then secured for the interview. At the time of the interview, men were asked to sign a consent form and were provided with a \$20 gift voucher as recompense for their time.

Once the man's interview was completed, the researcher arranged to interview the practitioner about their engagement and work with the man. Interviews were held at the practitioner's office, and again the practitioner was asked to sign a consent form to participate in the interview. When the interviews with the man and practitioner were complete, the interview with the man's ex/partner was arranged. Women who were interested in being involved in the research provided their consent for the practitioner to share their contact details with the researcher. The researcher then contacted the woman and invited her to participate in the research. An interview time was arranged at her convenience and an office space at Uniting Communities was secured for the interview. At the time of the interview, women were asked to sign a consent form and were also provided with a \$20 gift voucher as recompense for their time.

The recruitment process resulted in 12 men consenting to participate. However, one man did not turn up to the interview despite having verbally agreed to participate. A one-to-one interview was conducted with each man, and separately with his practitioner and ex/partner, if she had chosen to

be involved. Five ex/partners agreed to participate. Of the remaining six men, one had no current/recent relationship and the ex/partners of the other five declined participation. For those women who provided reasons for declining participation, these included the recency of their separation and/or their desire to be free of any contact concerning the man. Eleven interviews were held with five practitioners (three male and two female), accounting for their respective caseloads. The resulting data, across all of the interviews, consisted of six dyads (man and practitioner) and five triads (man, practitioner and ex/partner). Table 1 provides an overview of the participants. Please note that pseudonyms have been used.

The experience of the practitioners was extensive. Male 1 has worked at Uniting Communities for approximately 15 years. He has a 20-year background in work with men who use violence against women and children and a longstanding interest in narrative therapy and invitational practice. He has a social work background.

Male 2 started training in invitational practice approximately 15 years ago and more recently trained in narrative therapy during his employment at Uniting Communities. He had worked at Uniting Communities for approximately 5 years and during this time mainly worked with men who used violence in their intimate partner relationships. He has a social work qualification.

Male 3 started training in narrative therapy approximately 20 years ago and has worked with Uniting Communities for nearly 10 years. He has facilitated the men's groups for most of this time, where he also engages with invitational ideas. He has a social work qualification.

Female one started training in narrative therapy approximately 3 years ago, and it was her employment at Uniting Communities that enabled such training, as well as her introduction to invitational practice. She has mainly worked with couples or in individual counselling sessions with men. She has a social and behavioural science qualification.

**TABLE 1** Participant sample

Man	Ex/partner interviewed: Y/N	Practitioner	Intervention type and time (approx.)
John	Y Linda (current)	Male 1	8 months One-one counselling
Carlos	N Mary (separated)	Male 3	4 months One-one counselling
George	N Maria (current)	Male 2	3 months One-one counselling and men's behaviour change group
Harry	N Kelly (separated)	Male 3	6 months One-one counselling and men's behaviour change group
Ben	Y Paula (current)	Female 1	5 months Couple counselling
Jim	Y June (current)	Male 2	3 months One-one counselling and men's behaviour change group
Roger	Y Amy (current)	Male 1	18 months One-one counselling
Randall	N Janet (former)	Male 2	18 months one-one counselling
Steve	Y Jane (current)	Male 2	2.5 years One-one counselling and men's behaviour change group
Bob	N Katy (separated)	Male 2	6 months One-one counselling
Matthew	No partner	Female 2	7 years One-one counselling and men's behaviour change group

Female 2 started training in narrative therapy approximately 10 years ago and has been employed at Uniting Communities for 10 years. She has worked with men who use violence during her employment at Uniting Communities (group and individual counselling) and became engaged with and mentored in invitational practice throughout this work. She has a social science and psychology qualification.

## Interview schedules

Interview schedules were developed for men, practitioners and women (Appendices D, E and F). The men's interview schedule was developed first, with the literature review used as the foundation for the first draft. The practitioner's interview schedule was then developed to mirror the men's interview schedule. The women's interview schedule was developed third, and its focus was on developing questions about her safety, experiences and perceptions of change from

her partner. The draft interview schedules were workshopped amongst the research team, who tested the questions with each other verbally.

A face-to-face consultation was held with Uniting Communities' invitational narrative practitioners to test the draft interview schedules for appropriateness of language and fit with the invitational narrative approach. The interview schedule questions were read out one by one, allowing time for the practitioners to provide verbal feedback.

The interview schedules were developed in these stages to ensure that the dynamic of engagement as an element of invitational narrative ways of working was appropriately understood and explored. Building the interview guide through collaboration between researchers and practitioners informed by participatory action research and development evaluation principles guided the process. The construction

of the guide was a collaborative and interactive process, which involved evaluating the teams' thinking throughout the design.

All interviews, except one, were conducted face-to-face, were audio-recorded and transcribed, and averaged 1.5 hours in length. One man (Carlos) was interviewed over the telephone because he was on home detention interstate. His interview was also audio-recorded and transcribed.

## Analysis

The analysis of the men's and practitioner interview data was guided by narrative analysis (Appendix G). Narrative analysis is an approach that emphasises the narrative or story-based nature of human understanding. Its focus is on the details of the story and who tells it; on "particular actors, in particular social places, at particular social times" (Abbott, 1992, p. 428 cited in Riessman, 2008, p. 11). The story is the unit of analysis and thus a level of ambiguity is accepted (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005). The strength of narrative analysis is that it allowed the researchers to focus on each man's story and his sense of change, and compare this with his practitioner's account of change. Universal generalisations are not relevant, instead each man's story is analysed in a complex constellation of details and points of view (Neuman, 2006). By keeping the story intact, the researchers were then able to compare this with each man's ex/partner's account of change.

The narrative analysis focused on the men and how they told their story of engagement and change. It also incorporated how practitioners and women understood the men's story of engagement and change. The interview data from the men's stories, together with the ex/partners' and practitioners' interview data, formed a holistic understanding of the men's experiences of engagement, attitudinal and behavioural change, accountability and responsibility.

The narrative analysis was guided by thematic and structural coding (Appendix G). Thematic and structural coding come together in narrative analysis to "interrogate intention and language—that is, how and why incidents are storied, not simply the content to which language refers" (Riessman,

2008, p. 11). Thematic analysis was deductive. Thematic codes were developed from the State of knowledge review, which provided a protocol to help the researchers draw out examples of invitational narrative practice evident in the stories told by men and practitioners. Structural coding allowed the researchers to appraise or interpret the examples (say something about them) and also invited the use of the women's stories in the appraisal. Together, thematic and structural coding enabled commentary on the key principles of invitational narrative practice in engaging men to enter into a process of change, and the implications of this for themselves and those around them.

Three researchers conducted the interviews and, together, developed the narrative analysis protocol (Appendix G) to inform and guide subsequent analysis. Initially, each of the researchers worked through the protocol to analyse the data for their own interviews (triads and dyads). In the interest of qualitative reliability (van den Hoonaard, 2008), the data was then independently coded by other (non-interviewing) members of the research team who used the narrative protocol to conduct their own analysis of the transcripts of four triads. After sharing their respective analyses, the research team came together to identify common patterns and agree upon significant themes.

## Ethics and safety

This research was approved by the Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee (No. 7705), and by the Uniting Communities' Ethics Committee.

It was of utmost importance to keep women and children safe during the research project, and therefore various measures were undertaken. First, a service-mapping exercise was completed at Uniting Communities so that the research team could understand the complexity of domestic violence work in the organisation and become familiar with the pathways offered to engage and work with men. The research team developed familiarity with the intervention stages (see Figure 2) and with the organisation's safety protocols and processes. All researchers were aware of mandatory notification processes, and these processes were written into all information sheets and consent forms.



Second, interviews were not conducted in isolation but rather as part of a dyad or triad. Having the same interviewer allocated to a dyad/triad enabled a holistic understanding of risk or safety concerns as well as the capacity to directly feedback information of concern to the organisation. The dyad/triad structure created a holistic analysis of engagement, attitudinal and behavioural change, accountability and responsibility.

To manage risk in relation to the safety of ex/partners, the following mitigating strategies were also adopted:

1. The interview schedule was co-created with agency clinicians and was closely adhered to.
2. All interviewers worked closely with an experienced clinician in Uniting Communities in preparing for interviews and debriefing after interviews.
3. Because the potential for inadvertent collusion with perpetrators is a constant concern in this area of work, a clear process for risk identification/management was put in place. This included a commitment to regular debriefing, supervision, support and reflection before and after interviews.
4. All interviewers were briefed about protocols for managing participant disclosures of sensitive or potentially sensitive information.

Furthermore, all contact with ex/partners was mediated through the relevant clinician/practitioner who has specialised skills in this area as well as an understanding of the potential risks. This ensured that all contact occurred within the agency context and in accordance with its existing safety protocols. No information regarding the involvement (or non-involvement) of ex/partners was shared with the men.

The participation of all parties (practitioners, men and ex/partners) was voluntary and clearly outlined on consent forms and the information sheets provided (see Appendices B and C). All participants were given the option of withdrawing at any stage without impact or consequence. None of them chose to do so. At the end of the interviews, the interviewer also checked in with how the participant was feeling, and explored whether they required additional support to debrief or had any safety concerns. Again, this was not taken up by any participants. All information sheets for men, women

and practitioners included details of free support services such as counselling lines.

All participants were advised at the outset that should the interview bring to light that they, their partner or their children were at risk of harm, the interview would be stopped. Participants were advised at the outset that should the researcher have any suspicions that a child was at risk of harm, confidentiality will not apply, and a mandatory report would be made to the Child Abuse Report Line and practitioners at Uniting Communities notified. No such events or actions occurred during the research process.

Interviews were digitally recorded and independently transcribed before deletion. Transcripts were stored electronically, in a de-identified form, on the researchers' password-protected organisational hard drives via the University computer server, along with the code linking de-identified transcripts and audio-files to participants (stored separately). A copy of the original audio recordings will be retained on the Principal Chief Investigator's password protected computer for a period of 5 years to enable verification of results and/or secondary analysis.



# Key findings

Of the 11 men identified, eight (Steve, Roger, Matthew, John, Jim, Harry, Bob, and Ben) attended Uniting Communities because their partner instigated couple counselling or gave them an ultimatum: to receive help regarding their use of violence or the partner would leave. Randall and George were referred by the Men's Helpline, and Carlos by the police.

The dominant principles and skills for engagement as intertwined in invitational narrative practice are detailed below. The invitational narrative practitioners used these principles and skills to enable ethical practice whereby, through respectful, curious collaboration, the man was invited to identify and name his ethical preferences so that, in reaching these preferences, he could identify restraining ideas or thoughts. Ethical strivings also allowed the practitioner to engage the man in exploring shame and opening up conversations about his use of violence, including naming his violence and its effects on his partner and children. The findings conclude by presenting evidence of men's key moments of taking responsibility and descriptions of behavioural and attitudinal change; and more importantly, how women ex/partners perceived the men's change. Quotes from men, practitioners and women are included throughout the findings to show how invitational narrative ways of working engage men who use violence in their intimate relationships and understand men's behavioural and attitudinal changes.

## Respectful collaboration and competency focused

For narrative and invitational practice, the process of engagement is designed to locate responsibility for the man's realisations and achievements within himself, so that men can connect with their own desire—and capacity—for change (Jenkins, 1990). In adopting a curious, respectful stance, practitioners invite the men to both explore their personal responsibility and reflect on their behaviour (Katic, 2016). Men are positioned as competent and able to have conversations that explore the ways in which violence is supported in the context of daily life (Katic, 2016). Practitioners use a respectful questioning approach to bring to light the ways in which men have been socialised into particular ways of being and collaborate with them to examine the effects of these ways

of being on significant others (Combs & Freedman, 2012). The worker–practitioner relationship is seen as a side-by-side one, with the practitioner facilitating therapeutic actuality by exploring the man's perceptions of his behaviour and inviting him on a journey towards personal responsibility (Brown et al., 2016).

The majority of men spoke about respectful collaboration as not “being judged”, saying that the practitioners' interested and curious stance encouraged them to delve deeper into their thoughts, feelings and behaviour, and was instrumental in their willingness to keep engaging with the service. For example, the importance of “no judgement” for John was that it enabled him to connect with his practitioner, both initially and over a sustained period. In John's words:

It's a conversation, you don't feel like you're being interrogated, and he'll ask you questions in a roundabout way where you realise what's happening by the answers, if that makes sense. Like at the end of the conversation you go, right, I understand why you're asking that question. He just knows where to dig and what to ask, and ask you about feelings and going in the circle of how it affects you and others.

Important also was the respectful and exploratory tone which means that, as John emphasises, “it didn't feel like it was an interrogation, because it just felt like we were talking ... it didn't feel like I was under the spotlight”. According to John, the practitioner's open approach—not offering “black and white answer[s] or put[ting] thoughts into my head” but rather “teas[ing] the ends out and just mak[ing] it part of the conversation”—supported him in reflecting and engaging in conversations that were at times difficult. In this, the sense of validation—“just for someone to go, yeah, that's okay, you're getting it”—was also critical to John's experience.

Linda, John's partner, also commented on the significance of the nature of the counselling relationship to John's continued involvement, explaining that “he felt like the counsellor got him and understood where he was coming from”. Her observation that John “actually quite enjoyed delving into whatever they did in sessions, and was quite excited about being a better person and him actively seeking that” further suggests his engagement and investment in the process.

Narrative and invitational practice involves asking questions, being curious, and generating experience in practice while maintaining a clear focus on the client (Combs & Freedman, 2012). The men reported that these practices enabled them to delve into their thoughts and behaviour, and thus engage in deeper reflection and discussion. For example, Randall said that he was particularly conscious of the risks associated with talking to a practitioner; that is, he was reluctant to “lay himself bare”. He explains:

Once we got to know each other and we got a bit more relaxed, I let my guard down and just talk[ed] through some stuff ... He [the counsellor] didn't seem to be judging or whatever but focused on working on making me a better person regardless of anything else ... for the kids, and, you know, for the future ... I could have been giving him a whole line of dribble, but I chose to answer truthfully on where I was at, even though that was a bit difficult sometimes, and a bit confronting for me. I suppose, I chose to try ... he would encourage me and prompt me—prompt me to look a bit deeper.

Consistent with Randall's perspective, the practitioner, in his account, drew attention to the open but purposive nature of their conversations and the importance of respectful questions:

There's a way of the conversations, and a lot is up to the guy, and if the guy is willing to go into these questions and question himself in a way, you get to give him a lot of scope and choice about the conversation, and he'll take it to places that are useful for him. So [Randall] would engage in that ... using the platform of what's going on at the time ... Sort of gaining more agency, as he, over time, developed greater, a longer history of doing these assessments of his own behaviour, and alignment checking of his own behaviour.

Here the practitioner acknowledges the potential for men to feel “ganged up on” in this context, and thus the importance of “narrative, respectful exploration”.

The men attending the group program also spoke about the importance of respectful collaboration and not feeling judged. For example, Jim spoke highly of the non-judgemental focus of group sessions and his sense of identification with other men in this setting. Jim said:

Why did I keep coming back? Well, obviously it was helping me through a—yeah, just coming along, just listening and—and it was just identifying with other people that had exactly the same problem.

Jim's practitioner, who also facilitated the men's group, said:

Our generic position is sort of not to be imposing our judgement or views on families but sort of checking things out in sort of respectful engagement, and you know what are your values, what do you want out of this, what are you concerned about? And allow him the space to speak about those things in a way that I think most men appreciate yeah ... invitational practice enables him to see his violence more clearly as something that goes against his preferred values, it enables him to see the processes that lead him and the ideas that work him up to using violence ... it's not being imposed.

In terms of the group experience, some men also spoke extensively about the facilitators' ability to both engage with a range of men and dynamically respond to their needs in order to get the best out of everyone. For example, in Steve's experience, this went beyond merely asking the “right questions”; while encouraging the men to “dig deep”, they managed to do so without antagonising them:

They wouldn't ask the right questions until they knew you were comfortable in the group. So they were really reading people to a tee. Like a couple of people would come in and they'd be there for 4 weeks and then a couple of newcomers would come in. They sort of just [worked] around the way the group ran. But they knew the people in there and they knew the people that didn't want to talk or the people that were there just filling out a requirement and then the people that did want to talk and the people that were struggling but wanted to. They were very, very good at reading people.

Jane, Steve's partner, confirmed Steve's positive experience of the group, while also making an important point about how this felt for her:

Coming home from men's group ... [he'd say] it was really interesting—I learnt a lot about this tonight ... I think he came home and talked to me about respect or

communication or whatever the theme was that night and he actually learnt stuff—stuff that I already know—he would talk to me as if someone had taught him something and that he was interested in it and inside I would be so frustrated thinking I’ve been trying to tell this shit for years but I wasn’t the person that needed to present it to him, and he had a lot of respect for people running the course I know that and I’m not sure how that was gained but probably because there was kind of that no blame situation.

Some men acknowledged feeling confronted at times, but said that because of the facilitators’ skills and respectful manner, this did not diminish their engagement with the process. The invitational and narrative focus on competency, rather than deficits, enables practitioners to maintain a critical, curious and sceptical stance regarding both explanations of violence and the assumptions underpinning these (Besley, 2001). For example, Harry reported that he initially felt quite confronted by his practitioner’s approach, and then again when he first attended the men’s group:

I guess initially it was, I was, felt quite confronted because in my own mind I was coming because my wife had said that I had issues with anger, and I hadn’t really, in my own mind kind of attached the domestic violence, domestic abuse aspects of it to myself, cos I’d only focused on how can I learn to control my anger ... so when I first started coming I was, I felt quite confronted because both the counsellor and the support group essentially didn’t really mention anger at all, and it was all about domestic violence and domestic abuse, and that was quite confronting.

On Harry’s part, after he got over his initial feelings of confrontation, he found that the group was somewhere he could be accepted and where he was listened to without judgement. From there, he made a deep commitment to attend and learn from each weekly session. He explained:

And there were times when I didn’t really want to come but I felt that I had made a commitment, genuinely made a commitment to myself and to my wife and my children, even though they weren’t there I made a commitment to them to attend and to learn as much as I could. I guess another reason why I kept coming was I challenged myself to get something out of every single night, to learn at least

one new thing out of each night, and so I guess another reason why I’ve stayed coming to the group is because it’s given me the ability to have a voice.

Harry’s practitioner acknowledged the importance of building trust in this context by giving men space in which to openly explore their thoughts and beliefs and work towards creating respectful relationships:

So often these men come to this group, this is the first time that they’ve been able to actually articulate or be given, or have a space to even begin to speak about these things. So that takes time and a sense of trust in the group ... you’re kind of building this possibility if you like, for this man to express, not only kind of grief about past stuff, but also to be open about his behaviour and feel that he can speak about it.

Nonetheless, the idea of giving men a voice as a way to engage them in conversations about violence needs to be treated with caution. The risk of losing sight of women and children is a critical concern, as it undermines the analysis of gender-based power, privilege and entitlement (Vlais, 2014, p. 2) that underpins this work. Thus, men’s appreciation of aspects of the group program, including its non-judgemental approach, the fact that they felt heard, and so on, must be balanced against the construction by some men—albeit a small number of the group—as primarily a place for mutual support. Because invitational and narrative ideas are grounded in the twin principles of safety (for women and children) and accountability (for the male perpetrators) (Katic, 2016), practitioners are sensitive to men’s presentation of defensiveness and self-entitlement, as well as other factors including mental illness and cognitive capacity issues (Kozar & Day, 2017), and the need to balance men’s needs against the imperative of women’s and children’s safety. Practitioners take seriously their responsibility to avoid potential—or perceived—collusion by ensuring that they do not confirm men’s behaviour, their attitudes towards women, or their use of violence (Jenkins, 1990).

This tension was perceptible in George’s interview. George mainly talked about his experience of the men’s group, expressing his opinion that “one-on-ones [individual

counselling] are probably not as effective as having the group conversations”. Throughout the interview, George referred to the behavioural change group program as a “support group” and explained:

I need to talk to people and work through some of the issues that I might have myself ... what I’m going through right now—I think it’s really worthwhile group for men too—because I don’t know if there are many support groups for men. I think having that opportunity to have the conversation ... different ways how people dealt with things and all that, I just think it’s just fantastic.

Similarly, Jim talked about enjoying the group as a non-judgemental space but also for the “fellowship” that he found there:

It was alright because you sort of—you go along and as you go along there’s certain people you’ll click with ... form a little bit of a fellowship, if you like.

Even when prompted about the behavioural change focus of the group, George continued to talk about it in terms of the “opportunity to debrief”, to “share the experience and listen to others or just talk to someone”. Thus, rather than feeling challenged by the program content and ideas, he talked about “actually enjoying” the companionship associated with the group experience.

Noticing this, George’s practitioner spoke about his efforts to direct George’s focus towards his own use of violence and its impact on Maria, his partner. For example, in discussing an occasion on which his attempts to explore Maria’s experience were “pushed back” by George, the practitioner explained:

I’d like to do it more elegantly and let him come around to that in his own time in little bits as, as we just move, nudge the conversation around ... but given the lack of time I just pushed it and [said], [How] would she experience that, as if her concerns are not even second and you’re putting your concerns first? She’s, her concerns are that you’re very controlling would she see that as controlling as well?’ He pulled me up and he said, ‘You keep saying I’m controlling ... What are you saying to me?’

Similarly, Jim’s practitioner observed that Jim also had particular expectations of the group, including that the facilitators should be able to provide him with definitive answers and tell him what he needed to do. This demand could be intimidating to others:

So [Jim’s] speaking and sometimes his words come across in a way that’s hard to read and often read as intimidating ... for example, the expectation that we will have answers to give him.

These accounts illustrate the complex demands of invitational and narrative ways of working; practitioners must be continually alert to what is said, what is not said and what is implied, while also paying attention to language use and the centrality of ethics. This requires them to balance a commitment to open curiosity and respectful collaboration with an unrelenting focus on women and children’s safety and men’s accountability to others. It is the practitioners’ knowledge of gender power relations, and dynamics of domestic violence, that enables them to traverse this balance between engagement with men and accountability to women and children. In other words, the safety of women and children is the primary focus of work with men; the engagement of men in this context is a means to an end; that is, ensuring safety of women and children (Wendt et al., 2018).

What the stories of the men and practitioners show is that respectful collaboration is, in a very practical sense, about engaging with men in such a way that change is self-generated and personally meaningful, not externally imposed and therefore precarious. The inherently non-confrontational nature of narrative and invitational ideas therefore does not equate to an approach that is simple, free-floating or open-ended. Rather, as one practitioner emphasised, the goal is to work:

In a way where [the man is] not just being ambushed but linking it with how he wants to be, how he is being asked to think about different things in different ways to fit with how he wants to be as well.

## Ethics

Concern with ethics and ethical behaviour is a central principle of invitational and narrative practice, which both emphasise men exploring their values and articulating their own ethical desires and principles. In engaging men in conversations concerning issues such as who they want to be and what they would want to be known or remembered for, practitioners hope to open up space for “new realisations and practices” (Katic, 2016, p. 2). A practitioner, for example, talked about her work with Ben and Paula, and in particular Ben’s initial reluctance to participate in counselling:

I remember [Ben’s] first remark [to me] ‘You’re too young’; ‘You’re probably not even married’; ‘You probably know nothing about relationships; what am I going to learn from you?’ I said, ‘Well I’m guessing I’m going to learn a lot from you guys with all your experience and knowledge, so do you want to give this a shot—what do you think?’ And I paid a lot of interest in how it came to be that she wanted this and he was willing, willing to attend, participate and sort of asked into that and in the asking of that I think it became clear very quickly that he had a kind of deep commitment to his 50-odd years of marriage with [Paula].

Thus the practitioner carefully engaged Ben in conversation rather than confronting him, in a way that both acknowledged his reluctance and connected with his core ethics around marriage, loyalty and commitment. This exploration of ethics, meaning and life priorities enabled Ben to reflect upon his life in a way that was both constructive and conducive to change:

I think it probably has got me thinking a lot ... I look back at what I did and what I could’ve done and I could have changed a lot of things ...

Q: And what’s contributed to that, do you think?

A: I’m probably caring more about myself than trying to change other people and I’m talking about family here ... so we’ve had our problems as a family, but I used to try to change them ... I was hoping to achieve perfection ... I don’t think that anymore ... so now I’m willing to listen ... The fragmentation’s still there, but it repairs quicker now ... for example now I’ll go out of the room and then I think, shit I’ve let myself down again and I’ll

pick a rose or I’ll go back and put my arm around her, you see. So that’s, I’m looking more at what, at myself in saying that, I was in the wrong.

Q: You talked about noticing yourself ... can you try and give me any examples about what you notice about yourself in particular that you didn’t notice before?

A: ... before I was just angry without any thought about it, but now I get angry I think ... Where I must have known I was doing it before, but didn’t, it never used to bother me I suppose—I’ve become much more tolerant ... I’ve got to be thinking all the time and well, to me still at the moment if I’m losing it the best thing I can do is walk away. And that will probably go to the end of my life, I don’t know, but it’s better than, better than the opposite.

Ben’s partner Paula confirmed his account. Reflecting Katic’s (2016, p. 11) discussion of invitational narrative practices as facilitating a “shift from self-centred thinking” to “understanding the experience of others”, Paula had observed important shifts, including that Ben now listened to her and empathised with her and others:

He’s far more caring and listening—that’s continued. It’s not always there because it’s never always going to be there ... I’m not trying to say, I’m never in the wrong because I mean, that’s not the way life is, is it, but talking from my emotions—yeah, I would say that I feel that [Ben] puts in a lot more effort ... Well, emotional safety is that you can talk to somebody. You can get upset or get angry and it’s not going to be a full on, I feel safer as an individual. I mean, to go back to the past, the days of physical violence, I suppose I did feel unsafe at times then but yeah, so, I just feel more safe as an individual, more relaxed.

Paula’s reference to emotional safety highlights the importance of attending to both physical safety and emotional safety, drawing attention to the effects of chronic fear (Pain, 2012) associated with living with domestic and family violence.

For other men, these ethical conversations happened more readily. However, this did not make them any less challenging, as they still required the practitioner to work intensively with the men to examine their beliefs, assumptions and knowledge



within the context of both broader power relations and their own use of power (Combs & Freedman, 2012). For example, while Steve was clear that his wife's "ultimatum" was central to his decision to get help, he was also able to articulate quite clearly his recognition that this was his problem and not a "relationship problem":

I knew I had to fix myself because there was a serious problem with the way I was behaving, irrespective of whether [Jane] was going to hang around or not. The behaviour was my behaviour and it was no one else's. So I had to fix my behaviour to be a better person to hopefully fix everything else. I think I made a pretty conscious decision early on that I'm going to work at this and I'm going to get better at the way I do things.

Reflecting his movement towards responsibility as well as his growing sense of connection to his own ethics and the kind of person he wanted to be, Steve goes on to explain:

I don't want to lose what I've got, not at all. But at the end of the day I want to maintain myself as a person the way I'm going. I don't want to go back to that. So for me, that's what I'm working on and I think when I do that everything else seems to just work.

Evident also was Steve's increased understanding of the harm that he had caused, most notably in relation to the impact that witnessing his violence has had on his two daughters. Thus, he not only wanted to "fix" his relationship with his daughters, but was also acutely aware of the implications of his actions for their own (future) relationships, explaining that "You want people to treat them [his daughters] with respect—they deserve it. Everyone deserves it". Closely associated with this was his growing sensitivity to the use of power in relationships, expressed in his recognition that "everyone's got an opinion and everyone's entitled to it ... I don't need to counteract that. I don't need to better it. I don't—they're entitled to that".

According to his practitioner, Steve was somewhat unusual in his readiness to engage in ethical conversations from early in their contact. He described, for example, Steve initiating a discussion about parenting in which he stated his preference for Jane's parenting style over his own and named

this as an area in which he wanted to make changes. From the practitioner's perspective, Steve's "ability to recognise a better way", combined with his desire to be different—"not wanting to hurt these people, not wanting to hurt his kids, not wanting to hurt his partner"—provided a crucial foundation for their work together, and as such, exemplifies the importance of a focus on ethics and ethical behaviour to perpetrator intervention work.

## Restraining ideas

While enabling an ongoing focus on ethics—that is, men's values, beliefs and movement towards respectful ways of living—narrative and invitational practices are equally focused on restraints to change, or in other words, what gets in the way of men realising their ethical preferences (Katic, 2016). A Foucauldian understanding of power as productive, and not merely repressive, underpins invitational narrative approaches, evident in their focus on "examining questions of self, cultural contexts, power and the way power relations help to shape, legitimise and constitute personal narratives" (McLeod, 2000; Rose, 1989; 1998 cited in Besley, 2001, p. 73). Reflecting Foucault's emphasis on the inseparability of power and knowledge, attention is directed towards societal and cultural discourses as the context for individual beliefs and actions. Thus, in aligning themselves with particular discourses, men may be viewed as accomplices and recruits in the continuation of patriarchal practices (Moss, 2016). Practitioners strive to maintain a stance of curiosity in relation to exploring which ideas and practices might be stopping men from choosing respectful and non-violent ways of being. These are conversations that require careful navigation to ensure that women's and children's safety remains paramount; the challenge for the practitioner is to maintain a dual focus on both restraint and responsibility, as exemplified in Roger's case.

Roger comes from a large family, but has lost contact with all but one sister. Throughout the interview, he talked about the constant presence of violence in his life, including his childhood experience of physical abuse and neglect and the resulting trauma, as well as the violence encountered through his work in the inherently violent culture of the security



industry. He also described the aftermath—both physical and psychological—of a recent motorbike accident that had profoundly impacted his capacity and lifestyle. He explains that in coming to counselling, he was seeking answers to questions, including:

Is there a better way of dealing with some of my issues?  
Is there a different formula, is there a different process?  
Is grieving involved? Is digesting and understanding and learning part of this, is it all controlled by medications?  
Does anybody have the power over me that I don't recognise? Is there anything I can do?

Describing his perspective on these early sessions, Roger's practitioner spoke of his struggle to engage meaningfully with Roger, noting that at times he felt "overwhelmed", "irritated" and "intimidated". However, by both actively engaging Roger in exploring his ethics and drawing attention to restraining ideas and their influence, the practitioner was able to establish a more constructive basis for intervention:

I was looking for space to ask this question, because of the density of his stories, it's kind of looking for an opening, looking for a little bit of a foothold and interrupting some of the flow of things because it was coming out thick and fast. And so I would periodically sort of say [Roger] would you mind if we pause just a sec because I've got a hunch there's other stuff here that might help me understand ... he's either said something or indicated something that's pointed in a direction, or said something that was important. And so I've sort of tried to pull the conversation up a bit and say now what was important about you doing this ... ?

In this way, the practitioner created space for Roger to reflect more deeply on his thoughts, feelings and experiences:

So he [Roger] talked about what it was that he missed out on growing up and he talked about respect as missing but also that loyalty was something that was incredibly important in his family, they were poor but very hard working, rural workers, and it was a pretty tough scene by the sound of it ... and so trying to hold onto his ethics and he increasingly seemed to be able to respond to that, but not always, sometimes it would just keep going. And so part of what I was trying to do was to get a little bit of

that distance in there a little bit of some sort of reflective surface so he can hear what he's saying.

Taking the time to explore Roger's childhood trauma was a way to open up conversations about the effects of his own behaviour on Amy and her daughter, and thus, in turn, Roger's ethics. In shifting the focus away from causal explanations for his violence and toward its impact on others, the practitioner invited Roger to think about what was getting in the way of him making change in his life:

I was interested in him expressing an ethic around sort of caring for [Amy] and her daughter and that somehow the anger didn't sit well. I would say, so [Roger], about the smashing the cupboard up, I would say something like, did that kind of sit okay or not okay with your sense of you talking about really caring about them, in fact, love, is the word that was used, does it kind of sit? It's where a bloke notices, or where any of us notice there's a mismatch between some stated ethic and what we're actually doing with it. So in that space where he has told me this story about the cupboard, and I've sort of brought back in, you know the reflective surfaces, a bit of summarising around some stuff, he told me about his ethics, and then how do these fit together? Because men will want to tell you that they do these things out of love, you know. Even though this is a bit awkward or tough or uncomfortable, I would ask is this what you've signed up for. So it's inviting him to be quite explicit, to say yep, or no actually. So it's inviting that sense of him to explicitly articulate his investment in this at every time, and for me not to either overestimate his readiness to take responsibility but not to underestimate it. So it's tracking, it's constantly trying to find that space, really, is how I'd describe it ... just slowing things down to create awareness.

For Roger, this approach was significant, enabling him to connect with the practitioner, identify his ethical preferences for "kindness", "compassion", "empathy", "love" and "tenderness" (all the things he "was not given as a child"), and engage in work towards these. He explains that:

The counsellor was honest with me. He said, 'Some of these things I can help you with, some of these things I have to report on, some of these things I may not like but will talk about them.' He was truthful, and he's a person, and he cares. That's all I needed.

The notion of restraints to change provides a lens for thinking about both the complexity of change and the ubiquity of social and cultural supports for violence. In practice, restraining ideas are used to explore the networks of presuppositions, premises, expectations and assumptions that inform understandings of masculinity and femininity, and gender relations and roles. For Randall and Harry, these gendered assumptions were intimately connected with their Christian faith. Close adherence to any faith, whether Christian (in Randall's case, evangelical Christianity) or other, has the potential to form the basis of a network of restraining ideas. By paying attention to core beliefs and ethics, the practitioners were able to work with the men to explore their preferences without engaging in discussion or debate about religion or faith-based principles. For example, Randall's practitioner observed that:

[In] terms of his stated goal of becoming a better person, a better person for his kids, tells me about what his current preferences are and for [Randall] the invitational narrative ideas connected with him in terms of Christian values and beliefs.

Explaining that Randall's use of pornography was one of the issues for discussion, Randall's practitioner talked about how this "became part [of their] ethical conversations", enabling Randall to articulate its lack of fit with his Christian beliefs and broader ethics.

From the perspective of Harry's practitioner, the invitational narrative approach invites men on an "ethical journey", in which:

Narrative practices are, the kind of questioning that actually deconstruct the ideas, the taken for granted ideas that are embedded in discourses around what it is to be a man, and so the invitation is to have this man consider the possibilities of a life that fits more with who and how he wants to be, and the kind of ethics behind that.

For Harry, this provided a safe space to reflect on his Christianity, to question the hierarchical, gendered dictates of his church and to consider a changing value base for his own relationships:

I'm a Christian ... exploring my own beliefs and values has been challenging because, certainly the church

upholds that same hierarchical model, and dare I say it, most churches that I've been involved in uphold the stereotypical model as well, so the male is the head of the church, it can't be a woman, and that's always challenged me ... it caused me to look at the values and ideas that I'd grown up with, and that I'd learned and so in a sense caused me to I guess kind of unpack every part of my life.

Practitioners involved in narrative and invitational practice thus collaborate with men to identify and resist limiting ideas, including those associated with the cultural and social contexts in which men are recruited into dominant, hegemonic forms of masculinity (Vlais, 2014).

The belief in, and commitment to, men's "own realization and desire to become ethical" (Katic, 2016, p. 7) is central to narrative and invitational practice, and underpins the practitioner stance of curiosity, patience and respectful exploration. The notion of restraints or restraining ideas reflects a conceptualisation of change as complex, non-linear and active. In this way, practitioners are focused on the long-term—on collaborating with men in the (co)creation of deep and sustained change, new understandings and the possibility of different ways of being. This is a stance that is inherently optimistic regarding both the human capacity for change and (the majority of) men's preferences for equal, fair and safe relationships (Moss, 2016).

Matthew had been attending men's groups and individual counselling for a period of 7 years and said his values and beliefs were "always there, they were just forgotten". He said:

I would make excuses for myself why they should be forgotten over time anyway and today I keep those values and my beliefs very close to me and not much moves me, nothing will move me from them because it prevents people being hurt ... It is that question of what type of relationship would you like with your partner ... you want those things but you have to give them. You have to give them.

Matthew's practitioner commented that:

It is ethical change, it is awareness of the self, this is philosophical therapeutic stuff, it's not in order to cure

headaches or depression or all that ... so it is a change in the way that people relate to each other in the world, so it's relational, it's ethical, it's accountable to women and children if there's a recognising of power and control ... [T]he most available discourse to masculinity is, 'Oh it's her fault', one, or 'I just snapped' or 'I'm mentally unstable'—those things are available in our culture, so if a man can think twice about that and start to look at himself in a safe way then hopefully she'll have a safer experience ... it's about safety then I think it—that's change, that's accountable change.

## Shame

In invitational narrative practice, shame is recognised as playing an important role in the process of taking responsibility. By exploring the experience of, and emotions associated with shame, practitioners support men in facing their shame in a way that highlights the contradictions between their behaviour and their stated ethical preferences. Steve's experience of shame, for example, was especially heightened by the fact that his children had witnessed his violence:

The girls saw when I broke her [Jane's/their mother's] arm ... I think that just sort of tipped me over the edge as if to go 'Shit, I've really gone way too far now' ... I was a bit numb, had a lot of remorse for what I'd done.

Steve explained that talking about this with his practitioner was particularly challenging:

[It was] pretty hard because it was pretty emotional. Because I knew what I'd done and I knew that it was going to have to be talked about but my prior reasoning was I would never talk about it. I would just go, 'Oh, that didn't really happen'. So talking to someone about it was really difficult.

The experience of remorse and shame is also important in enabling reflection on the impacts of abuse and violence on women and children, as the foundation for empathy-building. For John's practitioner, the exploration of ethics and the experience of shame and related discomfort are intimately related, and provide a powerful base for transformative work with perpetrators:

This is a very sensitive space for everyone, and it was for [John], because our culture doesn't provide men, or anybody much, I don't think, we don't know how to do shame. I think now this experience of shame, particularly in the face of having disgraced oneself by acting in a bad way is a critical measure of the distance from one's own ethics and so this is a really important space to be explored.

Here, the practitioner makes the connection between John's experience of "moments of discomfort" and his broader ethical principles:

[John] would talk quite explicitly about the sense of feeling ashamed about some of his behaviour, and he said the shame was in relation to him wanting to be more approachable or wanting to be able to have conversations on a sort of a level keel with the girls, or [Linda], or a dialogue as he put it ... you know, recognising other people and their opinion instead of trying to obliterate their opinion in the interest of his own, etc.

Accordingly, John described "talking about [Linda's] feelings and the girls' feelings"—the "things that you have to admit to" and "how my actions affect them"—as especially challenging, but nonetheless crucial to his work towards change. In his words, "going through all the stages of guilt and shame and remorse" is necessary, "otherwise you can't move forward".

The practitioners acknowledged that paying attention to the experience of shame, while difficult for most men, is crucial to ensuring their accountability to women and children. In practice, this requires that they maintain a balance between respectful curiosity and sensitivity and an unwavering focus on women and children's safety, as highlighted by this practitioner:

These are conversations most of these men have never had with anybody, and I have to try and remember that, you know? It's weird, isn't it, but lots of men I work with who have made life incredibly dangerous and painful for the people around them, require a huge sense of safety to talk about them. So that almost fascinates me, that space, the simultaneous visiting of huge trauma and hurt on others, and creating a constant atmosphere or a context of safety for them to step into, to be able to work in this space, and non-judgement.

In this context, conversations concerning shame require an environment of trust and relative safety via a therapeutic relationship that is both established and collaborative. In drawing the men along pathways of reflection towards greater personal responsibility, practitioners talked about the importance of an (therapeutic) alliance for addressing discomfort, embarrassment and shame (Brown et al., 2016; Katic, 2016). Matthew's practitioner, for example, reflected on the centrality of gender politics in her work with men who use violence:

We can't enter this conversation with any new men just straight off the bat because, particularly coming from a woman—because it is my gender that is under the spotlight here ... because of patriarchy it's my gender that is talked about and sometimes I find it difficult to come alongside the man and don't have him feeling shamed, or blamed ... If he gets a sense that somebody's going to be somehow punitive, that you know he's done a bad thing then it's—yeah it's going to shut him down, he's not going to want to engage with our other processes ... That speaks to very, very big gender politics, you know it's really hard to even fathom the enormity of that when patriarchy will construct masculinities that will always shift responsibility—right? Or my gender ... we're constructed as having to take care of them [men] so this is where the rubber hits the road ... we just invite him to have a look; it's kind of come and have a look and have a conversation with me ... otherwise we'd lose the man ... To invite men to have a look as a sense to get to know themselves.

In relation to her work with Matthew in particular, the practitioner acknowledged that while acknowledging and exploring shame can take a long time, this reflects the complexity and challenging nature of the process. Here she emphasises the importance of a partnership approach, so that men are not left to “sit” in shame—and, to this end, the value of narrative principles of externalising:

For [Matthew] ... to feel the shame, to let it overcome him ... It took a lot for him to work up, it took a lot of ethical and trust building—that he knew that change was possible, that we would provide the conversational space for that, for him to be able to feel whatever he's feeling, for men to be able to feel whatever they're experiencing

and for him to know and for us to be able to scaffold that embarrassment as being a catalyst or a pointer to what's important to him ... Let's externalise the shame ... so let's put it out there on the whiteboard and let's see how it's affecting you in your life. For us, in terms of accountability, the process of externalisation allows the person to generate some agency, so have some power over his actions ... [We are] trying to very carefully stay with the embarrassment and have the man experience it so get a sense of where it is in his body—what is it that this shame might lead you to do? So that shame, that embarrassment is 'I've done her wrong', 'I've hurt something that's very precious to me and I've hurt it because of power and control, because I was captured by these dangerous ideas', 'Because I wanted that ...'

In discussing his experience of counselling, Matthew referred to his desire to deal with feeling uncomfortable: that he was tired of being uncomfortable with his thoughts and behaviour. When asked to reflect upon this sense of discomfort, Matthew explained:

I think it's probably a good thing to be uncomfortable with that sort of thing, I mean, but looking back it wasn't a good thing for me, but so something I had to go through, I think, and I probably still go through it to this day.

Interestingly, Matthew seemed to recognise the importance of the practitioner's role in bringing these feelings of discomfort—or shame—to the surface:

I didn't like the way I felt ... and she (the practitioner), I suppose it's their job to sort of bring a degree of guilt on a perpetrator and they do, and I'm not knocking them in any way ... it's sort of just like expanding the thoughts ... It's very, very difficult ... Because I was ashamed. Because I was ashamed and probably in the first group it was like, I can do no wrong, I'm always right, and but it sort of progressed from that, like the 12<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> [session?], within the middle of that first group anyway. It was like an—it was an embarrassing moment so it's like you don't want to admit to counsellors or in front of sometimes even ten guys, sometimes even seven guys, yeah, it was a pretty tough one to swallow, it's really hard.

Navigating discussions about shame and supporting men in facing such feelings is highly skilled work in narrative and invitational practice, requiring that practitioners manage the potential for men's disengagement and defensiveness while enabling an "awakened reality" with regard to the harms experienced by victims/survivors of men's violence (Brown et al., 2016, p. 134). This awakening is fundamental to change for narrative and invitational practitioners, ensuring that men both acknowledge their choice to use violence and identify their own solutions (Payne, 2014).

## Naming violence

Invitational narrative approaches work with men to gradually progress towards increasingly precise and accurate descriptions of their uses of abuse and violence; this is seen as a key way in which men demonstrate their readiness to change (Jenkins, 2009) and move away from tactics of defensiveness, denial, justification and minimisation. For invitational narrative practitioners, each step towards naming abusive behaviour provides opportunities for men to reflect on their ethical journeys (Jenkins, 2009, p. 115). Slowing down the work—emphasising depth, reflection and contemplation—is seen as necessary to ensure that men carefully evaluate meanings and their ethical implications for change. This is in contrast to confrontational approaches which insist on men naming and demonstrating responsibility for their violence from the outset. The slowed-down approach taken in invitational narrative practice recognises the need to build readiness by focusing on men developing their capacity to face and reposition shame (Jenkins, 2009, p. 115).

The notion of "calling it what it is", or the idea that a "thing does not exist until it is named", is central to invitational narrative practice (Jenkins, 2009, p. 115). In this context, the act of accounting for one's violence is seen as an important exercise in self-confrontation that can enable deeper realisation. For some of the men, this was a pivotal moment in their movement towards responsibility, as expressed by Steve:

You just think, wow I'm not the only one. But then again I felt like I was the only one in there. So you're listening to what people are saying but you're still thinking about what—they would talk and then it would trigger something

in my mind of what I've done ... The thing that stood out for me was they gave us this five sheets of paper and it was these are forms of domestic violence. Have you ever committed any of these? When you're ticking 80 percent of them, you've just got to go holy crap ... like controlling a situation to get an outcome that I want. Like you wouldn't think much of it but when you persuade someone to change their point of view to get what you want, you're not listening and you're not understanding what's going on.

Matthew also spoke about the impact of this exercise, or a similar one; however, its significance for him related to ethics, and in particular the practitioner-facilitated discussion concerning the ethical question: "What type of relationship do you want?" In other words, as Matthew explains here, it was not the naming of his violent practices that he found confronting, but rather the experience of reflecting on these in the context of his emerging ethical realisation:

It's like a checklist of the thing where you name what you have done and have you ever pulled hair, have you ever engaged in intercourse without consent, have you ever belittled or denigrated or all that sort of thing ... and to me that was, that experience wasn't effective ... It was clinical, that was just a matter of just checking the box and getting it out of the way but to talk about that stuff openly, which I do now, it was the question they put on the board: What type of relationship would you like with your partner and your children? And people were saying loving, caring, kind, understanding and I was thinking, shit, why am I not getting any of this? So—and I can laugh about it now—anyways, you know where I'm coming from, and later in the group I realised I wasn't getting any of this because of what I was doing and the effects it has on others, I mean—I was being very selfish and I had a sense of entitlement about me that I was entitled to all this and maybe my partner wasn't entitled to this.

John's practitioner further emphasised the importance of inviting men to name and describe their violence in detail, noting that without this explicit focus, the nature and effects of violence can be hidden or diminished:

In a narrative invitational approach, it's inviting him [John] to name this, [to consider] why is it important to name it



and to be able to call it for what it is ... as opposed to, 'Oh I just lose my temper'. But what other labels would you use to describe it? So it's around the politics of language, really, what would [Linda] think if you were describing this as you 'being a little bit upset' as opposed to being emotionally abusive? What would she think? These sort of questions to try and get the language right as a sign of stepping and taking full responsibility for it, rather than trying to shrink it or diminish it.

John's practitioner went on to explain how, over time, John progressed in his willingness and ability to describe his behaviours in detail including, for example, "eyeballing [Linda], like getting right up close, raising his voice, a particular tone he could get in his voice that would send everybody on edge". For his part, John recalled that while initially he saw himself as having an "anger problem", through working with his practitioner he came to recognise the diverse forms and manifestations of violence, and ultimately to understand his behaviour as domestic violence:

I was never violent, like physically violent, but I think, worse than anything with having a dummy spit or having a brat episode, that's actually worse, because mental abuse, I think is harder to deal with, harder to see and harder to heal. So, if anything, that made me feel worse, because it was never intentional and it wasn't until you start talking and you start working through it that you realise how nasty it is to the people that you love, or anybody, but especially the people that you love, and just not realising the impact that it can have, because you don't see it, you know.

Some of the practitioners described a questioning exercise used with men to stimulate deep reflection regarding their violence, which involves working through a series of questions designed to construct a detailed picture of their uses of violence, focusing in particular on their thoughts and feelings at the time. The practitioners talked about working closely with the men to slow down the conversation—by honing in on details, teasing out the complexities and probing what might be presented as irrelevant—as a way of counteracting the narratives associated with the idea that violence "just happens". Harry, for example, talked about his realisation of the distinction between thoughts, feelings and actions:

We talked about how you can have ideas and those ideas can become emotive, and those emotions can, if we let them, can become actions, those actions lead to consequences. I picture that timeline in my head all the time—and I've definitely been challenged to look at aspects of my life, and aspects of my, of who I really am, so what makes me, and my interactions with other people, not just my wife and my children, but with everybody, so I've been challenged in that sense.

This approach was also useful for disentangling men's presentations of distress, and making sense of these in the context of power and control. For example, George was referred to Uniting Communities by Men's Line Australia after making a "preliminary suicide attempt"; he explained that he "probably wasn't coping well" when his wife Maria told him that "she needed space". George's practitioner clarified that:

He was very concerned and distressed that his wife was making movements that looked like she was pulling out [of] the relationship and he heard from her that her experience of him was that he's been very controlling. And ... he thought her description of this was a bit misplaced and he wanted to understand if he was controlling.

This question—"am I controlling?"—was one that George returned to repeatedly:

I never saw myself as controlling and that's why this was a really big thing for me ... I think I needed something just to say, 'Am I controlling?' If I am, what do I need to do?

Nonetheless, despite seeming open to this possibility, his unrelenting focus and debate concerning whether or not he was controlling enabled George to avoid deeper engagement across both the individual and group settings:

In my mind I'm thinking, look, I've been self-reflected, I've done all this, people have been telling me, 'Well, no, it's not controlling'. I mean, I'm a very factual person. I like to get my facts and say, we'll do this, we've got all this, [and] this is probably the more efficient way or the best way of doing it. And so I'm thinking, where's that controlling behaviour? I don't know. So, if I ask someone, 'Oh, yeah, you're going out tonight. Where are you going?' That was seen as controlling. My wife said to

me, 'Oh, you're controlling me by asking me where I'm going', and I said, 'Oh, normal relationships, people do ask where you're going. If your phone stops working or whatever and you don't come home, do I know where you might be?' So, yeah, I probably didn't see a lot of things as controlling but then there's probably some stuff where, if she was doing something, I would say, 'Oh, yeah, how come you're doing it that way?'—And it was very much around saying that's an unusual way of doing it, but perhaps that's controlling and I need to change my ways. So, then I was thinking, well, you know what? Maybe I am, maybe there are small pockets where, in some people's mind it seems controlling and some not ... [But] why is that controlling? Why is that—what am I doing? So, it allows you to reflect on your actions but I think it also then says, no, it wasn't controlling. There's nothing wrong [with] me asking ...

Recognising this, George's practitioner observed that:

His big long, at-length stories about what was going on, was positioning him[self] as treating her like a princess and doing everything for everyone. 'And she says I was controlling but I was doing stuff for her and she doesn't like me washing her car', or something like that. So the, the wrap-around story was convincing to people who don't know his partner's experience, probably very convincing to himself.

Each of the men interviewed were at a different stage in their counselling journey; some men were reluctant to name their violence, whereas others were ready to name it but went to lengths to justify it. Carlos, for example, was on home detention for assaulting his wife; one of the central themes of his story was his distress that "no one"—the police, the courts—seemed to be interested in his perspective on the assault. Carlos's practitioner explained that they do not open up questions about "why" as this invites justification and takes the focus off women's and children's safety and the effects of harmful behaviour. The practitioner uses curiosity to bring the conversation back to ethical preferences and effects:

And why is a question that, [in] invitation or narrative we kind of avoid a lot, because there's no answer to why. It's what happened, how did you find yourself going there, what were you giving up on when you went there? And

what was the effects of that on you and your partner and your family?

Furthermore, the mere act of naming violence does not equate to behavioural and attitudinal change. The naming of violence is regarded as a work in progress, because for invitational narrative practitioners, this naming is connected to a deep understanding of the known and potential effects of violence upon individuals, families and communities (Jenkins, 2009). Thus, men might acknowledge some forms and acts of violence and not others, thereby failing to engage with issues such as ongoing patterns of coercion and control and gendered power relations more broadly. For example, Roger talked about violence in his current relationship but was unwilling to discuss his use of violence in a previous relationship, instead commenting—ambiguously—that:

It's hard to say if it's alright to say the female does the violence. You work hard, you come home, and you get pissed off with a woman who doesn't look after your kids, what can you do?

This element of ambiguity was evident throughout Roger's account, making it difficult to determine his level of responsibility, as reflected in his description of an incident involving the daughter of Amy, his current partner:

I was close to being violent to her [Amy's] daughter, and violent in such a way where, 'Go and clean your room. If you're 12 and your mum tells you to go clean your room ... ?' But she doesn't ... it's hard for me, because I haven't been around children ... it makes it hard for me to not treat her as an adult ... So, I would bring the bin inside, and if it's a TV, or if it's a cabinet, or if it's a desk, or if it's a table ... I'll throw the whole lot out, I've already done it. That's where my anger issues were coming from. But like the daughter and like my partner were standing there going, 'Why do you do this? Why do you attack my daughter? Why do you think you have the right?' Because when men don't think, they get frustrated and throw their hands around. That's when their kids get hurt and that's when their wives are broken, and that's when they're starting to fight with other men ... I lashed out. I'm not thinking. I'm pissed off, and I don't know why.

When asked about his experience of discussing this incident with a practitioner, though, Roger came closer to naming his use of violence, while also alluding to his sense of shame:

Well the scariest part is to acknowledge that, are you violent? Yeah. How do you know? Your daughter's running out of the room. That's violence. I yelled at her. That's violence. I threw things at her. That's violence. I threw things past her, counting her bed, her cabinet, her door, I ripped a door off the room—that's violence ... I should have been locked up for how I've been making them feel.

Amy, Roger's partner, also talked about this incident, explaining that she had told Roger he was getting out of hand and that if he didn't get help the relationship would end. She described feeling frightened both for herself and for her daughter. In talking about this same event, Roger's practitioner acknowledged his own concern for the safety of Amy and her daughter and explained how he sought to engage Roger by inviting him to reflect on his own childhood experiences of fear and trauma. The practitioner's account, as shown here, demonstrates the interweaving in practice of invitational and narrative ideas of ethical preference, restraining thoughts and naming violence to engage men in useful ways without losing sight of safety concerns:

I think, particularly with [Roger], around hearing and attending to his trauma, and hearing and attending to what's going on in his life now that's very destructive for his stepdaughter, and his partner. But that took a long time, like what was going on around his partner and stepchild. That took a long time to get to. And even though I would periodically ask, he either didn't hear me or what he told me would very quickly veer off somewhere else. So partly it's persistence too, I think there's something to do with the skill of just being a bit dogged about it. But that double thing, and it seems to be the case for lots of men who come here, that it's a two-sided event around trauma and then visiting trauma on others, you know. And so it's attending, trying to attend to both of those, really. And obviously the ongoing big picture is how safe is this girl and how safe is the mum? That was very hard to ascertain, but he did agree then to us contacting his partner and I did make periodic child protection notifications on the [child] ... but I had to play that extremely safe, obviously in the interests of his partner and child. This allowed me to stay with him in this with some reasonable knowledge

I had that whatever safety things we could put in place were put in place, and then after about four sessions, we then did have contact with [Amy]. And that obviously gave us a much fuller picture of what was going on.

In invitational and narrative practice, the ability—or readiness—of men to accurately name and describe their use of violence is regarded as a crucial step towards acknowledging its impact on women and children, and in turn enabling the men to reflect upon their ethical journeys (Jenkins, 2009).

## Exploring the effects of men's violence on women and children

Men who use violence often resist considering the experiences of others, and the impact of their behaviour on them. A key premise of invitational narrative practice is the recognition that profound ethical engagement and the development of remorse and an interest in others (Jenkins, 2009) are interlinked. Practitioners aim to work with men in a way that enables them to work through these concerns in a gradual, ongoing and sustainable manner. The recognition of harm done to others cannot be forced; instead, men must explore their own understandings of their behaviour and its effects in order to reflect upon these in terms of their ethical journeys. The practitioners were clear that trying to rush this can unintentionally lead to active resistance, avoidance or defensiveness. Working with shame alongside the recognition of effects—that is, balancing (personal) shame and impacts (on others)—as seen in the accounts of Ben, Paula and their practitioner, is one way of facilitating sustainable change.

The assertion that he was not currently physically violent towards Paula, while admitting that he had been in the past, was highly significant for Ben. When asked to reflect on his understanding of violence and abuse, he made a connection between his own experiences of trauma and Paula's:

But you see ... I wasn't violent, I wasn't being violent when we went to see [practitioner] anyway ... I had post-traumatic stress at one stage and [Paula] has probably, or the way I look at it, [Paula] has probably got post-traumatic stress from when I was a violent person. And I think well, it's my fault that she [has this] ...

Interestingly, Ben also distanced himself from violence by distinguishing between his “old self” and who he is now. He goes on to say that:

Probably, because I was affected by it, that is post-traumatic stress. You see, I was in a special unit and [I] have been to war and did some pretty horrible things ... I don't think they shaped me but then I wasn't a nice person I don't think, I don't know why she married me ... I was brought up fighting so I was a good ... I don't know, that's what I'm saying now whether—[I'm] making excuses for myself.

In providing her perspective on Ben's insight into the effects of his violence on her, Paula was cautious, saying that while she was hopeful that he had gained this, she didn't know. The continuing impacts with respect to Paula's sense of emotional safety—such as her confidence in raising difficult issues with Ben—were also clear:

Particularly, ... if we go back, as far back as physical violence ... I mean, we don't talk about that because it would upset or make him angry, put it that way ... when I say we don't talk about it, I won't say it's never mentioned, being abusive ... [but] the physical violence is in the past. I don't know—that's probably affected my behaviour along the way.

Recognising this, the practitioner noted that Paula continues to make a lot of allowances for Ben because of his difficult childhood and his experiences in war. One strategy used by the practitioner to facilitate conversations around harm was to focus on the language used by both Ben and Paula in order to link this with Ben's ethical preferences. Exploring effects is slow work, requiring that men have the opportunity to carefully consider both the perspectives of other people and the harm done to them, in order to experience new realisations and practices conducive to ethical ways of being. Here, the practitioner clearly captures the complexity of this work:

[Paula] might have been crying, talking about the effects and I might be saying, 'Now okay thank you for sharing that [Paula], can I now ask you a few questions [Ben]?' And maybe, '[Paula] can I ask you in very particular ways about what he's hearing and seeing and the effect of even hearing from you now about what that's like—if it's new or different or if it's the same as what's happened before?'

And then I might ask a series of what we call 'outsider witness'—narrative questions to kind of ask [Ben] what he was hearing, what was standing out, any images, anything that I had spoken to him about in terms of her values or the things that she held dear and precious in her life? [I would ask] '[W]hat would you like to do with that information now that you know ... ?' So just lots of questions so that he could kind of really show [Paula] very directly having heard ... what would be different—what he would maybe be willing to do on account of hearing that. And that's a very narrative process I guess, because we want people not just to hear things in empty kind of ways. We want people to be kind of mobilised in taking steps and actions that fit for where they're at. So in doing that structuring and scaffolding of those questions I guess ... I did want to make sure he had a fairly big voice because he had a lot of responsibility and accountability to take. [I] felt like that was a juggle with family work or couple work because you are trying to take a gendered approach and balancing that with being invitational and narrative.

The journey towards recognition of effects is not necessarily linear. Practitioners are required to work specifically and intently to continually invite the man to consider the impact of his abusive behaviour on others. Bob, for example, reflected on his behaviour and its effects on others generally, but without naming his violence or specifically referring to Katy, his partner, or to his son. For example, he said:

Taking ownership of the things you've done and how it made you feel, certainly doesn't sit well. When you sit back and analyse what you've done and how you've treated people, it's not really nice.

Bob did not discuss his use of physical violence towards Katy with the interviewer at all during the interview. However, Bob's practitioner confirmed that this had been a significant focus of their work together and recalled details of their conversation, including:

[Bob] seeing the hurt, being asked back into, sort of, a moment of—'How did you know [Katy] was hurt by this? What did you see?' [In order to] get sort of concrete and particular, get into the moment. When he went back to the big incident where he assaulted her and choked her and threatened her life, ... he said she was petrified. [I



asked] ‘How did you know she was petrified? What was she doing?’ He described what he saw or heard in her voice ... Yeah, paying attention to these affects is important too.

Evident here is the detail and intensity of invitational narrative practice, with its focus on enabling men to experience remorse in a way that is measured and supported in order to reach long-lasting realisations, underpinned by a fundamental commitment to men’s own desire to be ethical.

Some practitioners identified exploring the effects of violence and abuse on children as a powerful way to stimulate rich discussion about ethical preferences, particularly with men with whom they were otherwise struggling to engage. Such conversations could then be used to open other windows into recognising the effects on partners. For example, Carlos did not talk about the effects of his abuse on his wife, but acknowledged his concerns regarding its impact on his daughters:

My daughter was, my little one was in her bedroom, even she didn’t hear or whatever, but she saw when the police arrived and you know like all that situation, I tried to avoid. I don’t want them to be in a bubble as well but I’m trying to avoid that violence, I don’t want, you know, like, to get used to it and see police all the time with problems or that sort of thing.

Carlos’ practitioner explained how he focused on Carlos’ empathy for his children as a way to explore his ethical preferences, with a view to opening up these conversations to include the effects on his wife:

So initially, he [Carlos] talked about how he was kind of partnering with the children almost, and it seemed to be setting up this sort of unhealthy closeness that was about positioning their mother as wrong basically. So I was inviting him to consider what this closeness might be engendering in the children in their relationship ... I asked him quite a lot about the effects that he thought there might be with children, and the effects on his partner is another story, but the effects on his children.

Invitational narrative practitioners observe that it is common for men to struggle with and resist these conversations, at least initially, given the familiarity of narratives of egocentrism, entitlement and justification for men who use violence (Jenkins, 2009). This tension in practice was especially apparent to the practitioner working with George, requiring that he work hard to re-position George’s protest as an opportunity to further explore his ethical preferences:

[George] has a story that he is being falsely accused and unfairly treated; however, it is important to work with this and talk about what would it be like for [Maria] to have that? [George] is good at moving the conversation somewhere else where he takes up a lot of the word volume, which I am naming as an obstacle which he is becoming more aware of. [Maria] has reported through the safety contact feedback that she feels swamped or overwhelmed by his words and this is my experience too. My plan is to move towards being more attentive to those questions that see her experience, or lead to questioning himself.

The practitioners also talked about the importance of moving men from seeing incidences of violence—and their effects—in isolation, to recognising patterns of behaviour with cumulative effects, creating deep-seated fear, control and dominance. For example, Jim spoke about his growing recognition of the fear experienced by June, his partner:

Oh, well, obviously when I’ve pushed her, it’s put a thing in her that I can be pretty aggressive. Quite aware of that.

Q: Okay, yeah. So you’re more aware of that now.

A: Yeah, and she can have a thing where, just say if my voice goes up or something like that, she can have a thing come over her and it’s just like I’ve said to—or her stomach will drop—and I’ve said to her, she said to me not that long ago actually, she said something to me about her stomach dropping and I turned around and I said to her, ‘When that happens, can you go, that’s what I’m talking about’, so then I can see what she’s actually saying.

Q: So when she speaks about her stomach dropping, is she sort of speaking about fear?

A: That’s what it is, it’s fear, like egg shell thing, and I’m like, that’s what I’m saying to her, when you feel that, tell me then when it happens and then I’ll clear it ...



Jim's expectation that June be responsible for "telling him" is noteworthy, though, as it indicates a limited understanding of the impact of his behaviour as well as an ambivalence regarding his own responsibility in this respect. A later comment by Jim seems to confirm this reading; he says:

I just think she's [June's] got a problem ... I know it's not me. I honestly believe it's something in her head and, yeah. She's on medication and when she had that—when she tripped out, she'd stopped taking the medication so I sort of see that if she's on the medication she's better.

June was nonetheless quite clear in her explanation of the ongoing effects of Jim's behaviour, including his past physical violence and the emotional abuse that continues:

I'm tired, work too hard, I haven't eaten, didn't get enough sleep, so the name-calling was terrible—and egg shells ... and now not necessarily physical but the fact that like he'd come here ... I sometimes think it's affected my self-esteem, my self-worth because for a while there the name-calling ... I couldn't look in the mirror and not hear certain words, like the names ... but I also realised like I'm at a point with [Jim] now where I won't take crap.

In a different example, Harry talked about listening to the facilitators challenge men—and experiencing that challenge himself—in the group program setting, and recalled the time when his thinking about the broader effects of violence began to shift:

The facilitator will challenge you, not in an aggressive or argumentative way but they'll sort of say, 'Okay, well where did that come from ... how do you think the other people felt?', and I came to understand how things may have been perceived. So I think the group probably helped to reinforce, so there is physical violence for instance ... I certainly came to understand how those impact upon others and that really helped me to understand the consequences.

Harry also acknowledged the particular value of the group discussions in enabling him to "see how my actions would have been interpreted by [former partner]".

Harry's practitioner explained the importance of this shift—recognising the differences between the perpetrator's view and the victim's/survivor's experience, that "[I]t's not an act and we're over it, this is a lifelong trauma"—in enabling attitudinal change. Key here is the distinction between a focus on an isolated act and the experience of this act within the context of other forms of control and abuse:

Yeah, until he's invited into her space and understand the effects. So there's this dance between the preferred ethics, and the values and the identity that he's expressing. But he can't do that without understanding his partner's experience, if he's got any hope of wanting to change. We try and bring men back to this disconnect between his intentions and his ethics, and his actions.

Some men were more specific in their descriptions of the effects of their behaviour, and were perhaps further advanced in their ethical journey. John, for instance, was able to provide concrete, here-and-now examples of interactions with his family in which he experienced moments of recognition. Here he talks about his realisation of his daughter's continuing wariness and caution in his presence:

I was talking to my eldest the other day, she was mucking around on her laptop. Music's going on in the background. She couldn't hear me, so I raised my voice. She said, 'Don't yell at me'. And it's like, oh, stop ... Because I'm not—and I explained to her later, I said, 'Look, I apologise'. I said, 'I wasn't yelling at you'. I said, 'You couldn't hear me, so I raised my voice.' But automatically, it takes her back to, 'Don't yell at me', and it's like, ooh, that was never my intent, but because that was the first thing that she thought when I raised my voice ...

John's practitioner confirmed that exploring the effects of his actions had been central to his work with John. Notably, he observed that John came to counselling already "being able to name a lot of this stuff"; that in that respect he was "a bit unusual" because "he'd thought about things considerably", probably after considerable prompting and input from Linda. As was the case with Carlos, discussed previously, John's practitioner noticed that John was nonetheless more ready to recognise and accept the effects of his violence on his children than his partner. Thus, his practitioner initially questioned the extent to which John "could tolerate hearing

anything from [Linda] about the real effects of this on her, or whether that was a potentially risky thing for her to be doing”. He later concluded that there “seemed to be space for this to happen”, but acknowledged that it was slow work. Over time, though, these discussions evolved to a point where it was possible for John to reflect upon the notion of reparation or “making good”. The practitioner explained:

It’s not often that I’ll get down the track this far with men, but the question came up about his increasingly looking into some of the effects or some of the damage that’s kind of been done, over time, this question about how to make good on this started to come up. Like do you just forget this? Or move into a brighter future, or how do you fix it? Can you fix it? These are really profound questions that trouble men in different ways, and with him as well. Like how do I sort this? Do I apologise for the 500<sup>th</sup> time? Or something else? So there was an exploration of that.

The evidence for John having made significant progress is strong. Nevertheless, paying attention to Linda’s perspective highlights the complexity and embeddedness of the ongoing effects of violence, as well as the shortcomings of assuming straightforward distinctions between “violence” and “non-violence”, and hence what constitutes a “safe” outcome. For example, Linda explained:

I feel like he’s done really, really well and I’m really proud of what he’s been able to achieve. I do think prior to men’s [stopping] counselling ... the family should be involved because it seems to be a forgotten thing that, like there’s scars from stuff that’s happened and not just with myself, like I’m still dealing with the impact that this has had on my children, and I don’t feel like I can speak to [John] about that because that’s a bit blamey.

It is equally clear that while John has indeed made progress and their relationship has improved, the underpinning power dynamics remain, and Linda continues to struggle with the daily experience of living with these contradictions and complexities. For example, Linda perceived that John does not fully grasp the ongoing impacts of violence, particularly in relation to the children, or the ways in which this plays out differently for her. Crucially, however, as Linda pointed out, because “he thinks that he understands it”, he assumes that “he doesn’t need to hear it”.

In contrast, Steve was acutely aware of the impacts for both his wife Jane and their daughters:

It was not only fixing the relationship with [Jane] but it was about fixing the relationship with the girls as well because the girls didn’t want to know me for 12 months I reckon. They took a step back, which was pretty confronting as well.

In articulating both the extent and the ongoing nature of harm, Steve demonstrated his increased capacity to hear Jane, and importantly, to take her seriously:

[Jane’s] silenced herself so much from what I can gather, that—and even now she still says, ‘I’m not going to say anything because it’s just not worth it’. So despite of what’s going on now, that domestic violence imprint is still there ... it may not ever get to that point where she feels she could just say what she wants to physically say because she might think something’s going to happen. And she even says now, like there’s situations that crop up that she’ll just start crying and she just—like then she just gets flashbacks. It’s almost like a PTSD; she’s just traumatised by it.

Steve’s awareness of the impacts on his family was no doubt facilitated by Jane’s willingness to tell him, reflecting her increased sense of safety. Jane explains that:

There was a long period of time I think when my mental health was quite bad that I would say to [Steve] ... I would be like, ‘Well I’m broken—you fuckin broke me you bastard. So just deal with it—you are going to have to deal with this until I get better’. So I really pushed him sometimes. I got really, really mean. I got really, really mean to him but at the time I was just so angry because he broke my kids.

## Responsibility and thinking about change

Broadly, invitational narrative engagement and practice aims to work with men so that they can locate responsibility for their own realisations and achievements within themselves, owning and incorporating their capacity for change. Men are seen as having the capacity to gradually discover and develop their own integrity and responsibility (Jenkins, 1990).

Throughout the intervention journey, the vision is that invitational narrative ideas enable men to question the possibilities of how they live their lives and how they can maintain a vision and action for social change (McKenzie-Mohr & Lafrance, 2017). In sum, change from an invitational narrative viewpoint is about both behavioural and attitudinal change. Through ethical striving, it is thought, men can recognise and resist patterns of abusive behaviour, recognising restraining or dangerous ideas that inform such behaviour. Realisations of change and expressions of accountability can be seen in how men name abusive practices, how they understand the effects of abuse and how they face shame. Furthermore, it also can be seen in how men engage with understandings regarding the socio-political context of, and power relations associated with, men's use of violence against women (Jenkins, 2009, p. 133); which reflects the transformative political project of invitational narrative practice (Besley, 2001).

This section brings together the men's accounts of change, how they conceptualised and talked about change, and what they saw as most significant. Where relevant, commentary from their practitioners and/or ex/partners has been included to provide a source of verification. Sub-headings are used here to differentiate the length and currency of men's involvement with the service and highlight the cumulative gains of longer-term engagement. These findings demonstrate the complexity, fluidity and partiality of change, and hence the difficulty of making definitive statements or drawing absolute conclusions about men's change. It is possible to detect in the men's stories elements and moments of change that are significant and "real". Also evident, however, are the tensions and contradictions in men's claims of change, emphasising the need for caution.

The perspective provided by Matthew's practitioner is especially valuable for thinking about men, responsibility and change. It is included here as important context for making sense of the accounts that follow:

I guess the language of responsibility is one that we see all over the place ... we see a lot of talk in all of the policy and that's around men must take responsibility for this ... that kind of urging or insistence about men taking responsibility is one thing, and you know, the language

is important, I think. But in practice, when we're sitting in a room with a man or with a group of men, the ... responsibility has to be co-constructed, it can't be taken as a given, and it frequently is assumed that people can just step into it once they get clear enough. Well it's not the case with anybody, it's a socially, collaboratively constructed possibility for men to step into, and it can take a long time to get there. So rather than start, as a starting point, it's something that's arrived at, and see what men's interest is, because a good number of men that we see have had life experiences where very few people have taken any responsibility for anything, so if that's the case, there needs to be a very careful scaffolding and constructing the stories around where they have seen evidence of responsibility taking rather than me or someone else taking it for granted that any man knows what this looks like in practice.

## Early stages

At the time of the interviews, Jim, Carlos and George were the most recent referrals to Uniting Communities and hence had only just begun counselling and/or attending the men's group. Their reflections provide an opportunity to identify early indications of change enabled by invitational narrative practices. Jim, for example, had only been attending the men's program for 3 months at the time of his interview. He had an intervention order taken out by his former partner. The changes that Jim described during the interview were largely constructed around comparing himself with other men in the group and trying to look at people differently. For example, he said he appreciated listening to the "other blokes":

Like someone would give an example and I was like, 'Oh, fuck man, what are you thinking?' Do you know what I mean? I can see the speck in your eye but I couldn't see the paint hanging out my own, so basically you can see some of your own behaviour through other people.

... Well, women, they can get pretty stressed out and freaked out by what I see as just normal, right, but the way I grew up and that, it's like, man, and yet most of my life I've had people come near me and they're fucking terrified. And I've even seen it with other people like blokes and that where I can intimidate them with not even opening my mouth.

When the interviewer prompted Jim to talk about his behavioural change towards his partner, he elaborated:

We're probably getting on better than we've ever got on now, do you know? And I'm more along the lines of if you don't want to be there, don't be there, just go, but I'm not going to get in there arguing or—it's like, I'll stand there and even if there is—I just—I don't want to argue. I'll see you later, I'll go.

Jim's accounts of change show little engagement with the idea of ethical striving, and thus little basis for him to recognise restraining thoughts or feel shame regarding the effects of his violence on others, particularly June, his former partner. The practitioner spoke about Jim's presence in the group and the need to manage and gently challenge his ideas or comments as a way to invite reflection. Framing this as work in progress, he explained:

I'd be expecting that there would be slip-ups, that things wouldn't be all smooth sailing for [Jim], my guess is that it's had some maybe philosophical insight but if he is able to enact that ... he preferred to watch other men being challenged.

The practitioner's reflections demonstrate the skills required, at the beginning of counselling, to engage men slowly and tactfully, laying the foundation for work to come.

June also reflected on how she perceived Jim's change. She too picked up on the theme presented by Jim and the practitioner of Jim comparing himself to other men in the group, and also perceived some willingness to change, because he was attending the group for her, whereas he had not done this in past relationships:

I guess with the group he started to recognise himself in others, through them ... I think for the first time not only seeing it but admitting it, do you know, whereas prior to this relationship there was a lot of denial and 'It's shit, it was her fault and she was a bitch' ... [but] this time he is going, 'Well hang on a minute this is girlfriend number four ...'

However, June also named the lasting effects of the presence of her fear in her life, saying:

But it's a bit like the storm, you sort of think, 'Is the storm going to come?' and it doesn't, but you're still bracing for the storm ... So I still had the brace on and the protective shield of armour and I wouldn't get it and I'd be like, 'Oh where was that?' He's a lot more inward now than outward ... , and he's not as, I actually haven't felt egg shells probably ... for at least 4 months bar a couple of times.

Carlos was on home detention for an assault on his wife. They had been separated for 6 months at the time of interview and Carlos had been attending counselling for about 4 months. According to his practitioner, this was a serious assault, and he had been struggling to engage Carlos in conversations about his use of violence. He noted that Carlos was minimising his assault on his wife by talking about it in terms of being "a bit of a shock" and "out of character", and saying that he had "just slapped her". Likewise, in his interview, Carlos focused on his partner's behaviour, rather than his own, and justified his use of violence as being the result of her provocation:

My wife knows that, I think that's why she pushed me ... she knows maybe I'm not one of them [a perpetrator] but something triggered in me, I don't know.

Similarly, George had been attending individual counselling for only a few months and had been to three sessions of the men's intervention program. His partner Maria chose not to be interviewed. While George was clearly ambivalent, there were some indications that he was becoming more open to the possibility of other perspectives. For example, he talked about:

How other people might perceive some of your actions and things like that. And it's probably the realisation of saying, 'Well, yeah, people's perceptions is their reality' and—which you need to be more mindful of.

He provides another example from the men's group, in which:

It came up [that] sometimes you need to take that deep breath and just think before you take action ... it's almost like I want to resolve the issue straight away, that's me. That's probably my weakness ... If you want to do something, well, let's just resolve it. But sometimes you

just have to let—you have to pull back and say, yeah, you might think that’s right, it might be right, you might think it’s right and it might even be right, but you might just shut up and just hang five for a bit.

At times George hinted at some level of responsibility with phrases such as “I know I do that maybe that’s part of this controlling thing”; however, he moved on quickly in the interview to deflect this by saying things like, “[but] why is that controlling? Why is that—what am I doing?” His fixation on “this question, am I being abusive?” was identified by his practitioner as a significant block to progress which also impacted other men in the group program:

For instance, we’d be in the men’s group and some of the men were talking away, so taking responsibility for behaviour, naming their behaviour as abusive and violent. And this became the culture of the group but [George] stood outside that. One man spoke about, I can’t remember exactly what it was about, but he was taking responsibility for something and talking to [George] [expecting him to do the same], ‘When you do this or when you be controlling or abusive to your wife.’ And then [George] pauses and, ‘No not me, I’m not doing that.’ So, which is not great for the group, it’s a bit disruptive and it’s not going to work for a guy to be setting himself aside from [the group by saying], ‘You guys might all be violent and abusive, not me’ ... Part of the steps in the work is to be facing up to what you’ve done and taking responsibility for behaviour.

There is limited evidence of insight, or indeed responsibility, in George’s story, perhaps reflecting the early stage he is at in the process of, or journey towards, change, and George’s practitioner saw him as still being some distance away from taking responsibility for his behaviour. The interviews with George, Carlos and Jim—men who were at the start of their contact—show the skills used by practitioners in working across settings (individual and group) and in response to complex and diverse individuals and situations. Engaging men through the lens of invitational narrative practice emphasises that men’s reluctance is not necessarily a barrier to working with them. By focusing on men’s ethical preferences, practitioners instead work *around* resistance, acknowledging men’s humanity and working with them to identify and explore the contradictions between their use of violence and

their honourable ethics (Moss, 2016). Invitational narrative practice thus aims to dismantle those restraining ideas and practices that can get in the way of men acting in accordance with their ethical preferences, thereby supporting readiness for, and action towards, change.

## Making progress and initiating change

Ben, Bob, Harry and John’s interviews show the insights into change that can develop once men have become more settled in their therapeutic journey, having experienced the intake and assessment processes and established a level of rapport with their practitioner or men’s group.

Ben’s story shows that change can be less obvious, or less marked, for some men, but still significant: in other words, while tensions remain present, shifts in behaviour or attitudes can be demonstrated. Ben, aged in his early 70s, positioned physical violence as something in his past that he does not use anymore. Instead he mainly focused on “arguing” as the area in which he had most changed:

We were having differences of opinion without snapping at each other ... Before the counselling I wasn’t willing to try to work it out, look that’s what you think, I think different, I’m off and that was it, there was no, no what’s it called, compromise ... No compromise, whereas now I can think, alright then, so now if it starts now I can just walk out the room and come straight back in and put my arms around her, whereas before it would have been 2 days or whatever.

Ben and Paula both talked about Ben’s pattern of “giving the silent treatment” or “seething” for long periods of time. Both identified that this behaviour had shifted since counselling. Paula explained that she had wanted to attend counselling because she felt she was not listened to and she was tired of the yelling and seething. It was listening that she particularly valued:

Well, he does listen to me now. I mean, he’ll still sometimes say, ‘Oh, you’re picking on me, blah, blah, blah’, but then he’ll come around ... I’ll say, ‘What you did this morning really hurt me’ and he’ll be very, very apologetic and say, ‘I’m really sorry. Yes, I should have listened to you then’.



Q: Okay, and that hasn't happened in the past?

A: No ... it's more been that's a closed door, let's go from now rather than discussing things through.

Paula also positioned physical violence in the past. She named being heard and listened to as what she wanted in her older age. Listening was the dominant theme in the interviews with Ben, Paula and their practitioner. Listening was an activity Ben focused on to demonstrate change and maintain a vision for sustained change. He reached for examples to show that listening was important to him as an identification of change. Ben also reflected that it was the listening that occurred in the counselling space facilitated by the practitioners that had the most impact on him, and identified listening as something he needed to continue to work on:

Well she, [the practitioner] didn't give me any pointers ... but she just sat there and all of a sudden I'm listening and [Paula] was saying to me ... I hear completely different to what she said and that, that frustrates her, it annoys her and I can understand that. But if I'm not listening then I don't hear what she said and that upsets her. So I'm working on my listening but I've been working on it for a long while, And I'm not, I'm not getting on that well with it, but I think it's improving.

Paula also described the support of the practitioner, as the third person in the room, as validating her feelings:

For me it was really very good to be able to sit there and talk quite openly about things that was just seen as picking an argument at home and that was very good and I found [the practitioner] really good ... she definitely listened and then referred what I said to [Ben] and what [Ben] said to me and was really very good in that way ... it just worked with a third person.

Paula shows there are some beginnings of healing for her, and names the counselling context—the intervention—as having a therapeutic effect on her as well as Ben.

When the interviewer inquired about safety—that is, feeling safe during counselling with Ben and at home—Paula confirmed that she was safe and felt safe in both contexts. She also opened up a conversation about acknowledgement,

and how the recognition she felt as a result of counselling somehow validated her feelings and what she had endured throughout her relationship with Ben:

Yeah, I felt very safe—I think I even felt pleased because he would hear me say in front of somebody else what I had been saying many times and I mean, I should say—[Ben] is more ex-violent than current violent so I didn't have any fear of any physical violence, that he might have done—would have been—got upset and withdrawn or got a bit angry so I had no fear of any physical violence but yeah.

Bob showed considerably less evidence of change in response to his 6 months of contact. Bob and Katy were separated, but still spending some time together. Katy initially agreed to be interviewed but cancelled twice and did not take part in the study. Bob having an affair was a strong theme in his story, and he often referred to the affair as an example to demonstrate remorse and his commitment to change. This gave the practitioner some hope that Bob would engage with ideas of ethical striving as a journey to taking responsibility for his use of violence in the relationship. However, during the interview Bob did not name his use of physical violence, while the practitioner did, making clear reference to the fact that it had a significant effect on Katy. The practitioner perceived Bob's omission as indicative of his tendency to compartmentalise his behaviour, an issue that he planned to further address in future sessions. Later in the interview, Bob spoke differently about this and other affairs, framing them in terms of an addiction and thus externalising rather than taking responsibility for his actions:

If she wants to say, 'I never want to see you again. Go away', I'd be devastated because that is not what I want—I want to reconcile with my wife, I want to save my family and not have another broken marriage. But I'm sort of getting to a point where I just have an unhealthy attraction or addiction—for use—for want of a better word—for other women. Whether it was on the internet or it was Facebook or going out or doing whatever. And don't get me wrong, I've learnt a lot since my affairs were brought out and—but every now and then I stupidly jump on Facebook or Instagram and have a look at a hot woman or something, that was just a slip up in my addiction. Drug addicts, people with addictions fall back sometimes.

In Bob's account, restraining thoughts or ideas are noticeable. He makes nebulous claims and excuses to try to explain what is stopping him from choosing respectful behaviour. He presents some ethical striving, but shows little evidence of shame or an awareness of the effects on Katy of his affair or his use of violence towards her.

Harry had experienced both individual counselling and the men's group. His partner was not interviewed because she had not continued with her own counselling and indicated she would not return to the relationship. Significant for Harry was his recognition, gained through individual and group work; that his acts were based in control and were therefore abusive. He explained:

Over time I guess I learnt to understand domestic abuse, it has so many different paths and there's various levels of it and that sort of thing. And so from my perspective I came to understand that anger was a way of controlling people, and that that can be certainly perceived and interpreted as abuse. So I learnt an awful lot about it. And I guess I learned that while it's wrong, in order to become a better person I had to understand that that's something that I had potentially acted out in my relationship.

Throughout the interview, Harry also acknowledged that his partner did not want to reconcile, and it was his engagement with his practitioner and the men's group that enabled him to understand her decision:

I learned so much from how [practitioner] would represent things on the board. I would take photos on my phone, and take those away with me and continue to study them and think on them. And I've used those concepts in everyday life, not just, you know I'm not in a relationship, I've told you that my wife has now told me she's not interested in reconciling our relationship, so I don't have a partner with which to, in a sense I need to practice that I've learnt. I learnt a lot about the different areas that violence and abuse can occur in, and it's not just the physical aspect, you know there's the emotional, there's the psychological and financial ... And so I think the support group really helped me to join a lot of those dots and connect a lot of those concepts in my own brain.

When asked if anyone had noticed his changed behaviour, Harry named his work colleagues.

So mainly at work cos they're the main people that I deal with. At work people noticed the change almost immediately because I was a different person in meetings and I would relate to people differently ... I would always jump in and correct them, now I just, I let them finish. I don't have to find a problem to solve ... Those are some of the things that I learned.

However, progress is not always consistent. For example, Harry also spoke about his children noticing his changed behaviour:

But also at home, my, up until very recently I only had one of my sons living with me, I've now got two. He certainly knows the difference because there's essentially no confrontation whatsoever, there hasn't been a raised voice in our house since my wife left.

It is important to note that Harry may be implying that his behaviour change is somewhat easier because he no longer lives with his former partner; which can be interpreted as her being the provocation. This brief reference to his former partner shows that change is not linear and can be patchy. But again, Harry was also able to articulate specific learnings from his practitioner:

I guess for me, and this is going to sound silly, but when I find myself in a situation where not, in the past I probably would have reacted poorly or badly, and I said this in the group, I, my brain automatically goes back to the whiteboard and I literally see pictures that were drawn on the whiteboard or words that were drawn on the whiteboard, and concepts that we discussed, and I just, that's it, stop. You know the biggest thing; the single biggest thing that I've taken away is that timeline of thoughts becoming emotions, becoming actions, becoming consequences, and I just see that all the time.

Harry's interview shows some indications of more advanced changes but also struggle with dominant ideas about provocation and anger; however, he was able to name violence and its effects, and also demonstrated a stronger and more integrated understanding of violence. Harry described his

progress in terms of learning skills and recognising different emotions. While he had previously thought about his past behaviour in terms of his personality, he now recognised its intentional and controlling nature at times. The practitioner reflected on Harry's change and also picked up similar themes, such as:

I think certainly things like definitions of domestic violence. I think he was quite struck by that, that it was, the whole notion that domestic violence was experienced by someone, rather than it was just this experience, domestic violence is something that happens, it doesn't just happen, it happens to and it's experienced by. So he kind of really engaged in that; which was important ... with power and control ... he just viewed that as well someone's got to do it, but not the impact that that might have had, or how he might have enquired into that differently. So principles yeah, so power and control, yeah just that idea of him sort of understanding his own way that he was responding to her, so you always bring it back to the partner's experience. So he was able to do that quite well. He was able to engage with that.

John identified examples of changes he has made in several areas, including details about how he communicates differently, how he controls himself by "not getting wound up so quick" and explaining he is "just being a happier person". He also talked about other people noticing him, the stronger quality of his friendships and improvements in his relationships with work colleagues. Linda confirmed that John's "willingness to communicate" and "express his feelings" was the most significant change, and she also thought her daughters would have noticed his calmness. In recognition of these changes, John's practitioner described being especially interested in focusing on his expanded sense of agency (Jenkins, 2009): that is, on "what he's doing differently that's allowing this to happen, rather than oh it's just happened". In this context, the practitioner talked about introducing John to the idea of writing a letter of apology, as an act of reparation to those people who had been most harmed by his behaviour. This was intended as a therapeutic exercise, in which the practitioner would work with John to further acknowledge and reflect upon the impacts of his acts while also articulating his ethical stance and aspirations. However, to his practitioner's surprise, John in his eagerness went ahead and wrote—and delivered—three letters, to Linda and to each of his daughters.

When he talked about this in his interview, it was evident that John attached considerable significance to these letters, describing them as:

Probably three of the hardest things I've ever had to do in my life. Again, it was the starting. Once I'd started, it was fine, you know, because it's like right, let's go. But it was three of the most rewarding things that I did. So, yeah, it was hard owning up, admitting to three of the people that are the closest to me in my life that I was wrong.

In her interview, however, Linda revealed that John had subsequently destroyed one of these letters—the one he had written to his older daughter. This is an example of the importance of gaining validation from women on men's stories of change. Linda explained that:

[John] did write apology letters to everybody. Which was really nice, but I just don't think that goes far enough because my eldest daughter doesn't have that any longer because [John] ripped it up.

Evident in these stories are the skills used by practitioners in engaging men—the intensity of the work, the demand for continuous vigilance, for careful listening, questioning and respectfully challenging restraining ideas, for connecting men with their ethical principles and preferences. The exploration of men's ethical striving and restraining ideas provides a means through which practitioners can both unpick men's justifications and explore their feelings of shame.

## Sustaining change: Insights and challenges

Steve, Roger, Randall and Matthew had engaged with invitational narrative practice through counselling and men's groups over a significant period of time (upwards of 2 years). Their interviews show details of how they recognised the effects of their violence on their partners and their journeys to continually reach for their ethical preferences for non-violence. For example, Steve, who had been engaged with invitational narrative counselling for just over 2 years, was able to give specific examples of ways in which he had changed his behaviour. Referring to a recent instance in which he said something that upset Jane, he explained that rather than getting defensive:

In certain situations I still like to give her space but then I like to—so I apologised to her, I held her hand, I tried just reassuring her. But it was already done. I couldn't—I can't stop what she's feeling from several years ago. So and then when I explained to her what happened I think that sort of just—she realised that what I said wasn't what was intended ...

Importantly, Jane's account of this situation corresponds with Steve's, while also confirming her experience of the changes that he describes:

Only a week ago, I said, 'I am just feeling really psycho again—I think something has triggered and I feel like I am going—I am spiralling down' and I said that to him and I can't remember what the trigger was but it was something that he had done, or not done necessarily but the way he had acted or something and I can't even remember what it was now but I felt that was it. And then I thought about it and I went, 'No it's just been a really shit week and you're probably okay'.

From the perspective of his practitioner, Steve's acknowledgement of harm was one way in which his insight and progress towards change were especially evident:

[Steve] would reliably step into responsibility in whatever question we had, so the type of conversations we'd tend to have worked so well ... he would be taking responsibility for his own actions, seeing impacts on his children and his partner, and you know, being very concrete about that ... Because a lot of men find it easier talking generalities with intentions and dreams and hopes. But the concrete—sort of what did I do, who did that effect, what did I say, how do they feel, what do I see, what was I feeling at that time—bring a whole different light to what we're talking about ... So topic after topic, conversation after conversation, [Steve] would bring it back to what he'd done, what he was doing, even in little ways, and how that affected his kids, and then his wife.

As a result of Steve's continued attendance at the men's group over a 2-year period, the practitioner stated that he was able to observe the changes Steve had made, as well as his work in maintaining and building on these over time. This fits

with Steve's acknowledgement regarding the enormity of the changes required:

I think it'll be a work in progress until I [die?]. Which is not a bad thing. I'm not worried about it. It would be good to—sometimes I feel like it would be good to just—I just want to yell. But that's not the way to deal with it. But that's a bit of the old me because I knew that would get a result and that's easy, whereas this is not easy. This is hard. You've got to work at it. You've got to stop and you've got to think.

In describing the changes that she had observed over time, most notably that she now feels "completely safe" and "never feels scared", Jane explained that:

In hindsight where those were some of the darkest days of my life where I'm at now is completely different. He's a different person—really amazing, beautiful, gentle soul that has flipped and when he gets angry now which is very rare he really does try and control his temper but he will talk to me. He will try and use his words and try and tell me what he's thinking and that's been really helpful because sometimes when I say something he interprets it completely differently and that's been really, really helpful and that too has been a gradual process.

Reflecting on his 18 months of counselling, Roger first talked about his own abusive childhood before acknowledging that the time had come for him to "process and understand yourself, and know your limits, or more to the point, know your self-control, and then figure out what you can't control". Roger also talked about the profound impact that counselling has had for him, explaining that:

If I didn't have a counsellor I would have been in a hell of a lot of trouble. He was somebody I could talk to, understand where my thinking has come from, and yeah I would end up crying ... I have not cried before like that ... my brain has put a mural together, I've just never had to put it together in a different way ... understanding the past, and then let me go through the mural, you know that parts affected by the past, then this part is affected by the middle, or your marriage, or the parenting role, or this belongs to the working role. You sort of take the mural apart, and then put it back together in a different

way. And he helped me put major areas back together ... It was me overstepping my boundaries, and I was doing that a lot and for the wrong reasons. My partner stepped in and pulled me up. You need to either pull the fuck up or leave. She can't deal with anything else.

With regard to his current situation—and that of Amy and her daughter—Roger said:

We're doing alright. We've still got the boundaries of, clean your room. 'Your room clean? Yeah', and I leave her alone. I [might] say—'Okay, mum, you'd better go and sort this girl out'. Before, I would just walk in with the rubbish bin, stacking the plates, the cups, the blankets, everything that was there and just thrown it all in the bin, and then put the bin out the front. But now, I say, 'Honey she has dishes in there' and I walk away ... I need to back off.

From the perspective of his practitioner, Roger's journey was slow. He described at times feeling overwhelmed by the extent of Roger's physical disability from an accident, and he described feeling occasionally "thrown off balance" on hearing about Roger's use of violence; which Roger positioned as a result of this accident. Reflecting on the tools of invitational and narrative practice that enabled him to make progress with Roger, the practitioner talked about:

Just going very slowly, finding out what it was that he wanted to say, not pushing things, you know, which I probably would have done 5 years earlier, I would have been more pushy I think, especially knowing that it was about violence, I would have wanted to get down to it, get him to, you know, ... really get clear about what he was doing and what for and who was being affected. But it simply wasn't possible and he wasn't in any way ready to tell me anything. So I think partly trying to hold on to that idea that you know, Alan Jenkins often talks about a readiness, that sense of inviting [Roger] to notice if and when he might be ready to take some other step, for him to get sort of clear about what he's doing here and what exactly it is that he's wanting. And you know, he was initially, he was talking about his anger and stuff, but also, I think the other important part of it that I think makes it more possible for [Roger] ... was an ongoing interest in restoring his ethics ... what it is that actually

matters to him enough for him to be coming here and to keep coming here for 18 months. Like how come? And I'm trying not to take that too much for granted.

The practitioner was also very clear regarding the importance of routinely checking in with Amy and her daughter, emphasising that it was their experiences that needed to be privileged. However, highlighting the inherent difficulty of efforts to quantify change, he observed that a focus on "key movements of change" offers the potential for more useful ways of conceptualising men's progress in this space:

I think about this in sort of like incremental bits. So if you think the whole conversation we've had, there's evidence for change. Now it's not sufficient, it's not enough, but without it, nothing much is going to happen. Nothing much is ever going to happen unless there's a beginning of a shift in talking and thinking etc., and how these events in his life get storied. So there's all of those changes that are going on, and with him naming stuff, being able to more richly describe both what he's done, him being able to sit really powerfully and excruciatingly in his shame [and] his willingness to hear some pretty straight talking from his sister ... So you know, this to me, it's a sign, and I think, I kind of, you know I do think about these as signs in a way of a man moving in some direction that's preferred—or change in a more general sense ... So it is the overall constellation of things that suggests to me ... change or movement rather than just one [thing]. So some reasonably credible accounts from him, because I think he's an extremely honest person, ... of steps he has taken at home to stop certain things ... Because I think, after a while, if you're in the space long enough, and you hear that term 'change' thrown around a lot, like it's really important that men change. And sometimes when I enquire into that ... what I'm interested in is how do they get there? [And] what sort of changing are you describing? What's the man recognising? You know the question with [Roger] is what's he recognising that's different? And he does, he's able to name some things that are different. But then the acid test is what [Amy] and her daughter are going to say about this? That's the big question.



When asked for her reflections on Roger's progress, Amy explained that she became increasingly stressed and scared of leaving her daughter with Roger because of his moods. It was she who prompted him to attend counselling to "sort out his own shit". She explained that she kept in contact with Roger's practitioner as part of the safety contact processes of the agency, but did not feel she needed counselling because it was Roger's problem, not hers. She explained the changes she noticed:

I don't have to worry so much but they are getting along so much better now. He did actually sit down with her and apologise for his behaviour and they've sort of set some ground rules now so that this doesn't keep happening. I'm still trying to educate him about parenting and children, he is not used to kids. So, yeah, but now that he's got someone to talk to, it's good because I don't have to hear about it all the time so I'm not having to take his problems on board as much as I was before. He's got someone to brain dump on, as he calls it, and that helps me a lot because I'm not having to listen to it over and over, the same thing all the time, I'm not a counsellor so I don't know what kind of advice to give him, all that sort of stuff, so it's just much easier now that he's got some outside help ... me and my daughter yeah we both feel safer now, safer in [our] own home which is really good.

In relation to the changes that have been most significant for her, Amy said:

For me, it's been more him removing himself when he's angry. He's learnt finally how to do that. He doesn't need to be in our face when he's angry, he's calmed down a lot more, he's now learnt to remove himself from the situation and go and have time out. So he's learnt to do that which has been a big improvement for us. Before that, he wouldn't do it and he wouldn't listen. Now he's actually listening as well when you're trying to talk to him. He doesn't get that glazed look and he's learnt to communicate. Yeah, so that's improved a lot.

Roger's story shows that change is complex, particularly when there are other intersecting issues such as disability, but still possible.

Randall's change was particularly expressed in terms of his "letting go" of control: that is, control of his relationships and his possessions. Randall had been receiving counselling for 18 months, but his partner Janet was not interviewed. They had been separated for some time after he assaulted her at their home. Randall identified a range of areas in which he had grown over the course of his counselling, but perhaps the most significant of these related to the shift in his position on—or a letting go of—his relationship:

Probably more focused on just trying to be better for [ex-wife], so we could reconcile, trying to work myself out with my kids, but as we went on, it probably shifted more to be, actually I've just got to be a better person for me, and then the results will flow through and wash out to the others.

Randall's practitioner confirmed this observation, explaining that while Randall was initially grieving and showed a level of desperation to save his marriage, during counselling his focus shifted to enacting the way he preferred to be—a supportive person and a supportive father. In the process, according to the practitioner, Randall started showing self-awareness and ethical reflection:

He began to question if he was only pursuing [ex-wife] to save face, because he'd lost her, not because he really wanted to be with her, to get something back rather than being about [her]. So I thought that was an interesting answer. You know, these possessive sort of masculine models of thinking, he's been thinking about those.

A greater connection to others was also evident in the way that Randall spoke about the changes in his life, suggesting both personal growth and a growing sense of responsibility for self-care. He talked about becoming more involved in the community of his church and developing closeness through friendships. Importantly, these relationships also provided him with confirmation of his progress: "we will go out and chat sometimes, and they just say, mate, you're just a completely different person to how you were before". This was evident also in what he described as his openness to hearing about the impacts of his behaviour on others—his family in particular, showing change or a shift from self-centred to other-focussed relationships and connections:

I said to my kids ... , 'Like if I'm doing something that's not quite right, or you know, or I've said something in a manner that you felt a bit upset by or whatever, well, let me know, just feel free, find the right time, but feel free to tell me what you think I've done wrong' ... ultimately, I'd rather people tell me the truth than people just give me something that's clearly not true, you know, because I'll be more hurt and more upset if I find out later on that people have just been spinning me a line, I'd rather know straight up ... Don't feed me a lie and bullshit to try and protect my feelings or whatever.

Importantly, and perhaps countering the potential shift of responsibility onto others to monitor his behaviour, this was coupled with a growing attentiveness to other people's experiences. Randall talked about starting to "see different reactions, I suppose from people, or maybe being a bit more observant of how people were reacting to what I was doing, saying, exhibiting, whatever". He also described a sense of consciousness and agency, evident in the recognition that he "can choose to react differently now". Randall's insight that he must remain attentive—that he "not just default into my own, doing my own thing for me"—thus seems to reflect an increasingly "other-focused", rather than self-focused/self-centred, stance (Jenkins, 2009). Randall also talked about responsibility in terms of "owning up", saying, "I know I'm at fault for this, this, and this, regardless of anything else that [ex-wife has] done or not done. So, in a sense, I was trying to own up to that stuff".

As evidence of his change, Randall cited positive feedback from his children, such as his eldest daughter telling him, "Oh, you're definitely different now Dad". The practitioner also took particularly seriously Randall's reporting of feedback received from his former partner. For example, the practitioner explains:

I was probably most influenced by [Janet] saying that he'd changed, and this happened probably mid-way through our engagement, that he got that feedback, and he kept adhering to that, and then he became a force for stability, rather than a trauma in their life, so the stories that he would be reporting about his life were more about helping out, putting the kids first, so putting difficult times [in

the] past ... of course not having partner contact meant that I was going from [Randall's] version on his change, but it's what I had.

Matthew had been attending counselling on and off for the longest period of time (7 years). At the time of interview, he was not with a partner. His movement towards being more other-focused, as well as his capacity to talk about his ethical realisations, were the elements of change that were most noticeable in his account. Throughout the interview he reflected on his interactions with other people in his life, including his adult children, previous partners, work colleagues and acquaintances, saying that as a result of counselling, "I'm always mindful of what I do, I'm always mindful of how I communicate with people ... I really don't think I judge anybody less like I used to". Matthew described as pivotal his recognition that:

I have the power of choice and realise that it's helpful to think things through rather than just react—though I don't like that word—I would rather be thoughtful than thoughtless, careful rather than careless, kind rather than selfish—what type of person do I want to be? I can't blame anyone for what I do.

Matthew's practitioner talked about change only being considered once engagement had been established, as well as the importance of distinguishing between commitment and readiness. For her, this meant moving beyond nebulous or idealistic comments such as "I want to change", "I want to be a good man", "I have changed", and/or "I recognised I need to change". When there is no detail, claims of change need to be treated with caution. For example, when describing Matthew's change over time, she said:

We try to get a sense where each man is in his commitment to change, which might be different and his openness and readiness just to seek responsibility, so the commitment and the readiness might be two different things ... with [Matthew] when he started he talked around the landscape of identity ... that is, these kind of nebulous comments that would be idealistic ... kind of 'You know I've changed' ... so we see a lot of men like this and men also speaking into the future, 'Oh I want to be a great dad' [or] 'I want to be a good man' ... it's a bit kind of nebulous, it's not

connected ... and to me that seeming act of benevolence already contains lots of control ... But what we like is to get deep, we like to get stories about how a man gets himself worked up, how he describes what happens, so we can talk about being responsible—accountability. [Matthew] looks at himself in a safe way, it's about safety then I think it—that's change, that's accountable change.

In the accounts of men who had experienced counselling for medium and longer terms, it is possible to see richer descriptions and conversations, clearer insight regarding the effects of their behaviour on others, and the impact of restraining ideas on the achievement of lasting change. The usefulness of thinking about the evidence of key moments of change, rather than of change as a definitive end-point, is also especially evident in these longer-term accounts.

## Transformative change

The importance of a “political stance of understanding”—recognising that violence is, fundamentally, an “expression of power relations” (Katic, 2016, p. 2)—is central to invitational narrative practice. Thus, individual work with men who use violence is connected with the broader societal agenda of addressing the socio-cultural factors that reinforce and perpetuate violence (Moss, 2016; Urbis, 2013). Invitational narrative practitioners are alert to signs that men are ready to explore gendered power relations and the ways in which their beliefs are shaped by/in diverse contexts, including media, educational, religious and political institutions (Moss, 2016) that “recruit” them into dominant male culture. In this study, only a few of the men articulated an awareness of the broader socio-cultural context of their individual behaviour, which likely reflects the different levels and lengths of engagement across the sample.

Matthew, perhaps because of his commitment to continue his engagement with the practitioners at Uniting Communities and his persistence over time, was able to share his experience exploring ideas around masculinity, entitlement and power:

There's a lot of things which I did I wasn't aware of and I'll go back to the word, entitlement. I'm making more money than you so I'm entitled to be treated in such a way

or I've got all the money in my bank and bad luck if you have to ask me for money, which is not a nice thing ... all these things I wasn't aware of until it was put up on the board. I wasn't aware that I'm privileged and I'm white and I was abusing that privilege. I'm entitled, privileged to have choice and control over myself ... it has taken a long time I must say, it's tough to challenge yourself, I have had these ideas for 20-30 years and so to question my own ideas, I still do now and I think that is healthy.

Matthew talked about fear and being aware of entitlement, and described how change is hard and long:

There's many things. The hardest things, it's all hard actually and if you've got a sense of entitlement, you've got fear.

Q: Tell me about the fear ...

A: The fear is quite major actually. I thought that was quite a problem within myself.

Q: What were you fearful about?

A: Loss. Fearful of loss. I'm going to lose her. That doesn't help. Fear of maybe even losing control over your environment. Fear—a lot of men actually, including myself, were fearful of losing their relationship and losing—maybe losing status amongst their peers as well. I've often been called names because I've stepped in when somebody's said, 'All she's good for is having lipstick in her handbag', and I really don't care anyway and now I will say something but I've even been called names, not—some guys won't agree with me because they're fearful that they don't have—they're going to lose their image or something.

Q: Do you remember key moments where that fear changed for you and how it changed?

A: It sort of comes from starting to understand yourself ... know yourself and accept who you are ... Yeah, it's fear that you're going to lose status amongst men, fear that you become less of a man but then the real question is what is it to be a man, so? ... You've got to find yourself and you have to be in love with what you're doing and actually have some selfrespect ...

The interviewer asked the practitioner about her experience of engaging Matthew in conversations about broader cultural ideas around power, control, masculinity and femininity,

and what that was like for her. The practitioner talked about the importance of feminist politics sitting with invitational and narrative ideas, but added that this often occurs later in the practitioner-client engagement and a man's journey, and depends on his readiness and insight to have these conversations:

We want to have people on the team with feminist politics, we can teach the skills, but the politics has to be kind of very malleable in feminist direction—so first of all there's an ethic of non-violence. So if we begin with, yes okay there are lots of people who are violent for lots of different reasons, the thorn in my feminist side—'Yeah but women are violent too'—but I can't get riled up about that as a wom[a]n because it would put the conversation in a very bad frame—I'd end up not being invitational, I'd end up being combative, you know, in a way that I don't want to be as a practitioner. It is easy for men to see she is just another one of those feminist women. So I tried the kind of academic way, I tried teaching, kind of not teaching but just presenting concepts like patriarchy and they were somewhat helpful but more recently I tried [a] conversation about discourse ... this is not just about me, it's about a general sense of what it's like to be a man or a general sense of what it is like in this world to be a woman, right? So with [Matthew] we were able to talk about his mum, her poverty, what it was like growing up for her, what were her choices, how they were limited ... we scaffolded to—like violence is a choice, in the context of upbringings and culture.

Harry and John were able to name gender and power as important concepts raised in counselling and the men's group that influenced their thinking and actions. For example, both men throughout the interview pondered their relationships and how men and women fulfil roles decreed by socio-cultural dictates. Harry said:

In group we did talk quite a bit about how men are perceived in society and what are the roles that various sexes and individuals play in society, how society builds stereotypes and the hierarchical model of the man is the head of the house, is the head of the church, is the head of the government. And other things like, you know as men we're seen as the people that have to solve the problems and provide for the family, and all those different concepts or ideas that society continues to ingrain, and so we did

talk about that quite a lot. And that really helped me to understand that a lot of how I've come to think and behave and react is, I guess almost enforced upon me or trained into me by my father, by my male extended family, by the media, by society in general.

John also commented:

And the male versus female gender roles within the family, and what society, not so much now, well, yeah, to an extent, compared to back then, what people's roles were and how the family should work ... it was going through that role identification and digging deeper into that sort of saying right, so the bloke is the one who, you know, he's the king, so it's what he says goes, because he's the money earner, So, I think growing up in the seventies, there was still a lot of that inside of me, but then, also realising that as times change and the attitudes change that I know it's not right, you know what I mean.

Harry's practitioner described how Harry's stereotypical views of hegemonic masculinity initially allowed him to distance himself from taking responsibility for abuse. Unpacking and challenging his views of himself in light of new understandings led Harry to shift his perceptions and look to a future where his actions aligned more closely with his preferred ethics. Similarly, John's practitioner explained the importance of finding ways of inviting men to think about or externalise the dominant forms of masculinity in culture and how they support violence and abuse. The practitioner emphasised that a distinction must be made between approaches that "sort of blam[e] the individual man for this" and those that encourage a man to "take responsibility for his position" within culture—that is, recognising that while an individual is not "responsible for inventing these tactics of violence or abuse that ha[ve] been around for thousands of years", he can choose to take a position on/against it. Invitational, narrative ideas position identity as relational, historically and culturally situated, and changing through time and contexts, and therefore invites men to engage in explorations of where their ideas come from in the context of their own lives and upbringings. This enables men to identify restraining ideas, such as that who they are and how they act are fixed, and instead grasp that they can choose and commit to ethical striving towards respect and responsibility (Combs & Freedman, 2016).

## Women's safety

Women's stories provide critical insight regarding men's change: what this "looks like" away from the counselling space and how it is experienced by others. While women's voices might be considered a crucial counterpoint to men's voices—balancing, in a sense, the intensive focus on men as the subjects of intervention—this is not to say that men's accounts are necessarily "wrong" or falsified. Rather, what is evident in the perspectives of the women here is the incredibly complex and pervasive impact of living with violence, and hence the vastness of "change". The women's accounts raise difficult questions regarding the "meaning" and "limits" of change, particularly given the subtleties, anomalies and occasional contradictions seen in the men's stories. How do we determine, for example, what should be considered "significant"—or sufficient—change? When is men's change too subtle to be significant? What is adequate or "enough" in this regard? Which changes "count"? How might we distinguish between relationships that are unsafe (violent) and ones that are (more-or-less) safe but still problematic? The most obvious "answer" to all of these questions is that "it depends": that is, that different individuals have different standards. In effect, though, what this amounts to is "what women will live with". As is evident in these narratives, women will—and do—live with a lot, but this can easily be overshadowed by a focus on men as the subjects of intervention. Taking seriously what women tell us requires that we acknowledge and attempt to grapple with the ambiguity and imprecision of terms such as "safety" and "non-violent".

The account given by Linda, John's partner, was especially rich and evocative, raising issues that are both unique to her own experience and encapsulate the deep-rooted and insidious nature of gendered violence and the ways in which this plays out across multiple domains and dimensions. For example, Linda clearly identified the impacts of John's abuse on her children, which in turn shaped their relationship with her. While trying to compensate for John's behaviour—"I always felt like I could counteract that to a certain degree"—she spoke of her youngest daughter's anger towards her:

[Daughter claimed that] I never stopped dad being mean to them and yelling at them and threatening them. She basically ... saw it from obviously her own perspective,

and because I don't go and yell and scream and rant and rave and carry on to my husband, then she kind of, because she didn't see the fallout from when things would happen, she took that like I had done nothing.

Linda was acutely aware of her children's distress, though, and talked about the ways in which she had actively sought to protect them. She nonetheless felt that she was bearing the brunt of both John's abuse and her children's anger. Indeed, the children seemed to mainly target their anger at her ("[John] would say he cops just as much, I completely disagree with that") and "to have more respect for him now than me"; that she is "easier to blame" and "easier to take it out on because I'm predictable to them". For example, she observes that:

They're teenagers, but when I try to get them to do something or whatever, my eldest has recently just said to me 'I'm not going to do that, you're not scary', and that's a bit cutting because I don't want to be scary ... in order to get my children to do the right thing. And I won't be scary so that I can match someone else, I think that's BS. So yeah I'm still dealing with the fallout, just in a different way.

June, Jim's partner, also referred to the lasting effects of abuse—its imprint upon her—which means that it is never wholly in the past:

He was not reacting to things that I'd expect a reaction and that kind of like, I was like, 'Oh I didn't get one'. Do you know like that actually—it took me a while to not, I did feel the egg shells for a while after, even though they weren't there if that makes-[sense]? I still had them in me.

While Paula, Ben's partner, described shifts in Ben's behaviour, most notably in relation to his listening, she also observed that these were not constant; for example, she said, "he'll still sometimes say, 'Oh, you're picking on me'". Although she also said that he was "far more caring and listening", she acknowledged that "it's not always there because it's never always going to be there". Thus, Ben had made changes—and "puts in a lot more effort"—but these were partial and perhaps unpredictable. Linda made a similar observation in relation to John that, "old habits die hard" and he still has "moments



where it's just like, oh god, come on!". Paula nonetheless talked about feeling "more emotionally safe", suggesting a greater depth of change than merely the cessation of physical violence. Emotional safety, for Paula, meant "that you can talk to somebody. You can get upset or get angry and it's not going to be a full on argument". Amy, Roger's partner, was more pragmatic about the changes that were significant to her, which included that "he's learnt to communicate", "he's actually listening", and he's "removing himself when he's angry [to] go and have time out".

It was in the interview with Linda that issues around enduring relations of power and control were most apparent. While Linda was confident that John had made progress, saying "I feel like he's done really, really well and I'm really proud of what he's been able to achieve", it was clear that gendered power dynamics were still at play. For example, when Linda suggested, just before John stopped going to counselling, that they see the practitioner as a family to "work through some of this stuff", he responded dismissively, saying, "Oh I don't think there's anything that we need to talk about". Linda believes that John still doesn't fully grasp the ongoing effects of his behaviour, particularly for the children, nor the ways in which these impact differently on her. It is also evident that Linda still feels she needs to "protect" John, as she recognises here:

Because I'm still not able to tell [John] the complete impact on me with certain situations, he feels like he doesn't need to hear it. Because he thinks that he understands it ... And it will be too hurtful to be honest ... [H]e gets depressed at times, I don't want to be the one to push him over the edge, that's not my role, yeah it's a matter of picking your time to be able to disclose certain things, and he gets upset and needs to go away and think about it or whatever process, but I would prefer if he could sit there and listen and be hurt if that's what it means, or whatever. It's not just about one person's feelings.

While Linda acknowledges that the situation "makes me angry and it makes me resentful", she says she "doesn't know what to do with that"; thus, she continues to put her own feelings aside because "well, if I matched what he does, what's that going to create?". Interestingly, and perhaps reflecting the stigma associated with domestic violence and the ways that

this plays out for women in particular, Linda was adamant that she not be "painted like I was an abused woman". This meant, though, that she was largely unsupported:

I don't really tell anyone about that side cos it's not their business, and then they get the wrong impression, they think that there's more going on than what the actual situation is ... They judge me and ... [faint speech] 'Oh poor me', I don't like that much ... It is what it is, could have walked away if I wanted to. We all live with our choices, so—deal with it where it is and go with it.

Similarly, Jane had told very few people of her situation. While this was partly for the sake of their children, it was also:

Because I didn't want people judging. I don't want people saying, 'Oh you should have left him or ...' I didn't need that shit—I was already crazy in my mind I was just trying to keep everything together—I didn't need other people's opinions.

## Implications of men's change for women's lives

Of all of the women, Jane was probably the most positive in her articulation of the changes that she has observed over time, describing Steve, now, as "a different person—really amazing, beautiful, gentle soul". For Jane, there have been a number of significant indicators of change, most notably that she feels "completely safe" and "never feels scared" anymore. For example, she says:

[I have] got braver to tell him [what is] bothering me and that I felt that he needed to go and take the dogs for a walk or something like that, and when he actually started to respect that—respect what I was saying ... They were I guess the signs that I thought things were changing and just the communication with him got better.

Jane also describes her sense that:

He's not just tiptoeing around me or being nice to me all the time now because he is frightened of losing me. I think it's just that he actually has the skills ... whereas before he was just probably practicing them.

Significantly, the women's accounts highlight the shifts that they made in response to the changes that they observed their partners making—that is, the real impacts and implications of perpetrator intervention. June, for example, explained that she will no longer “take crap” from Jim:

I do put my foot down and go, no, that's enough shit, you need to step back, you need to look at yourself, you need to like stop now ... It doesn't take much now for me to go, 'No you can fuck off, you need to face what you're doing and I'll talk to you in a couple of days.' I'm not doing it.

Amy's stance was somewhat unusual, perhaps due to her earlier experiences of domestic violence, in that she described having considerable clarity from the outset regarding Roger's behaviour:

I mean, his anger issues come from well before I came along so, sort of, he just has brought them into our home now and I said to him, 'Either you can go deal with this stuff or we're going to split up and you're going to take all this to the next person' ... 'Enough is enough, just deal with it please'.

Amy also described feeling significantly freed up from the burden of being Roger's primary support, explaining that:

Now that he's got someone to talk to, it's good because I don't have to hear about it all the time so I'm not having to take his problems on board as much as I was before.

As it became clearer that the men were starting to “get it”, as shown through their actions, the space in which the women could reflect on their feelings and articulate their needs also expanded. As Jane explains, at first she was “obviously very sensitive to him raising his voice or anything remotely where I thought it was going to escalate” but eventually “it started to get more hopeful” and it was then that her feelings of anger towards Steve grew. This was, she explained:

More about, 'Look what you have done to us'—I have tried so many years to keep us all together—I have tried to keep everything calm and everyone together and everything okay and then you can just come and break us all and it was just so mean and disrespectful and not nice and we didn't deserve it at all.

Through the experience of her anger, Jane came to position herself differently—both as a woman and within the relationship—saying:

That's the other thing I've really learnt—I don't need his approval—I don't need to ask him for stuff whereas before I used to—'Would it be okay if I this?'... Yeah I'm allowed to be me.

Over time, and reflecting her increasing sense of safety, she felt more able to speak openly and without “self-censoring”. Jane described becoming more confident—both in herself and in Steve's capacity to respond appropriately—to the point that:

We would have those kind of conversations, or just, like, as I got—not braver but just as the relationship started to get better—and I had pushed the whole feminist stuff onto him and really advocating for the future of women and wanting my girls to be safe and all that kind of stuff.

## “Women's work”

A final, and important, theme emerging from the interviews was the extent to which women contributed to the changes the men have made, both enabling and supplementing the formal intervention service. John's practitioner articulated this clearly when he talked about John's openness to work on his violence, observing that this was:

Largely because of the work [Linda] had probably done for years, is my hunch. In fact I'd be 99 percent confident that that's the case, that by the time they got here, she spent years getting him ready, I suspect, or had time to unpack this story, I think she would be figuring out very largely I would imagine. And lots of women do this, I think, over long stretches of time.

Relatedly, Jane talked about being frustrated by, yet resigned to, the disregard of her own perspective in favour of the “new knowledge” gained through the group program. She provided an example in which, after a group session, Steve would come home and talk about what he had learnt, “but he would talk to me as if someone had taught him something [new] ... and inside I would be so frustrated thinking I've been trying to tell [him] this shit for years”.

In Roger's case, it was his sister who was pivotal to his progress, as emphasised by Roger's practitioner:

It turns out that the person who I would think has been, without any question, the most significant around [Roger] actually naming stuff, or letting himself find a language to name it in a way that's getting, well, past just, 'I get angry', [is] his sister ... And it turns out there's this huge story about his sister saying to him listen, she's the older sister, she's the one who has been the holder of the stories about his trauma, ... she said to him, '[Roger], you can't keep treating [Amy and her daughter] in the way you are, this is abuse,' she says to him. Now this is something I can't do until he's ready to do it, but she can. And once he bought it into the room, this is what helped the work go along.

Amy also commented on the importance of Roger's sister:

I'd have to say, his sister actually helped him more than anybody has. When he went to Darwin in October, he came back much better than when he left ... She kicked his bum because she loves [Amy's daughter] and she's like, 'Bro, you can't treat her like that', and she uses metaphors that he will understand so it's like, 'That's [Amy's] car to drive, not your car, give her the keys back and leave their car alone', which he understood and he was, 'Oh, yeah, you're right, Sis'. So, yeah, he came back a lot calmer and that's when he sat down with us and apologised and everything so that was really good.

The invisible work of women in supporting the work of practitioners is especially evident in Jane's account. While she talks about this in terms of "hassling" Steve, it is likely that this played a more important role in his progress than she gives herself credit for. Jane explained:

Well, I would hassle him about what happened at men's group. So he wasn't allowed to come home and not talk about it—that was a rule ... I forced him, I guess, because he would have quite happily not told me what was going on, but when I started asking him, like, 'What was the theme tonight?', 'What were they talking about?', [I] would just get little bits of information from him about how sometimes the other men were acting in the group, and certainly, I guess, I could hear as things got further along he would talk about how this guy is just not getting

it—he is not getting it—he is still arguing with these bloody men—like with these counsellors and whatever.

Linda argued for greater acknowledgement and involvement of family members, stating clearly her belief that the family "seems to be a forgotten thing that, like there's scars from stuff that's happened". Thus, while recognising the need for the counselling focus to be on John "and him being in touch with his feelings and that type of thing", she didn't feel that "the aftermath has been addressed and thought of". This has particular implications because, as Linda points out, without involvement in the process, it is hard for women to know "whether it is okay to just say whatever without getting anger as a response". Moreover, she felt "like the ending of it was premature" and that it is unreasonable to "expect that that's not ever going to rear its ugly head again". She advocates for greater family involvement and a "more collaborative approach":

Like I understand that couldn't have been done right at the beginning, I get that, but before they stop counselling, I just, I said before but I just really feel that all the people that have been impacted need to be, I don't know, come together and be in a session and, or more than one, and do something like that.

# Discussion

While invitational narrative practice has been characterised as an emerging approach to perpetrator intervention, as shown in the State of knowledge review of this report, it may instead be seen as a way of working with men that is both well-established and long standing. Nonetheless, as emphasised by the key informants, it is an approach that is continuously developing and evolving in response to the passage of time, shifting socio-political contexts and application across diverse sites and settings. For example, some of the key informants consulted as part of the State of knowledge review referred to the potential for neurobiological insights concerning affect systems and the experience of emotions to further enrich invitational narrative ideas and practices. They also highlighted the invitational narrative focus on story-telling, ethics and cultural context as especially compatible with working with Aboriginal men who use violence. For example, Nunkuwarrin Yunti, an Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation and service provider in South Australia, offers a nationally recognised diploma in Narrative Approaches for Aboriginal people. Finally, the key informants talked about the influence of invitational narrative approaches on other programs across Australia and internationally, demonstrating the broader resonance of its ideas and principles. In sum, invitational narrative practices are increasingly used across therapeutic modalities, reflecting the range of social constructionist and constructivist perspectives on therapeutic change (Etchison & Kleist, 2000, p. 61), but remain under-researched. Etchison and Kleist (2000, p. 65) suggest a number of reasons for the dearth of research evidence, most notably the dominance of quantitative, positivist approaches in conceptualising effectiveness and success (see also Westmarland et al., 2010; Westmarland & Kelly, 2013). Such approaches are less useful for researching invitational narrative practices, as their emphasis on meaning and experience is better captured by qualitative methodologies and methods.

## Engaging men who use violence

Men in perpetrator programs/intervention can be defensive and commonly justify and minimise their violence (Augusta-Scott, 2006). The importance the men in this study placed on not feeling judged is therefore not surprising. In order to engage men, invitational narrative practitioners seek to respectfully explore their thinking through the formation

of an alliance, being careful not to pre-judge by positioning men as intrinsically problematic or deficient. Practitioners are instead interested in men's relationships with violence, with themselves, and with other people. Seeing men as competent, rather than deviant or hopeless, enables engagement because the curious stance taken by practitioners opens up conversation rather than shutting it down. Respectful, curious questions thus work to stimulate fruitful ways of thinking and working with men's stories, men's ethical preferences and the possibility of other ways of being (Combs & Freedman, 2012; Etchison & Kleist, 2000).

To engage and connect with men, this study found that invitational narrative practitioners listen for and inquire about their preferences and attachments: the things that matter to men, their core values and aspirations, the kinds of relationship they hope for, and so on. Stories about violence practitioners contrasted with alternate stories in which men have been or have acted differently, in ways that are respectful and non-violent (Combs & Freedman, 2012). To engage men, the practitioners invited them to identify and articulate their values and beliefs, and to explore the barriers to attaining these. Conversations often focused on what men value and why, and crucially, what this says about their identities and their preferred ways of being: their ethical preferences (Combs & Freedman, 2012). The principle of ethics was used by practitioners to engage men in a non-confrontational manner. Practitioners talked about being committed to a suspension of judgement on the basis that judgement can unintentionally get in the way of genuine curiosity (Moss, 2016). Instead, they worked to ensure a focus on the man and move beyond his explanations and justifications for violence, including what "caused" his violence, what his partner did or did not do, and so on. Rather than the more traditional, hierarchal worker-client relationship, practitioners described how they prioritise a partnership in which the man is positioned not as someone who is passive and needs to be fixed (Moss, 2016, p. 3), but as someone who is capable and able to influence the course of his life. Engaging men through conversations about their ethics also provided a way for invitational narrative practitioners to gauge readiness for action: that is, to evaluate men's responsibility-taking and progress towards change (Jenkins, 2009). Respect, ethical preferences and readiness were key principles of invitational narrative practice that, through the work of skilled practitioners, enabled engagement,

and thus the possibility of purposeful conversations that explore responsibility and accountability, activating men's strivings for change.

## Supporting perpetrator accountability

The invitational narrative principles of identifying restraining ideas, experiencing shame and naming violence and its effects are central to perpetrator accountability in invitational narrative approaches. Exploring what restrains men from living in accordance with their ethical preferences provided practitioners with a critical point of engagement, enabling the men to realise and reconnect with principles of responsibility, and thus accountability. The accounts from practitioners showed that they are active in shaping conversations with men, ensuring that these are purposeful and focused. This means supporting men in rethinking the ways in which they account for their violence—for example, where this involves constructions of violence as being caused by external factors (people, events and so on), or as something over which they have no control. Instead, the practitioners facilitated conversations that were informed by a position of curiosity or interested enquiry into the particular discourses and patriarchal practices that have been influential in the men's lives, including social and cultural understandings of masculinity, femininity and family. In this context, the concept of restraining ideas was fundamental to invitational narrative practice, enabling men to understand how socio-cultural discourses have influenced their choices to use violence against women and children (Moss, 2016).

While acknowledging that men make choices in their use of violence, invitational narrative practitioners are careful not to demean or embarrass men, recognising that this can cause them to disengage and/or resist change. Instead, the practitioners talked about sensitively and slowly engaging men in conversations about their feelings of shame or self-disgust, and in this way, to carefully scaffold men's reflections by contrasting their attitudes and behaviours with their ethical preferences. By connecting to men's own desires, hopes and dreams, practitioners explained they can support men to work through and acknowledge the discomfort of shame in an environment that is non-judgemental and safe (Jenkins, 2009). The rationale for such principle skills was

that it provided the foundation for further conversations in which the effects of men's violence on women and children could be explored, and connected with ethical principles of responsibility and accountability.

The acts of naming violence and abuse and articulating their effects on women and children, in the context of deep reflection and remorse, was seen by the invitational narrative practitioners as a key indicator of change. Perpetrator accountability was conceptualised in relation to the interweaving of men's realisation of their preferred ethics, their insights into the influence of societal and cultural stories on their use of violence, and recognition of the harms that they have caused to others. Invitational narrative practice therefore positions accountability as a political project, not one that resides solely within the individual, and thus is oriented towards a broader social movement of accountability (Combs & Freedman, 2012). Invitational narrative's post-structural and feminist underpinnings provide the basis for its particular stance on the relationship between societal structures and the choices of individual men, highlighting the broader relations and practices of accountability. Reflecting the transformative political project of invitational narrative practice (Besley, 2001), the focus on accountability was integral for practitioners to have conversations with men about the socio-political context of, and power relations associated with, men's violence against women (Combs & Freedman, 2012, p. 1055; Jenkins, 2009, p. 133).

## Promoting women's safety

As the State of knowledge review established, a commitment to the safety of women and children lies at the heart of invitational narrative ways of working, which is evident in its focus on accountability in relation to both men's accounting and women's experiences. Thus the voices and perspectives of women and children are central, not only informing the work with individual men, but also in the recognition that work must be accountable to women and children. Men's claims to change are therefore held up for scrutiny against the experiences and perceptions of ex/partners and families. All practitioners in the study collaborated with parallel women's safety programs to ensure that their invitational narrative practice with men was supported by clear structures for



supporting women and children. More broadly, practitioners were able to articulate how their invitational narrative practice was informed by an analysis of gender-based power, privilege and entitlement which they brought into the therapeutic space through the exploration of ethics, restraining thoughts and shame (Vlais, 2014).

## Enabling invitational narrative practice: What works?

The focus of invitational narrative practice on men's particular stories and backgrounds, rather than on universally applicable generalisations, makes it a powerful intervention for achieving deep and sustainable change. However, in order to be effective, practitioners require time and space to focus on contextualised meaning-making (Combs & Freedman, 2012). As shown in this study, paying attention to men's local contexts and experiences while exploring their values, ethics and identity within the context of culture, language and discourse is slow work. The building blocks for responsibility-oriented work include: slowed-down conversations; curiosity about men's stories and the contradictions within them; and working with and through men's routine explanations for their violence.

The deliberate, iterative and progressive nature of the work represents the deep engagement through which men are supported in experiencing difficult feelings, such as shame, without judgement and in reaching their own realisations concerning their ethical selves. Indeed, it is the commitment to open, contextualised and responsive practice that makes invitational narrative approaches unique. Its implicit stance of curiosity, for example, honours men's perspectives but sees these as partial and changeable. Rather than focusing on the "wrongness" of men's beliefs—telling men what they should do or how they should feel—practitioners talk with men in ways that enable them to experience their own realisations within the context of their own lives. The creation of a richer story informed by ethical preferences can provide men with an anchor, both in terms of accountability and as the basis for sustainable long-term change. In this way, invitational narrative practice replaces a focus on pathology, deficit and men as "the problem" with a larger socio-political analysis of gendered power relations, thereby positioning men as agentic and capable of meaningful, lasting change.

Effective invitational narrative practice relies upon highly-trained practitioners versed in such ideas. The specific philosophical underpinnings of invitational narrative practice, influenced by post-structural, feminist and intersectional thinking, distinguish it from more conventional, predominant approaches such as those associated with psychological and other individually-focused interventions. The exploration and critique of cultural norms and gendered expectations is pivotal to practice; thus, in order to engage men in conversations regarding the ways in which these shape individual beliefs, intentions and actions (Combs & Freedman, 2012), practitioners must be equally committed to a critical understanding of structural power relations as the context for gendered privilege and entitlement. Practitioners must therefore be prepared to reflect upon their own social positioning, while acknowledging their work with individual men as part of a larger political project focusing on gender equality and the safety of women and their children.

From an invitational narrative perspective, claims of effectiveness—or "success"—should be treated with caution, and focus should instead be on the contextualised meanings associated with changes in men's lives. Standardised models and programmatic approaches are therefore not part of the repertoire of invitational narrative practice. Instead, purposeful conversations, active listening and ethical inquiry are used to facilitate experiential engagement and develop stories that are meaningful and rich in both detail and transformative potential. In invitational narrative approaches, then, effectiveness is conceptualised in terms of moments, movements towards change that are unique to men's own journeys and evident in their articulation of key learnings, and specific shifts that are verifiable and confirmed by significant others, most notably women and children. Claims about the effectiveness of invitational narrative practice are therefore modest and always contingent on the combined insights of women and practitioners as well as men, thus fitting better with qualitative methods of inquiry. It is the articulation of ethics and shame, together with the recognition of effects and substantiated moments of change, that provide a body of evidence for considering effectiveness. On this basis, and given the findings of this study, it is apparent that invitational narrative approaches offer value in working with men who use violence against women and children.

# Conclusion

This study investigated invitational narrative ways of working with the aim of better understanding their use with perpetrators of domestic and family violence. Through the input of the founders and key informants of invitational narrative practice, as well as interviews with the men and women involved in it, and its practitioners, this study has drawn out the main principles and skills of invitational narrative approaches, including respect, competency, ethics, restraining ideas, shame and effects, and has shown how these are used to engage men in addressing their use of violence towards women and children.

Invitational narrative ways of working engage men who use violence in their intimate relationships by being respectfully curious about, and listening for, ethical preferences and readiness for change. Practitioners use this platform to explore men's shame and the effects of men's violence on women and children. The acts of naming violence and abuse and articulating their effects on women and children, are then used by practitioners to enable men to connect with ethical principles of responsibility and accountability. It is this scaffolding that positions accountability as a political project for invitational narrative approaches, where a gendered analysis of power that privileges women's voices and centres women's safety is made possible.

In conclusion, it can be argued that invitational narrative approaches are fitting for working with men who perpetrate domestic violence; however, it is an active and ongoing approach that requires time for the slow, curious, considered work involved in rich, contextualised conversations. This responsiveness to contextualised needs and interests of men enables invitational narrative approaches to be used with diverse cultures, circumstances and communities; hence offers contributions to the field of perpetrator interventions in Australia.

## Research reflections

The strengths of this study rest in the rich, in-depth, qualitative understandings of invitational narrative practice provided through the dyad and triad structures of the interviews. The interviews enable deep insight into both men's key moments

of change and the tensions and slippages experienced in this journey. They show how practitioners use particular principles and skills to both engage and respectfully challenge men. The interviews highlight women's insights into, and experiences of men's change, as well as the tensions and contradictions with which they continue to live. The key informant interviews provide firsthand accounts of both the origins of invitational narrative practice and the circumstances that have enabled and hindered its growth.

## Limitations

As a qualitative study, the primary purpose of this research was to produce "a deep, rich, and contextualised understanding" (Carminati, 2018, p. 2099) of invitational narrative ways of working with men who use violence against women and children. A higher number of women participants would, however, have enriched the data by both, rounding out men's accounts and contributing to further insights regarding women's experiences of violence and their perspectives on change. Similarly, the gains associated with partnership with an agency that is rich in history and experience regarding invitational narrative practice are countered by the particularity of the findings to this context. How invitational narrative approaches are used more widely—both in Australia and internationally—cannot be ascertained from this study. Finally, the invitational narrative practices considered in this study are those of particular relevance to, firstly, the field of perpetrator interventions, and secondly, the agency (Uniting Communities Adelaide) and geographical (South Australian) context. It is recognised that invitational and/or narrative approaches may be interpreted and practiced differently in other settings. This study should not, therefore, be read as an exhaustive or definitive account of all invitational narrative practices, principles and skills.

# Implications for policy-makers and practitioners

While this study has focused on invitational narrative practice as a specific approach to perpetrator intervention, it offers insights that are relevant more broadly, with implications for the ways in which work with men is conceptualised and implemented. The importance of engaging men *in order to* enable change, and the conditions that can make this possible, is a key finding. Engagement is something that invitational narrative approaches (arguably) do well and which policy-makers and other practitioners/intervention providers can learn from. This goes beyond transferable skills or techniques though, highlighting instead, the importance of investing in engagement—not because it is “good” for or benefits men but, rather, because it provides the foundation for addressing men’s violence through long-term and sustainable change. Taking engagement seriously, then, suggests the need to reflect upon—and perhaps rethink—the current reliance on measuring programmatic outcomes as evidence for men’s behaviour and attitudinal change.

Crucial also is the enormous complexity of behaviour change in this context, embedded as it is in the gender normativity and insidious micro-power relations of everyday life. This is nowhere more evident than in the women’s accounts, in their lived experience of men’s attempts to change their behaviour. Here, the women reveal the minutiae of change, the steps forward and backward. Perhaps most importantly, the glimpses that they provide of men’s change drives home the point that there is no “before” or “after” violence; that change is neither linear nor seamless, it exists in moments. As highlighted in the findings of this study, men’s violence does not constitute a—or a set of—behaviour/s that can be singled out and addressed; rather it infiltrates every aspect of their life and their sense of self. This is not to say that some men are irredeemably or innately violent but, instead, emphasises the work associated with creating and sustaining change. What invitational narrative approaches offer in this space is the scope to stay with and work through this complexity, to produce “bottom-up” change, that is, changes that are, both, generated through men’s perspectives and aspirations, and situated in the messy complexities of their daily lives. Further, the invitational narrative emphasis on connecting up men’s individual change with societal and cultural change—linking the personal with the political—ensures the continued politicisation of, not only domestic and family violence, but of inequality and social justice more generally.

Based on the findings of this study, the implications of adopting invitational narrative practices, whether as a whole-of-program approach or as elements thereof, include the following:

1. Invitational narrative approaches require formalised governance arrangements that provide an authorising environment: that is, requiring whole-of-agency “buy-in” from managers, supervisors and practitioners. The formalisation of invitational narrative practices as a whole-of-agency approach is important for ensuring that systems for staff supervision as well as data collection and monitoring for evaluation purposes are built-in to organisational structures and not reliant on “interested” individuals.
2. Agencies, as authorising environments, must be committed to the larger political project and social change imperative of invitational narrative approaches, based on the understanding of violence as an expression of gendered power relations within the context of broader societal inequalities.
3. Ongoing training, supervision and support enables invitational narrative practitioners to develop their practice over time, ensuring the ongoing integrity of the invitational narrative ethos.
4. Engaging men over time and through their journeys of behavioural and attitudinal change requires that agencies are committed, both, to working flexibly with a diversity of men, and to supporting practitioners by ensuring opportunities for ongoing skill development.
5. While invitational narrative approaches to perpetrator intervention are time-intensive and oriented towards longer-term change, they are readily adaptable across different stages and forums of intervention (i.e. individual, couple and group).
6. The safety of women and children is central to invitational narrative approaches to perpetrator intervention. Agencies must, therefore, invest in parallel women’s safety programs to ensure that invitational narrative work with men is complemented by structures of accountability, and processes for supporting women and children.

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# Appendix A:

## Conversation guide for key informants

Can you tell us a bit about (what you know about) the history and beginnings of invitational narrative practice in South Australia?

Can you talk about the time when invitational narrative practice was at its peak in South Australia? What was going on more broadly that enabled or contributed to its growth?

Can you talk about the events or factors that contributed to the shift away from such approaches regarding domestic violence in South Australia?

Do you see narrative and invitational as distinct approaches? What is your sense of the merging of the two in practice with men who use violence?

What do you think hinders the greater uptake of invitational narrative practice in perpetrator intervention? (In South Australia?)

Invitational narrative approaches have been talked about as “emerging” in the context of perpetrator intervention. What do you make of this? Do you agree with this positioning?



# Appendix B:

## Information sheets (practitioners, men and women)



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### INFORMATION SHEET for Key informants

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Title: Engaging Men: Invitational Narrative Approaches

Research Contact: Professor Sarah Wendt

This project is supported by Flinders University, Uniting Communities Adelaide and is funded by the Australian National Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS).

#### Purpose of the study

This study explores Invitational-Narrative approaches to working with men who seek counselling and support regarding their use of violence.

#### What will I be asked to do?

Participation is entirely voluntary. You are invited to participate in a face to face interview with a researcher to talk about engagement of men (who use violence in their intimate partner relationships) using Invitational-Narrative Approaches. The interview will audio taped and focused on the history and development of Invitational and Narrative Approach's in South Australia.

#### What benefit will I gain from being involved in this study?

You will not receive any direct benefit from your participation in this study. However, sharing your experiences will assist us in understanding the influencing factors that enable and hinder the take up of these approaches when working with men who use violence in intimate partner relationships.

#### Will I be identifiable by being involved in this study?

We will not use your name. Your comments will not be linked directly to you, but we cannot guarantee anonymity. Once the interview has been typed-up and saved as a file, any identifying information will be removed and the typed-up file stored on the researchers' password protected computers. The analysis of your interview will help us understand and situate key documents and events in South Australia and will be explanatory in focus not a judgement. The aim is to provide the policy and practice community with a rich, detailed and highly practical understanding of the invitational-narrative approach and how it can be made to work most effectively.

#### Are there any risks or discomforts if I am involved?

We anticipate few risks from your involvement because the interview will focus on history and development of Invitational-Narrative ways of engaging men who use violence in their intimate relationships.

#### How do I agree to participate?

If you would like to participate please reply to the email you were sent or please talk to Natalie Greenland at Uniting Communities or Sarah Wendt (details above). A consent form will be used before interviews. You may refuse to answer any questions in the interview and you are free to withdraw at any time without effect or consequences.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet and we hope that you will accept our invitation to be involved.

Other members of the research team include:

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*This research project has been approved by the Flinders University Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee (Project 7705). For more information regarding ethical approval of the project the Executive Officer of the Committee can be contacted by telephone on 8201 3116, by fax on 8201 2035 or by email [human.researchethics@flinders.edu.au](mailto:human.researchethics@flinders.edu.au)*

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## INFORMATION SHEET for MEN

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GPO Box 2100  
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Tel: +61 8 82013978

Sarah.Wendt@flinders.edu.au

CRICOS Provider No. 00114A

**Title:** Engaging Men: Invitational Narrative Approaches

**Research Contact:** Professor Sarah Wendt

This project is supported by Flinders University, Uniting Communities Adelaide, and is funded by the Australian National Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS).

### **Purpose of the study.**

This study explores Invitational-Narrative approaches to working with men who seek counselling and support regarding their use of violence. The purpose of the study is to gain deeper understanding of ways of working with men to change their use of violence in intimate relationships.

### **What will I be asked to do?**

Participation is entirely voluntary. You are invited to participate in a face to face interview with a researcher to talk about your experiences of counselling and your journey of understanding and changing your use of violence in your intimate relationships. The interviews will be held at Uniting Communities. They will be recorded using a digital voice recorder and should take about 1 hour. Once recorded, the audio recording will be transcribed (typed-up) and stored as a password protected computer file.

### **What benefit will I gain from being involved in this study?**

You will not receive any direct benefit from your participation in this study. However, sharing your experiences will assist in improving the delivery of future services and programs for men. You will be offered a \$20 voucher as appreciation for the time given to be interviewed.

### **Will I be identifiable by being involved in this study?**

We will not use your name. Your comments will not be linked directly to you, but we cannot guarantee anonymity. Once the interview has been typed-up and saved as a file, any identifying information will be removed and the typed-up file stored on the researchers' password protected computers.

### **Are there any risks or discomforts if I am involved?**

The interview will cover your understandings and involvement in domestic violence. You may find this to be a distressing or confronting. If you feel that you require additional support following the interview, we encourage you to contact your counsellor at Uniting Communities. If you wish to talk to someone different, please contact MensLine (1300 78 9978) or 1800 Respect (1800 737732). These services provide support free of charge. If you have any concerns regarding anticipated or actual risks or discomforts, please raise them with the researcher.

If our discussion brings to light that you or your partner/former partner or children or anyone else is at risk of harm, the interview will be stopped. If the interviewer has any suspicions of harm to children, they will make a mandatory report to the Child Abuse Report Line and notify counsellors at Uniting Communities. Disclosure of illegal activities may need to be reported to relevant authorities and will not be secure from lawful search and seizure.

### **How do I agree to participate?**

If you would like to participate please talk to your counsellor (person who gave you the information sheet). He/She will then help set up a time that suits you. However, if you wish to contact the research team directly, please email or ring Sarah Wendt (details above). A consent form will be used before interviews. You may refuse to answer any questions in the interview and you are free to withdraw at any time without effect or consequences.

**Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet and we hope that you will accept our invitation to be involved.**

### **Other members of the research team include:**

Dr Kate Seymour  
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CRICOS Provider No. 00114A

## INFORMATION SHEET for WOMEN

**Title:** Engaging Men: Invitational Narrative Approaches

**Research Contact:** Professor Sarah Wendt

This project is supported by Flinders University, Uniting Communities Adelaide, and is funded by the Australian National Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS).

### Purpose of the study

This study explores Invitational-Narrative approaches to working with men who seek counselling and support regarding their use of violence. The purpose of the study is to gain deeper understanding of ways of working with men to change their use of violence in intimate relationships.

### What will I be asked to do?

Participation is entirely voluntary. You are invited to participate in a face to face interview with a researcher to talk about your sense of safety while your partner/ex-partner is receiving counselling for using violence in your intimate relationship. The interviews will be held at Uniting Communities. However, it is easier for you this can be conducted over the telephone. They will be recorded using a digital voice recorder and should take about 1 hour. Once recorded, the audio recording will be transcribed (typed-up) and stored as a password protected computer file.

### What benefit will I gain from being involved in this study?

You will not receive any direct benefit from your participation in this study. However, sharing your experiences will assist in improving the delivery of future services and programs for men. You will be offered a \$20 voucher as appreciation for the time given to be interviewed.

### Will I be identifiable by being involved in this study?

We will not use your name. Your comments will not be linked directly to you, but we cannot guarantee anonymity. Once the interview has been typed-up and saved as a file, any identifying information will be removed and the typed-up file stored on the researchers' password protected computers.

### Are there any risks or discomforts if I am involved?

The interview will cover your understandings and involvement in domestic violence. You may find this to be a distressing or confronting. If you feel that you require additional support following the interview, we encourage you to contact your counsellor at Uniting Communities. If you wish to talk to someone different, please contact 1800 Respect (1800 737732). This service is provided free of charge. If you have any concerns regarding anticipated or actual risks or discomforts, please raise them with the researcher. If our discussion brings to light that you or your partner/former partner or children or anyone else is at risk of harm, the interview will be stopped. If the interviewer has any suspicions of harm to children, they will make a mandatory report to the Child Abuse Report Line and notify counsellors at Uniting Communities. Disclosure of illegal activities may need to be reported to relevant authorities and will not be secure from lawful search and seizure.

### How do I agree to participate?

If you would like to participate please talk to your counsellor (person who gave you the information sheet). He/She will then help set up a time that suits you. However, if you wish to contact the research team directly, please email or ring Sarah Wendt (details above). A consent form will be used before interviews. You may refuse to answer any questions in the interview and you are free to withdraw at any time without effect or consequences.

**Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet and we hope that you will accept our invitation to be involved.**

### Other members of the research team include:

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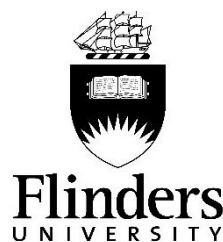
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# Appendix C:

## Consent forms (practitioners, men and women)



### CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH (Counsellor by interview)

Engaging Men: Invitational Narrative Approaches

1. I am over 18 years of age.
2. I have read the information provided and understand the purpose of interview.
3. Details of procedures and any risks have been explained to my satisfaction.
4. I agree to audio recording of my information and participation.
5. I understand that:
  - I may not directly benefit from taking part in this research.
  - I am free to withdraw from the project at any time, am free to decline to answer particular questions; and may ask that the recording be stopped.
  - Whether I participate or not, or withdraw after participating, will have no effect on my employment.
  - While the information gained in this study will be published as explained, I will not be identified, and individual information will remain confidential; however complete anonymity cannot be guaranteed.

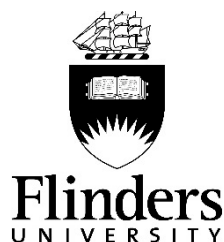
Participant's signature.....Date.....

I certify that I have explained the study to the volunteer and consider that she/he understands what is involved and freely consents to participation.

Researcher's name.....

Researcher's signature.....Date.....





**CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH**  
**(Men by interview)**

Engaging Men: Invitational Narrative Approaches

1. I am over 18 years of age.
2. I have read the information provided and understand the purpose of interview.
3. Details of procedures and any risks have been explained to my satisfaction.
4. I agree to audio recording of my information and participation.
5. I understand that
  - I may not directly benefit from taking part in this research.
  - I am free to withdraw from the project at any time, am free to decline to answer particular questions; and may ask that the recording be stopped.
  - Whether I participate or not, or withdraw after participating, will have no effect on any treatment or service that is being provided to me.
  - While the information gained in this study will be published as explained, I will not be identified, and individual information will remain confidential; however complete anonymity cannot be guaranteed.

**Participant's signature.....Date.....**

I certify that I have explained the study to the volunteer and consider that he understands what is involved and freely consents to participation.

**Researcher's name.....**

**Researcher's signature.....Date.....**



**CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH**  
(Women by interview)

Engaging Men: Invitational Narrative Approaches

1. I am over 18 years of age.
2. I have read the information provided and understand the purpose of interview.
3. Details of procedures and any risks have been explained to my satisfaction.
4. I agree to audio recording of my information and participation.
5. I understand that:
  - I may not directly benefit from taking part in this research.
  - I am free to withdraw from the project at any time, am free to decline to answer particular questions; and may ask that the recording be stopped.
  - Whether I participate or not, or withdraw after participating, will have no effect on any treatment or service that is being provided to me.
  - While the information gained in this study will be published as explained, I will not be identified, and individual information will remain confidential; however complete anonymity cannot be guaranteed.

**Participant's signature.....Date.....**

I certify that I have explained the study to the volunteer and consider that she understands what is involved and freely consents to participation.

**Researcher's name.....**

**Researcher's signature.....Date.....**

# Appendix D: Interview guide for men

## Demographics

What is your age? Please circle.

18–25 years, 26–35 years, 36–45 years, 46–55 years, 56–65 years, 66–75 years, 76 years and above.

What is your relationships status? Please circle.

I have a current partner, I have a former partner.

Do you have children?

Yes / no.

Do you identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander?

Yes / no / both.

What is your education level? Please circle.

Below Year 12, Year 12, Trade, Diploma, Certificate, Bachelor's degree, Master's degree, PhD degree.

What is your main income source? Please circle.

Employee, self-employed, government payments, other.

Have you completed an anger management group, men's domestic violence group or behaviour change program before?

Yes / no.

If yes when and what?

## Journey into the service

To start off, would you tell me a bit about yourself and what led you to Uniting Communities?

*Prompt: Was he mandated?*

What elements of the service do you participate in (e.g. individual counselling, couple counselling, men's group).

How long have you been attending?

What brought you to this/these elements of the service?

Whose idea was it to come to this/these groups (his, counsellor, partner, kids, others)? How did you initially feel about attending this service?

What were your initial goals or hopes in attending? Did this change over time at all?

How would you describe what kept you coming along? What has helped you return to the service, that is, turn up again?

## Engagement and invitational narrative ideas

What was that first conversation/session like for you? Can you remember feeling or thinking something that was significant or that influenced you in a particular way?

What has it been like for you to attend sessions regularly? Can you remember feeling or thinking something that influenced you in a particular way to keep you interested?

Have you felt encouraged, supported, and even challenged to explore and see yourself in different ways?

How would you describe how you are seeing yourself differently? What do you think has contributed to this?

Over the time you have engaged with the service, has what is important to you in your life changed in some way, or perhaps become clearer?

What might have become less important, and what might have become more important?

How has your understandings of violence and abuse changed on account of attending the service? In what ways has this been helpful?

What was it like for you to explore how what you have done has hurt others in your family or relationship? In what ways has this been helpful?

Have you felt encouraged, supported and even challenged to explore and see your partner and/or children in different ways or understand their experience of the violence and abuse differently?

What are you now understanding that is different than before? How did this come about?

What has it been like for you to explore your own beliefs and values about what is important to you in your relationships, or family, or life? Can you describe some key moments or examples?

What is your understanding of power in relationships, and has this changed in any way since you've been attending this service?

Have you felt encouraged, supported, and even challenged to explore broader cultural ideas and expectations about families, relationships, men and women? In what ways have these conversations been helpful?

When you look back, are there particular reasons or explanations for your use of violence that you held that no longer seem as reasonable as they once did? If so, what do you think has contributed to this shift?

How would you describe any moments of uncomfortableness you may have experienced in sessions and what helped you work through this uncomfortableness?

What have been some of the hardest aspects of attending counselling or the group program here?

What were the areas of conversation or topics that you found more difficult than others? How come these did not put you off from attending?

## Change

Can you recall when you first began to feel things were shifting a bit for you? What thoughts do you have about what has contributed to that?

How would you describe for me any changes you've noticed in yourself since you began this group?

How do you think it will be for you to maintain any changes you've made? What might help you sustain these changes? If not, what prevented you from sustaining changes?

Who else knows that you are attending this service? What do they say about it?

Have people in your life noticed changes in you since attending the service? Who might have noticed? If so, what might they have noticed that's different? For example, what have they said? What do you think has contributed to those differences (if difference is noticed)?

Can you think of an example/s where you've put some of the things you've learnt or realised through attending the service, into practice?

How would you describe the most significant change that has occurred in your life as a result of being involved with the service here? Why is this change significant to you?



# Appendix E:

## Interview guide for practitioners

### Demographics

In order to capture the workforce profile, we are interested in how you came to work with men who use violence in their intimate relationships.

How long have you worked at Uniting Communities? Please tell me about the service you provide (e.g. one-on-one, couple, group etc.)? What are your key roles and responsibilities?

What is your background and professional pathway (e.g. degree etc.)?

How long have you identified with invitational narrative ways of working? Tell me about that journey?

*Prompt: Ask about qualifications?*

How long have you worked with men who use violence? How long have you worked with men using invitational narrative ideas?

### Context development

We are aiming to better understand invitational narrative ways of working and how key ideas or principles from this “therapy” engage men who use violence in their intimate relationships as well as understand men’s behaviour and attitudinal change and promote safety for women.

[First name of the man] has agreed to participate in an interview. We would like this interview to focus on him, which is part of the methodology to support accountability. We are not asking for personal material or details of the man’s life but instead aim to talk to you about your experience of engaging with him and using invitational narrative ideas during your work with him. Please draw examples from [first name of the man]’s experiences of receiving a service from Uniting Communities to show “evidence” of how you think invitational narrative ways of working have been successful or not.

Can you just give me a brief overview of [first name] ... that is, how long have you been working with him? How did he enter the service? What were his main reasons for entering the service?

### Journey into the service

When [first name] first attended the service, what do you think was important to him? What did you understand about his situation or concerns?

Can you describe key ideas (or principles) you use from invitational narrative ways of working that were particularly helpful at the beginning stage of engaging [first name]? Examples ...

What was that first conversation/session like for you?

## Engagement and invitational narrative ideas

What practices did you draw on from invitational narrative ways of working that began to make it possible for him to see himself in different ways—that is—open up conversations about himself and what is important to him in his life?

What aspects of invitational narrative ways of working can you identify that helped you specifically discuss violence with [first name] and how do you think this has influenced him?

What aspects of invitational narrative ways of working can you identify that helped you specifically discuss with [first name] the harm he had done to others, and how do you think this has influenced him?

What aspects of invitational narrative ways of working help you have conversations with [first name] that bring forward understandings of violence and abuse as practices of power and control? How do you think this has influenced him?

Can you describe moments of any uncomfortableness you may have experienced in your work with [first name] and how did invitational narrative ideas help you work through this uncomfortableness?

What practices did you draw on from invitational narrative ways of working that began to make it possible for [first name] to see his partner (ex) and/or children in different ways or understand their experiences differently—that is—open up conversations about them in influential ways?

How do you think invitational narrative ideas has enabled [first name] to explore his own beliefs and values to grow different realisations about what is important to him? Can you describe some key moments or examples in your work with [first name]?

What practices did you draw on from invitational narrative ways of working that began to make it possible for [first name] to explore broader cultural ideas about families, relationships, men and women? How would you describe this awareness and how this has influenced him?

Why do you think [first name] is still here at Uniting Communities and how would you describe invitational/narrative ways of working—having something to do with this ... ?

## Change

In your opinion, what were the most important moments in [first name]’s journey towards change/achieving their outcomes or goals? What factors do you think contributed to this change—any examples from invitational narrative ideas? [This question is asked in terms of where the client is at in the service]

How would you describe how invitational narrative ideas enable change—and can you think of examples where you have seen this change in [first name]’s life?

What barriers did you and [first name] face in achieving his hoped outcomes/goals?

Where do you think [first name] is in his change journey? How has invitational narrative ways of working contributed to this?

# Appendix F:

## Interview guide for women

### Demographics

What is your age? Please circle.

18–25 years,    26–35 years,    36–45 years,    46–55 years,    56–65 years,    66–75 years,    76 years and above.

What is your relationships status? Please circle.

I have a current partner,    I have a former partner.

Do you have children?

Yes / no.

Do you identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander?

Yes / no / both.

What is your education level? Please circle.

Below Year 12,    Year 12, Trade,    Diploma,    Certificate,    Bachelor's degree,    Master's degree,    PhD degree.

What is your main income source? Please circle.

Employee,    self-employed,    government payments,    other.

Has your partner (ex) completed an anger management group, men's domestic violence group or behaviour change program before?

Yes / No.

If yes, when and what?

### Journey into the service

To start off, could you tell me a bit about yourself and what led you and your partner to Uniting Communities?

What elements of the service do you participate in (e.g. individual counselling, couple counselling, women's safety contact)? How long have you been attending?

What brought you to this/these elements of the service?

Whose idea was it to come to this/these groups (his, counsellor, partner, kids, others)?

How did you initially feel about accessing this service?

Can you describe why you are still here? What has helped you return to the service, that is, turned up again?

## Change

How would you describe how things were for you, your ex/partner and children before your partner started attending the service? How would you describe things now?

What were you hoping for by your ex/partner attending the service? Has this changed over time at all?

Have you noticed any differences in your partner since he has been accessing the service? What do you think has contributed to those differences (if difference is noticed)?

What effect have these differences had on you, your children, and the relationship?

Have you felt safer since your partner has been attending the service? In what way? What do you think has contributed to this?

Have other people in your life noticed changes in your partner since attending counselling? Who might have noticed? If so, what have they noticed that's different? What do you think has contributed to those differences (if difference is noticed)?

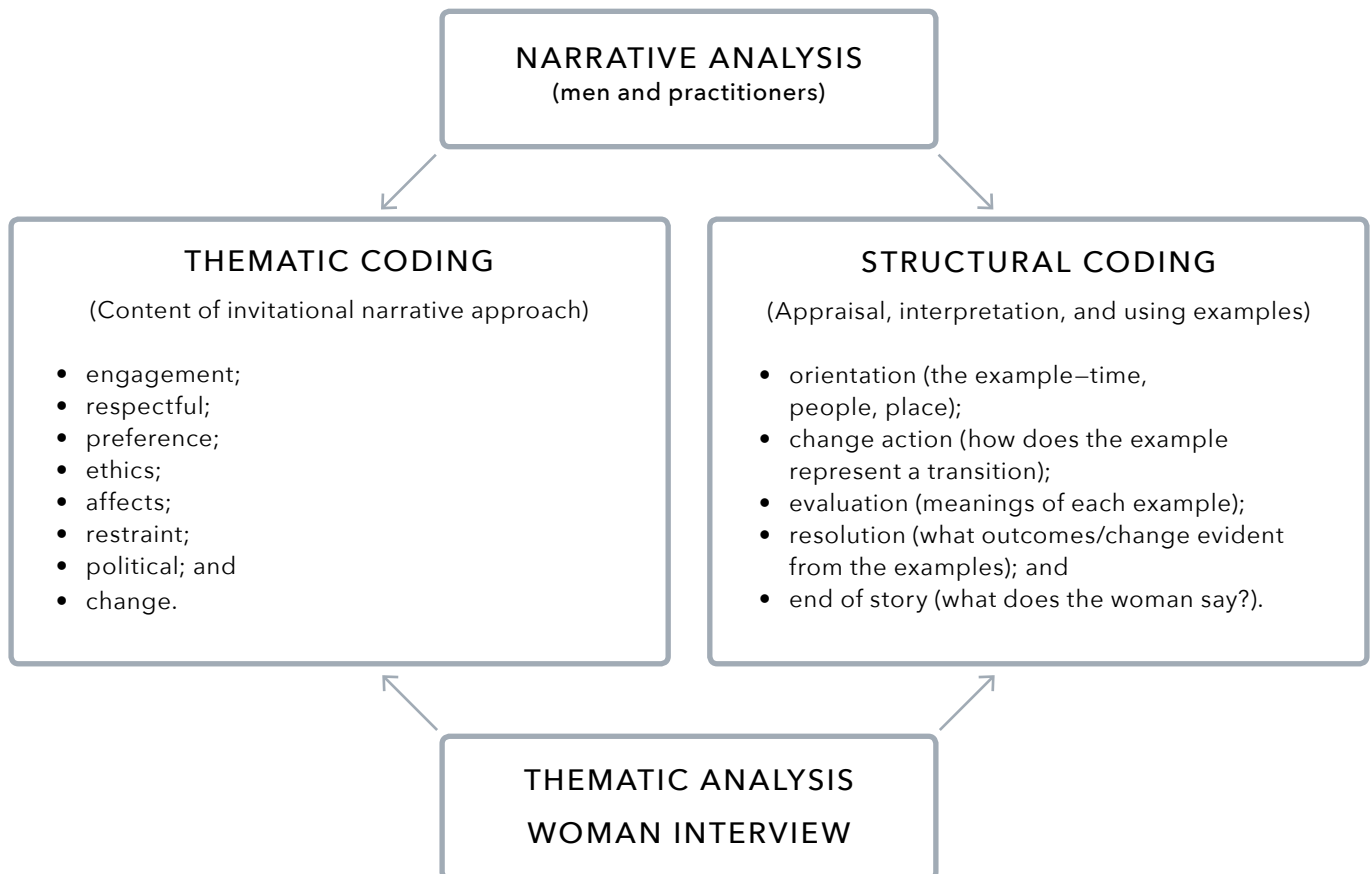
What were you hoping for by accessing this service yourself? In what ways has accessing this service been helpful to you?

How would you describe the most significant change that has occurred in your life as a result of being involved with the service here? Why is this change significant to you?

# Appendix G:

## Narrative analysis protocol

FIGURE 3 Narrative analysis protocol



Thematic and structural coding can happen together. Thematic coding is providing a protocol to help you draw out examples of invitational narrative practice. Structural coding helps you appraise or interpret your examples (say something about them) (Riessman, 2008).

### Thematic coding

**Engagement:** *What kept you attending?*

Examples of active engagement with ideas around power, ethics and fairness, men generating their own ideas and commitments concerning non-violence (Vlais, 2014). The counsellor adopts optimistic, respectful, not-knowing, curious stance—invites reflection to engage the man (Besley, 2001).

Purposeful conversation (to break through minimisation, denial—access emotions and assumptions).

**Respectful:** *Have you felt encouraged, supported and even challenged to explore and see yourself in different ways?* Examples of worker and client positioned side-by-side (not hierarchical)—to explore the man’s perceptions of his behaviour and using this exploration to reflect and build personal responsibility. Respect for self, respect for others (Katic, 2016).

**Preference:** *Have you felt encouraged, supported and even challenged to explore and see yourself in different ways?* Examples of drawing upon men’s motivations and desire for



equality, respect, love (Augusta-Scott, 2002). Connecting who he would like to be and what his actions show him (McNally, 2001).

**Ethics:** *What has it been like for you to explore your own beliefs and values about what is important to you and your relationships?*

Examples of individual beliefs and evidence of respectful living. Interested in the experience of shame and how this can enable men to feel a contradiction between their ethics and their abusive behaviour (Brown, 2016).

**Affects:** *What has it been like for you to explore how what you have done has hurt others in your family (e.g. partner, children)?*

Recognition of harm done to others—opportunities for new realisation and practices that enable ethical ways of living (Jenkins, 2009).

**Restraint:** *What has been uncomfortable, hard? Understandings of power?*

What is stopping the man from realising his ethical preferences? Explore established networks of presuppositions, premises and expectations (e.g. gender power) (Greenwell, 2016).

**Political:** *What is your understanding of power in relationships? Explore cultural ideas and expectations?*

Violence is an expression of power relations, heterosexist dominant discourses is an emphasis in invitational narrative practices not solely psychological explanations for violence (Katic, 2016).

**Change:** *See questions at the end of the interview schedule.*

How is change constructed? What are the important moments identified? The broader vision of invitational narrative practices is enabling men to question the possibilities of how their lives are lived and maintain a vision and action for social change (McKenzie-Mohr & Lafrance, 2017).

## Steps

1. Read the transcripts (man, woman, practitioner).
2. Based on this reading, write a summary of the man's narrative (an abstract):
  - a. Age, education, childhood, relationships, current relationship, children (i.e. who is he?).
  - b. How did he come to Uniting Communities? (How long, what intervention, history of seeking help?)
  - c. How was violence featured, described, experienced?
  - d. This can be about half a page (be succinct). Write a brief paragraph on the practitioner (i.e. demographics, duration of employment at Uniting Communities, duration of practice in invitational narrative approaches).

*When you are reading the transcripts to form the abstracts you can also open code: that is, what are the themes coming through in your first read (record them).*

3. Read the man's transcript again, looking for "evidence" of invitational narrative using the protocol abuse.
4. Record evidence under the content headings.
5. Read the counsellor's transcript again, looking for "evidence" of invitational narrative using the protocol above.
6. Record evidence under the content headings.
7. When recording your evidence look to structural coding to help you interpret and write your appraisal.
8. Read your recordings for the man and the counsellor. What is similar? What is ambiguous?
9. What is the resolution—the outcome of the plot from the man and counsellor interviews? This is your summary—what is the construction of change?

Invitational narrative approaches are grounded in accountability but also safety of women and children. Privileging the safety of women means invitational narrative practitioners have a responsibility to confirm changes to his behaviour with her (Katic, 2016; Vlasis, 2014).

10. Read the woman's interview:

- a. What themes does she speak about?
- b. What is her appraisal of and meaning about change?
- c. What is similar, what is different to the resolution presented by the man/counsellor?
- d. Use structural coding to help you construct your examples.

*Check in with your initial open coding—are there any themes not covered by conducting steps 1–10?*

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ANROWS

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AUSTRALIA'S NATIONAL RESEARCH  
ORGANISATION FOR WOMEN'S SAFETY

*to Reduce Violence against Women & their Children*

