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# How do we engage men who use violence?

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A symposium for policymakers and practitioners on  
invitational narrative approaches to engaging men who use violence

Adelaide, 11 November 2019

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# Welcome to Country

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Mickey Kumatpi Marrutya O'Brien

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# Welcome from ANROWS

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Heather Nancarrow, CEO, ANROWS

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# Engaging men who use violence: Invitational narrative approaches

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Wendt, S., Seymour, K., Buchanan, F., Dolman, C., & Greenland, N.

- **Brief presentation of the project and key findings (Sarah Wendt)**
  - How did we conduct the project?
  - What were the major findings?
- **Discussion about how invitational narrative ideas are used in practice (Kate Seymour)**
  - To highlight key practice principles of invitational narrative ideas and their influence when working with men who use violence (from three points of view – man, counsellor, ex/partner).
  - To encourage reflections regarding possibilities of invitational narrative ideas when working with men who use violence.

**Narrative practice** engages with people by exploring the ways in which they make sense of their lives through stories. 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.

**Invitational practice** seeks to engage men who use violence in an ethical journey toward respectful relationships, encouraging them to develop their own practice of self-confrontation and helping them to discover their own capacities for respectful ways of being.

“Invitational narrative” approaches are models of intervention that incorporate aspects of both White’s narrative therapy and Jenkins’s invitational practice.

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?

**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.

Conversations with seven key informants regarding the history of invitational narrative approaches in South Australia.

**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.

A total of five invitational narrative practitioners, 11 men who use/d violence, and five women (ex/partners) participated through in-depth face-to-face interviews.

Thematic and structural coding enabled 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.




assumption that, with skilled & 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

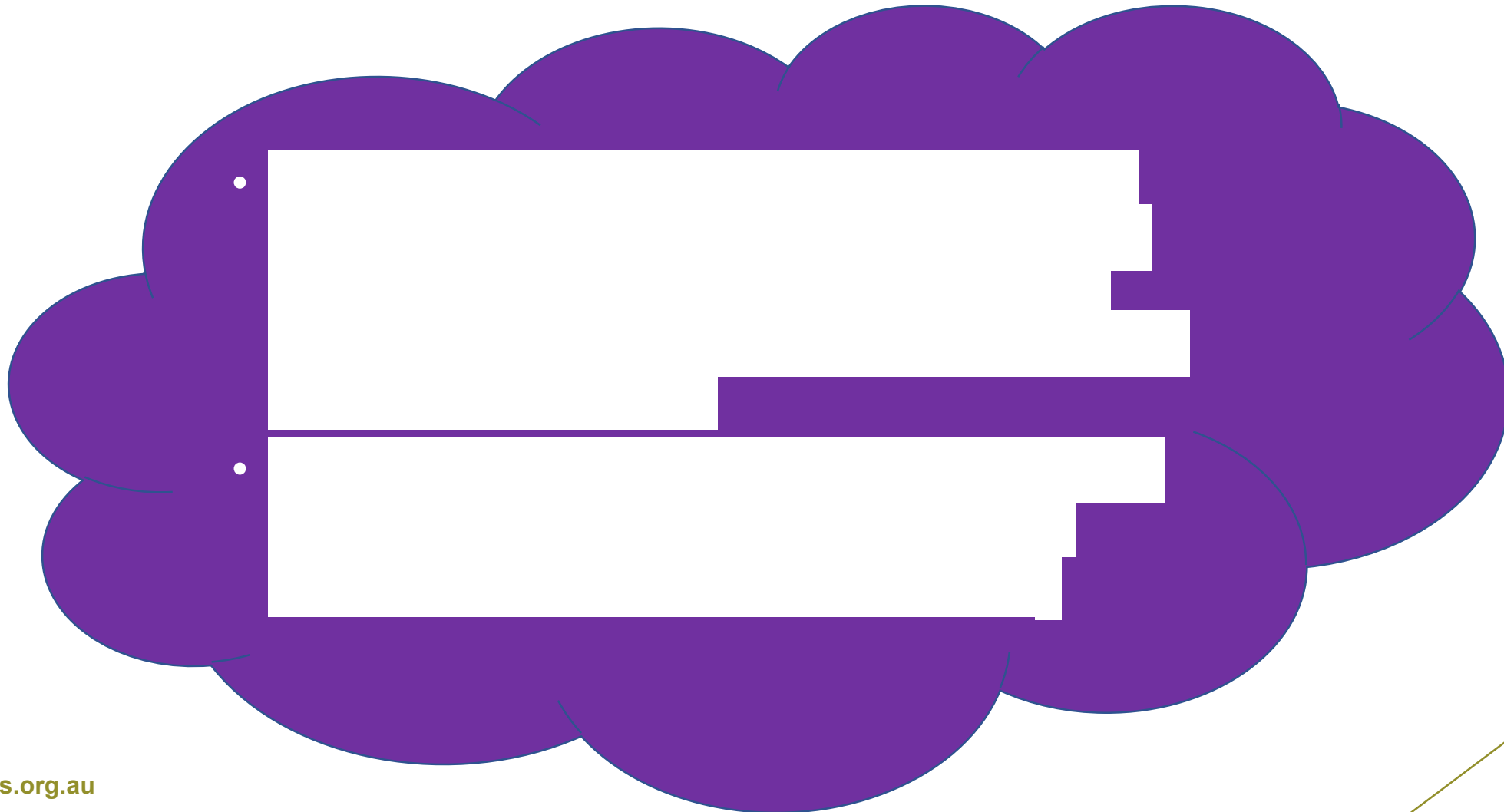
Change is more likely to occur when clients own the solutions and when those solutions have real meaning in their lives.



- how men name abusive practices—especially when they can give specific details;
- how men understand the effects of abuse—especially when they can explain this in concrete terms;
- how men develop an attentiveness to other people’s experiences, rather than a self-focused stance;
- how men face their shame; and
- how they engage with men’s use of violence against women in a socio-political context.



analysis of gender-  
based power,  
privilege and  
entitlement



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# How are invitational narrative ideas used in practice?

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Kate Seymour, Senior Lecturer, Social Work, Flinders University

Concrete progress  
+ improved  
relationship **but**

Gerri - *'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 Graeme about that because that's a bit blamey. [...] I think he would just see that as a normal part, he won't understand that, and nor do I feel like I can tell him that this is – or I see it as - a direct result of them being yelled at and not being treated correctly all their life.'*

His feelings (still):

Gerri – *'I'm still not able to tell Graeme 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. [...] He 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.'*

Her feelings:

Gerri - *'I put those aside, I, well if I matched what he does, what's that going to create? [...] It [the situation] makes me angry and it makes me resentful but I don't know what to do with that'*

Stigma

Gerri – *'I don't like being painted like I was an abused woman. [...] 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 ... oh poor me, I don't like that much. [...] It is what it is, I 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.'*

- **Tom** is a 50-year-old man in full-time employment.
- He has been married to **Sandy** for 25 years and they have 2 daughters living with them.
- He attended Uniting Communities over a period of approximately 2½ years, initially seeing a practitioner one-on-one and later attending the men's DV group.
- Tom's involvement with UC came about after he assaulted Sandy, breaking her arm. The assault was witnessed by their daughters.
- The assault occurred within the context of ongoing domestic violence throughout their married life.





## Practitioners:

- approach men as *competent* and *capable* of meaningful, lasting change
- are careful not to pre-judge men as intrinsically deficient
- are *curious* about men's stories and the contradictions within them
- emphasise depth, reflection and contemplation.

*'just kicking the ball backwards and forwards'*

## Supporting men to explore and articulate their ethical preferences

- The things that matter, his core values and aspirations, the kinds of relationship he hopes for
  - Contextualised, meaning-making
  - Deliberative and iterative
  - Creation of richer stories about their lives, informed by their ethical preferences
    - anchoring accountability
    - the basis for sustainable, long-term change

Supporting men to identify what restrains them from living in accordance with their ethical preferences

- Curiosity, questioning (what, how - not why)
  - *What gets in the way of you realising your ethical preferences?*
  - *What restrains you from choosing respectful and non-violent ways of being?*
  - *How does context (cultural, societal, social) shape your individual beliefs and actions?*

Supporting men to experience their shame in an environment that is non-judgemental and safe.

- Practitioners support men in facing their shame in a way that highlights the contradictions between their behaviour and their stated ethical preferences

Supporting men to name their violence and explore how it has affected their partners and children.

- Naming and describing violence in precise and accurate terms
  - honing in and teasing out the details, probing what might be presented as irrelevant
  - including ongoing patterns of coercion / control and gendered power relations more broadly

*Paper & pens on table.*

*Please prepare one (collective) response per table, for collection.*

1. What **stands out** for you?
2. What **worries** you or makes you feel uncomfortable?
3. What **interests** you or would you like to know more about?
4. What do you feel you learnt from Sandy's perspective?

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# Small groups report

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# Morning tea

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# Panel: Implications for policy

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**Fiona Mort** Director, SA Office for Women.

**Vanessa Swan** Executive Director Offender Development, SA Department for Correctional Services.

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# Panel: Implications for practice

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Chris Dolman, Narrative Therapist, Emerging Minds

Regina Newchurch, Narrative Therapist, Ninko Kurtungga Patpangga

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Q&A

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# Where to next?

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Sarah Wendt, Professor of Social Work, Flinders University

Gender and micro  
power relations –  
linked to  
social/cultural  
change

Complex,  
slow,  
sustained  
work

Change is neither linear nor  
seamless, it exists in  
moments

- Invitational narrative practitioners must be highly skilled.
- Invitational narrative approaches are readily adaptable to different intervention contexts.
- Engaging with women provides valuable perspectives on men's progress as well as on women's and children's safety.

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