

# Response-Based Practice with Perpetrators and Victims

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# Inspiration . . .

- Allan Wade
- Linda Coates
- Nick Todd

# Overview of Men's Counselling Service

- program of Calgary Women's Emergency Shelter
- provide individual and drop in group counselling for perpetrators
- individual counselling for women and partners of perpetrators
- free service
- We work with perpetrators until they have no further concerns about their abusive behaviour

# Therapy with Perpetrators: Assumptions

1. Abusive behaviour is deliberate
2. Pre-existing ability-men already possess the ability to behave respectfully
3. Men often portray their violence as an effect (something over which they have little control)

# Assumptions cont'd

4. Violence is a response: Perpetrators also spontaneously use the language of responses to acknowledge they have acted poorly
5. Excuses can be valuable sources of therapeutic material
6. Self-correction is preferable to correction by others – we align with his self-correction

# 1. Abusive Behaviour is Deliberate

- Men know when they have been abusive
- We try to elicit a lot of details from men – it is in the details that the deliberateness of their abusive behaviour is highlighted

# Case Example

- Client made clear decisions about what to throw

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- Suppression of resistance –
  - clear evidence of deliberate behaviour

## 2. Pre-existing ability: Men already possess the ability to behave respectfully

We try to maximize therapeutic use of the fact that men are often capable of responding skillfully and appropriately in various situations

# Language of Effects

- Men are portraying their abusive actions as effects of impersonal forces that overwhelm their good intentions (portraying themselves as affected objects)

# Language of Responses

- Men are portraying their actions as freely chosen (as responding subjects in their own lives)

### 3. Men who have been abusive sometimes talk as if they have no choice – violence as an effect

- The advantage of talking with men about the details of specific incidents of abuse, is that we can explore the choices he is making even when he presents his actions as involuntary

## Dialogue between therapist and client illustrating Choice Talk even when client presents actions as involuntary:

- Client: I just black out when I'm angry—I see red and I have no control over what I do. This anger just takes over me.
- Therapist: Can you tell me about the last time you felt like you blacked out?
- C: Well, probably the time I threw a chair at my wife—I blacked out then—I don't even remember it.
- T: Can you talk about what you do remember?
- C: I was just so mad at her—she really knows how to push my buttons. My wife is a petite little thing. I could really hurt her.

## Cont'd....

- T: Did you hurt her?
- C: No, no. I threw the chair at her but it didn't connect with her.
- T: Can you tell me more about that? How was it that you didn't hit her with it?
- C: Oh, I threw the chair beside her—at the wall. I didn't want to hit her with it 'cause I know that would have really hurt her.
- T: So it was important to you not to hurt her? This might sound like a stupid question, but what was important about that?
- C: I'm twice her size and I work out you know, so I know I could probably really hurt her. That scares me. I don't want to hurt her.

- Treatment is thus not seen as a way to help men overcome personal deficits or learn to take responsibility – rather it is an opportunity to support them as they negotiate talking about themselves as responding subjects rather than being affected objects
- We aim to amplify response-based talk, and to minimize effects-based talk

## 4. Perpetrators also talk in ways in which they take responsibility for abusive conduct – violence as a response

- Reflexive frame-breaks
- Men's talk contains many instances where they use the language of responses to represent themselves as competent social agents who could have made better choices

(O'Connor, 2000)

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- Case example:
  - Illustrating reflexive frame-breaks

Todd, Weaver-Dunlop, & Ogden, 2014

- Client: My wife is so messy. I'd come through the house at the end of the day kicking everything out of the way. Like, why couldn't she just put things away? I like a really clean floor, clean lines, everything tidy. When I came home, there's the kids boots and snow pants in front of the door, backpacks on the floor, dishes from the day on the kitchen table. I've worked hard all day and I'm tired, and I don't want to come home to a big mess and clutter everywhere. She knows this really bugs me, so why can't she just put stuff away, you know? It drives me crazy. But I probably shouldn't have reacted the way I did, I shouldn't have got so mad.

Todd, Weaver-Dunlop, & Ogden, 2014

- Therapist: What did you do that you weren't comfortable with?
- Client: Oh, when I came through the house kicking everything out of the way and yelling, I think I scared everybody. I don't want that.
- Therapist: This might seem like a weird question, but what don't you like about scaring everybody?
- Client: I don't want my family to be scared of me. That's just not right. They should feel comfortable with me.

Todd, Weaver-Dunlop, & Ogden, 2014



Not necessary to interrupt or confront client – rather we wait until he offers the spontaneous frame-break: e.g. “I probably shouldn’t have reacted the way I did.”

## 5. Excuses can be valuable sources of therapeutic material

- Outcome research has been surprisingly unresponsive of the notion that men must “take responsibility” before we can expect change.
- Excuses can be valuable in that for some men they are indicating they know they have behaved badly—that these are not the actions of a reasonable person. i.e. “I was drunk.” It is clear these are actions a sober person ought not to do.

Maruna, 2004; McKendy, 2006; Todd, 2010

# Excuses as self-correction

- Excuses can be understood as “a type of aligning action...indicating to the audience that the actor is aligned with the social order even though he or she has violated it.”

(Felson & Ribner, 1981, p. 138)

# Case Example

- Joe: I was really stressed—it was one of those days, my computer crashed, my neighbours were bugging me, I hadn't had much sleep, and I was really stressed so I took it out on Debbie. When is all this bullshit going to end?! It just feels like everybody is on my case.
- Therapist: So when all this is going on, how would you like to talk to Debbie?
- Joe: It just wasn't okay that I blew up at her—it's not okay. It's not really about her. I know it really stresses Debbie when I'm like this and I don't like that I'm stressing her. I don't want to wreck my marriage.

## 6. Self versus Other Correction

- Self-correction is preferable to correction by others.
- We seek to align with his small acts of self-correction, both overt and covert: goals, intentions, choices, frame-breaks, excuses, second thoughts, regrets, misgivings, apologies, etc.

# Working with Women

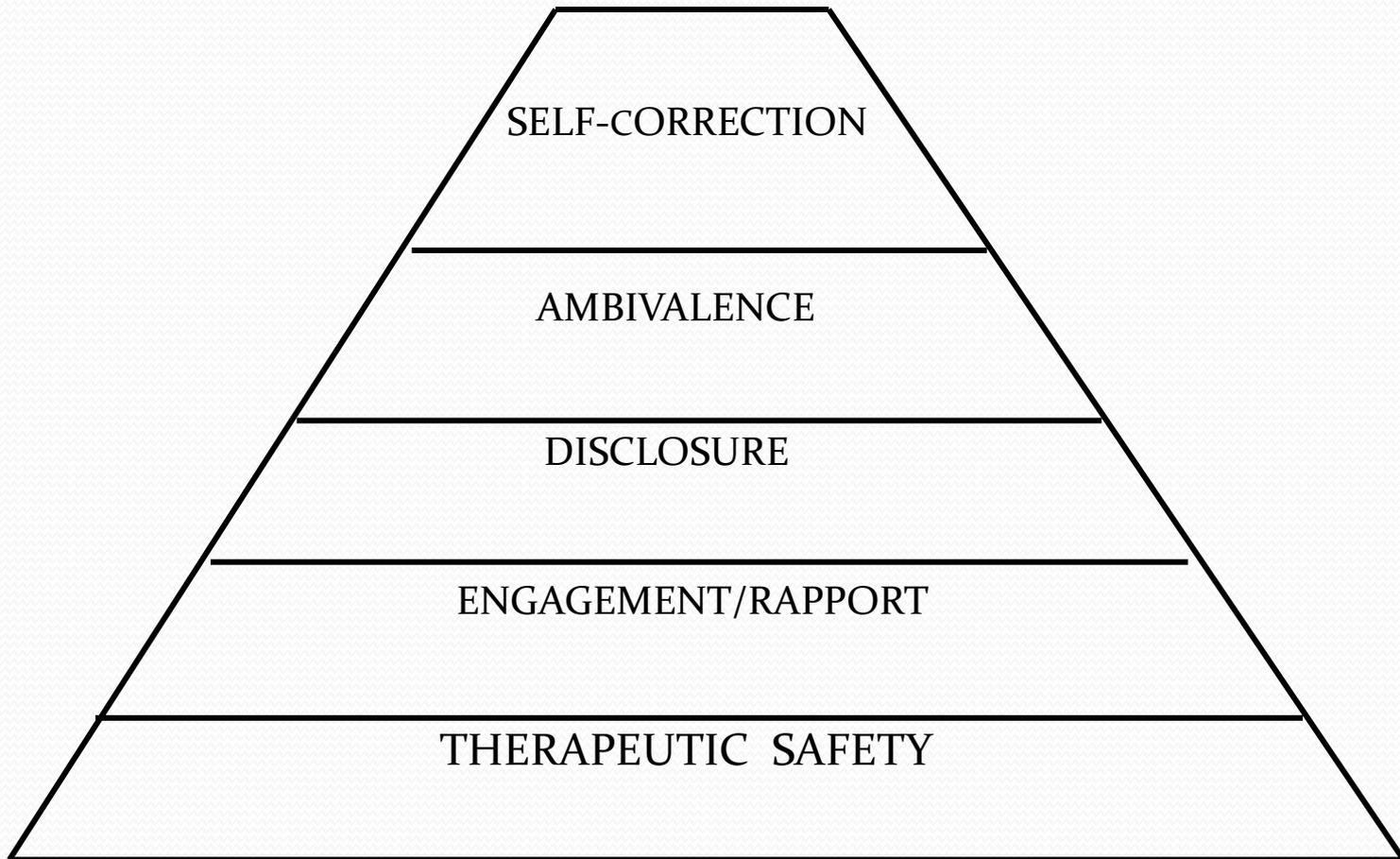
- Men sign an agreement for counselling – enabling us to contact their partners
- Men know confidentiality is not absolute – we talk with women if we have safety concerns
- We are very careful to protect women’s confidentiality
- Our work with women informs our work with the men

# Interviewing Perpetrators

## THE PRACTICALITIES

# A Foundation of Safety in Counselling

Todd, n.d.



# 1) Establishing a Foundation of Therapeutic Safety

- From our perspective, the key to change for those who have acted abusively is their own sense of having acting rightly or wrongly.
- We want to be able to talk about this.

# Establishing Therapeutic Safety

- Clarify boundaries and limits of confidentiality
- We attempt to minimize the client-counsellor hierarchy
- We try to avoid an “expert” stance

# Establishing Therapeutic Safety

- Slowly does is –talking about abuse is a difficult thing
- Avoid judgement and blame; create a safe place to talk

## 2) Engagement/Rapport

- Clients have the right to tell their stories their way
- Welcome and explore “messy, realistic explanations” (Maruna & Mann, 2006, p. 166) the men offer for their behavioural choices
- We find taking an informal and relaxed approach as counsellors helps – i.e. using humour

*... it's nice to just be able to come and smile and say a joke, or be loose, instead of always coming and feeling stressed out and feeling bad. It's nice to be able to come in and say 'hi (to the counsellors), 'how the hell are you today?', and tell a joke. They have that bond where you can come in and feel free to be who you are. It's good to be able to come and be yourself, where you can come and laugh with your counsellor and let them see that you're a person and see that your counsellor is a person as well.*

## 3) Disclosure

- The better the engagement with the client, the more likely they are to self disclose.

## 4) Ambivalence

- Go for the details.
- The more detailed the account, the more likely he is to disclose his ambivalence

# Ambivalence: Transcript example

- Client: We weren't getting along and then she accepted this guy's phone number, you know. And I got really pissed off at her because, one, he's my friend, and two, you don't do stuff like that, you know. Like, that's wrong, it's just morally wrong in my books. And she never told me about kissing this guy until we moved out here. And it was like, you know, I have a very hard time trusting women. I have yet to have a woman that's ... **and ... it's my own fault, maybe it's because of me ....** But, you know, I've yet to have a woman ... remain loyal.
- Therapist: What's got you thinking, maybe I had a hand in this, maybe it's my own fault?

# Transcript Example Cont'd

- C: Because . . . *I feel I push them away. I force them away.*
- T: How?
- C: By being angry, being jealous. I'm a very jealous person.
- T: So you've been thinking over this problem, where the trust doesn't seem to be there, like, "I'm wondering if my anger ..."
- C: Yeah, I think it's got a lot to do with it. *I push them away. I pushed Sue away, because I can't just let them just go and do what they want. I have a hard time. I want ... you know, I don't want to be a push-over ... but I don't want to be ... as aggressive as I have been.*

## 5) Self-Correction

- Self-correction is preferable to correction by others

# Client Transcript

- Client: I was mad because she was insisting that we sell the house for less than I thought we should. We ended up in a big fight. Which is why I ended up here.
- Therapist: Do you mind if we slow things down a bit? Can I ask you more about the fight?
- C: Oh sure.
- T: Can you walk me through what happened – what did you say, what did she say ...

## Client Transcript Cont'd

- C: Well like I said, she thought we should sell the house for 325, I thought we should sell it for 350. She would not budge on this, and it was really pissing me off. We need the extra money – right? She can be so pig headed.
- T: So what did you say?
- C: I told her she was always a pigheaded bitch, and that made her mad. She said I was being an ass, which made me even madder. So I called her something pretty nasty and walked away - into the other room.

## Client Transcript Cont'd

- T: Do you remember what you called her?
- C: I called her a cunt.
- T: How did she respond to that?
- C: Oh, then she was really, really upset. She walked over and slapped me across the face. No one has ever been physical in our relationship before. That just kind of shocked me, and the next thing I knew my hands were around her throat. She said I lifted her up off the floor, I don't remember that, but maybe I did. I remember her kicking me in the shins.
- T: Then what happened?

## Client Transcript Cont'd

- C: I suddenly realized I was accidentally choking her – that she couldn't breathe. I let go right away (is quiet). This just seemed to come out of the blue – I never thought I would do something like that.
- T: How do you make sense of that – that you did this?
- C: It happened before I realized, and it really scared me. I'm completely ashamed of what I did. Of course I have now blown all the trust and safety I built up for the past 3 years. It is completely gone now that I did that. What I've come to realize is that by me calling her a cunt, it was as painful as a slap to her.

# Conclusions...

- not the only way to apply response-based ideas, and not the only way to do good work
- Works for us because in our view:
  - Collaboration increases dignity
  - Assumes men can immediately stop their violence
  - De-centers therapy and therapist: leaves credit and blame where it belongs

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