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#### **About Shift**

Shift: The Project to End Domestic Violence is situated in the Faculty of Social Work, at the University of Calgary. The purpose of Shift is to empower others to create the social conditions that will stop violence before it starts. We are working to advance gender equality and equity, promote healthy masculinities, address the intersections of racism, heterosexism, and oppression, and build healthy relationship competencies to stop the perpetration of multiple forms of violence. We conduct research that will inform primary prevention practices, programs, policies, and legislation; and we partner with other researchers and academics, policymakers, community leaders, NGOs, community-based organizations and collectives to implement and evaluate effective primary prevention solutions.

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#### Authors' Note

This framework was specifically developed with male-oriented settings in mind (i.e., networks and spaces that are biased towards, dominated by, and/or designed for men). The approach involves changing physical and sociocultural contexts in order to shift behaviour. It is designed to complement traditional 'changing minds' approaches to behaviour change (e.g., psychoeducational programming) by using environmental cues to increase prosocial, equitable behaviours in specific male-oriented settings.

Men are critical to shifting environmental cues (e.g., social norms, cultural dynamics, organizational structures, etc.) within these settings. For that reason, this guide specifically focuses on engaging men in the Changing Contexts process. However, *all* genders have a role to play in ending gender-based violence and inequality – and this guide can be used with mixed groups and/or other genders as well.

We focus on men in this guide because we feel that the gender justice movement cannot be achieved by women or gender-diverse persons alone — and, generally, men have not played a strong role in this work to this point. We want to invite men into the movement in ways that are inspiring, effective, and mutually beneficial. Once men are more fully engaged in the gender justice movement, they can be included in a more general strategy to engage all genders in violence prevention and equality.

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# **Changing Contexts: Executive Summary**

## 1.0 Project Background, Purpose & Rationale

In 2017, Shift: The Project to End Domestic Violence (www.preventdomesticviolence.ca) brought together representatives from community-based organizations, government, and academia to develop non-programmatic approaches to helpful tip engaging men in violence prevention and gender equality in settings

The Engaging Men Collaborative (EMC) focused on nonprogrammatic approaches for a few reasons:

where they work, play, learn, and worship.



Words that appear bolded in orange can be found in the glossary

- First, recruiting men to violence prevention/gender equality programs can be a challenge; many men are uninterested in engaging in these types of activities on a voluntary basis. Given this, we need to consider other, complementary approaches and ask ourselves what else might be needed to more effectively engage men.
- Second, insights from Behavioural Economics and other related disciplines have radically altered our ideas about human decision-making and highlighted the extent to which behaviour is influenced by physical and sociocultural environments. We need to be integrating these insights into our efforts to engage men.

The EMC process culminated in the development of a practice framework called **Changing Contexts**: A Framework for Engaging Male Oriented Settings in Gender Equality and Violence Prevention. Designed to support human services professionals working in this area, the framework outlines a process for working with male-oriented settings to:

- Identify social norms and other cultural dynamics that contribute to gender-based discrimination and harassment in the workplace,
- Co-develop evidence-informed, customized strategies to address those dynamics

## 2.0 Key Elements of the Approach

At its core, the EMC Framework distinguishes between two complementary approaches: Changing minds and changing contexts.<sup>2</sup> While we still have a long way to go towards understanding the 'changing minds' side of the behaviour change tool box (i.e., changing individual knowledge, attitudes, and intentions), we understand even less about the other side. For that reason, EMC focused on developing processes, tools, and activities associated with a changing contexts approach.



The *Changing Contexts* practice framework adds to our behavioural change toolbox by outlining ways to surface and shift contextual influences that shape men's behaviours related to gender-based violence and inequality. Some of the key features of this approach include the following:\*

#### By 'contexts', we mean:

helpful tip

- Physical environments, which include anything you can touch, see, smell or hear (e.g., buildings, objects, uniforms, lighting, décor, etc.)
- Sociocultural environments, which include anything that is socially constructed or transmitted (e.g., social norms and networks, processes, organizational structures, symbols, social sanctions/rewards, policies, procedures, etc.).

While there is some overlap between these two categories, the distinction can be useful because it prompts us to move beyond social influences to consider the impact of physical design on behaviour.

### 2.1 Working with pre-existing networks or settings

Rather than pulling a group of strangers together for a program, practitioners work with pre-existing groups of men in settings where they naturally congregate (e.g., where they work, play, learn, and worship). This means that the *Changing Contexts* approach is more of an embedded, consultative approach rather than a traditional service delivery approach.

- Our behaviour is highly influenced by the actions and expectations of people within our own networks.<sup>3</sup> By taking an embedded approach, practitioners can leverage the power of those networks to create change.
- Changes in individual attitudes and behaviours are more sustainable when they are supported by the sociocultural environments in which they're embedded. (In contrast, behaviours that are cultivated in programs can slip away once men go back to their realworld contexts).<sup>4</sup>
- Research suggests that approaches that "build on existing platforms" where men already gather generally achieve and maintain higher rates of engagement.

<sup>\*</sup> Note: This short summary highlights only some of the elements of the practice framework. For a two-page overview of the foundational theories and constructs, principles, and practices that guide this approach please see The *Changing Contexts Framework-at-a-Glance* on p. 19.



### 2.2 Customizing & co-creating with key stakeholders in each setting

Practitioners work with key influencers in male-oriented settings to co-develop a change agenda that is customized to the specific culture, structure, strengths, priorities, and challenges of that particular group/setting. Drawing on community development principles, they then support the group to develop interventions that are customized to that unique setting.

#### Rationale

- You can't take a one-size-fits all approach to engaging men in gender equality and violence prevention because what works in one context may fail in another (e.g., something that works with software engineers might not work with police).
- Research emphasizes the importance of developing a context-specific understanding of the dynamics that perpetuate gender-based violence and discrimination in order to develop more effective interventions.<sup>6</sup>
- The co-creation process combines the practitioner's 'outsider' perspective with 'insider' insights from stakeholders who are intimately familiar with the setting.

## 2.3 Changing culture to change behaviour

Culture is a key starting point for this work because culture provides the values, belief systems, and rules that govern so much of our behaviour. Changing culture is challenging, though, because our own belief systems usually feel natural or inevitable to us, which means that we don't see or think about them very much. You can't change something that you don't see or understand — which is why the *Changing Contexts* framework includes tools and activities for surfacing culture and making it visible. This phase of work provides a strong foundation for identifying potentially powerful change points in each specific setting.

- Culture exercises "a form of mind control over us," subtly telling us what to think, how to behave, and what to care about. By actively working to surface culture, stakeholders are better able to critically examine and reconstruct the dynamics that are contributing to harmful behaviours within their setting.
- The process of surfacing culture not only offers stakeholders a more sophisticated understanding of their context; it also helps to build their capacity for structural analyses as they begin to identify the subtle forces that drive behaviours in their setting.
- Many settings have progressive policies that support gender equality and violence prevention. However, if those policies conflict with the prevailing culture of the setting, they are likely to be rendered ineffectual. (For example, hockey clubs have hazing policies but hazing still happens because it's a part of hockey culture). To paraphrase Peter Drucker, culture eats policy for breakfast so policy interventions need to work hand-in-hand with cultural interventions.



## 2.4 Flooding the system with signals

Research shows that there is a connection between very small signals like sexist language or rape jokes and physical, sexual, and structural violence.<sup>8</sup> The opposite is also true: prosocial, gender-equitable signals can disrupt toxic cultures and contribute to new social norms.<sup>9</sup> But there's a catch: for this to work, stakeholders need to *flood* their setting with signals; a trickle won't do.

#### Rationale

- Some things (like germs or gossip) can be transmitted through a network with only brief exposure. However, for social norms to change, people within a network need to be exposed to *multiple* signals. <sup>10</sup> So, less is not more with a signaling approach; an "unbroken array of consistent little signals" <sup>11</sup> is needed.
- Numerous studies have shown that we are influenced by people we don't even know because norms travel through networks like a social contagion, with people unconsciously picking up on tiny signals that are communicated via the reactions and behaviours of others. Researchers Christakis and Fowler (2007) refer to this phenomenon as "three degrees of influence" because that's how far the effect goes: we are influenced by our friends' friends' friends people we don't even know! Studies suggest that violent and discriminatory behaviours are socially contagious up to three degrees of influence, as are prosocial, equitable ones. This creates enormous potential for creating change at scale.

## 2.5 Leveraging the power of environmental nudges to change behaviour

Behaviour is not only influenced by how individuals within a setting react and behave; it's also shaped by other aspects of our environment, including physical and social design. The *Changing Contexts* approach draws insights from the fields of **Behavioural Economics**, **Behavioural Insights**, and **Behavioural Psychology** to identify small interventions that can nudge behaviour in the direction of gender justice.

- Traditional ideas about the mechanics of human decision-making assume that our behaviours
  are based on individual factors like values, preferences, and needs, and that these remain
  relatively stable from moment to moment. However, research shows that our decisions and
  behaviours are highly influenced by environmental cues. By creating small changes in the
  physical and social environment, we can have an outsized effect on how people in that
  setting behave. 15
- Educational efforts are important, but they take a lot of time. In contrast, environmental nudges can sometimes help to change the behaviour in the near term (even while we continue to work on changing minds over the longer term). This is an important consideration in the context of behaviours that are causing harm.



### 2.6 Addressing misperceptions about what is normative

Our ideas about what other people approve of, expect, or do are not always accurate. Research shows that we can often change behaviour by correcting these misperceptions. For example, a man who privately supports sexual diversity might make a homophobic remark in front of his friends because he feels that kind of behaviour is expected of him. But if that behaviour is *not* actually normative – that is, if most of his friends actually feel uncomfortable with those types of jokes – then highlighting the actual norm ('homophobic jokes are not okay in this group') can help to shift the man's future behaviour in that group.

#### Rationale

- Often, we behave in ways that are consistent with what we think is expected of us, even when the behaviour goes against our own attitudes or beliefs. 16 (In fact, the correlation between personal attitudes and behaviour is relatively weak. 17) In those cases where prosocial norms are in fact shared by a silent majority, correcting the misperception and highlighting the actual norm can create immediate changes in behaviour. 18
- This approach was first used on college campuses to address alcohol misuse. Studies show that when misperceptions of university drinking norms were corrected through messages that reflected the true norms, rates of heavy drinking among students declined. <sup>19</sup> The approach is now being used to reduce behaviours related to sexual assault. <sup>20</sup>

## 2.7 Working with Key Influencers

Shifting the dynamics that shape behaviours within a setting requires collaborating with stakeholders who have influence within that setting. Key influencers can be people in a formal leadership position, or they can simply be the most social guy in the office – the *type* of influencer needed will depend on the change points identified by the group (e.g., if you want to change an organizational policy, you'll need a champion from senior management. But if you're trying to reduce sexist jokes in the lunchroom, your most influential people might be the guys that people find funny and/or people they like and admire).

- The *Changing Contexts* approach is about flooding the system with signals but not all signals are equal. For example, normative signals transmitted by people we don't like or respect are unlikely to impact our behaviours, whereas those sent by people we identify with or admire are much more likely to influence us.<sup>21</sup>
- Key influencers are critical to the change process because they can serve to legitimize the change, model the behaviour for others, reduce barriers, and create momentum. Conversely, when influencers are not on board, they can serve to block change.<sup>22</sup>



## 2.8 Developing compassionate approaches to accountability

Holding men accountable for harmful behaviour is important, but it needs to be done in a way that doesn't cause them to disengage or shut down. The framework offers suggestions for how to develop compassionate learning spaces where men can explore new ideas and grow their capacity to positively shape their environments, while at the same time coming to terms with any harm they may have perpetrated.

#### Rationale

- Calling out has become a common way of holding men accountable; however, that approach often triggers shame, defensiveness, and social isolation none of which is conducive to engaging men and building relationships.
- Accountability to higher standards of justice, equality, and non-violence is critical in the
  context of this approach. (After all, we can't expect men to challenge sexist remarks or
  violent behaviours if we're not willing to do so ourselves). But we need to ensure that our
  approach doesn't shut down learning or inhibit opportunities for change. When we call
  people to higher standards in a compassionate way one that promotes ongoing learning
  and growth we model the behaviours that we're hoping to see in the men we work with.

## 3.0 Ready?

Do these ideas pique your interest? If so, we hope you'll dive into the <u>Changing Contexts framework</u> and begin exploring the EMC approach to engaging men in gender equality and violence prevention!

## 4.0 Glossary

**Behavioural Economics:** An approach that applies "evidence from psychology to economic models of decision-making".<sup>23</sup> Behavioural economists focus on the ways in which "rationality [in humans] may be limited or bounded, and influenced by factors such as impulsiveness, limited willpower, social norms, and the context in which choices are made."<sup>24</sup>

**Behavioural Insights:** "[T]he application of behaviour science to policy and practice with a focus on (but not exclusively) 'automatic' processes". <sup>25</sup>

**Behavioural Psychology:** The study of how our behaviours are influenced through conditioning processes. Behavioural psychology (also known as behaviourism) emphasizes the importance of discovering patterns in our thoughts and actions to modify or change behaviour.<sup>26</sup>

Calling out: Holding individuals, organizations, or groups publicly accountable for problematic behaviours. Calling out often takes the form of public shaming. $^{27}$ 

**Context(s):** Physical environments, which include anything you can touch, see, smell or hear (e.g., buildings, objects, uniforms, lighting, décor, etc.) and sociocultural environments, which include anything that is socially constructed or transmitted (e.g., social norms and networks, processes, organizational



structures, symbols, social sanctions/rewards, policies, procedures, etc.). 'Context' is also sometimes used to indicate a specific situation (e.g., becoming a father).

**Key Influencer:** Someone who influences the norms, attitudes, and behaviours of others within a specific setting. Key influencers can be formal or informal, and sometimes are both. A formal influencer is someone in a leadership role with decision-making power within the organization, group, system/institution, or community (e.g., CEO, politician, coach). An informal influencer is someone who others consciously or unconsciously look to as a source of information about how to think, behave, and interact within a particular setting or group.

Male-oriented Settings: Settings that are biased towards, dominated by, or designed for men.<sup>28</sup>

Non-programmatic Approaches: Activities and interventions that are outside of traditional programmatic interventions (i.e., pre-determined, structured activities that are implemented by human service agencies) and more emergent in nature (i.e. more open-ended and not entirely pre-structured). Non-programmatic interventions exist on a continuum of approaches that range from policy and legislation to community development and peer-group interventions. Non-programmatic interventions consider individual learning and behaviour in the context of a broader ecology of influences (e.g., family, peers, sociocultural norms, legislative environment), and are more likely to be implemented in situ (i.e., in environments where people naturally congregate rather than in clinical offices or agencies).

**Prosocial Behaviours:** "[V]oluntary actions that are intended to help or benefit another individual or group of individuals." <sup>29</sup>

**Signals:** Words, actions and reactions provide information or messages to others. In a *Changing Contexts* approach, signals are a way of communicating expectations related to gender equal, non-violent attitudes and behaviours.



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