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THE PROJECT TO END  
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

**Calling in Men: A review of  
literature and the case for  
calling men “in” to prevent  
violence and advance  
equity**

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**The views of the authors do not necessarily represent the views of  
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## Author's Note

We, the authors, would like to take this opportunity to situate ourselves in relation to this research and flag some of the tensions that we continue to navigate as feminists working to advance gender and social justice. First, we are white settlers, trained in the Western scientific tradition, with extensive experience working with feminist issues from an intersectional perspective. Both of us have over a decade of experience working directly with men in the areas of violence prevention and gender equality. Based on our experience, we firmly believe that gender and social inequality is inextricably linked with rates of male violence against all genders and our interventions must focus on all forms of violence to stop violence before it starts.

We are also white feminists committed to advancing racial justice and are on an ongoing journey to understand and learn more about where and how we can be most useful in this work. At Shift, we have been integrating approaches that aim to call *in* rather than *out*, while also reflecting on our own practices and building creative and innovative skills, so that we can maximize our capacity to hold people accountable in ways that generate healing, recovery, repair, and prosocial change. We believe it is imperative to ask hard questions and think strategically about what is and is not working in efforts to achieve social change across anti-violence, gender equality, and justice, diversity, and inclusion fields so that we can build momentum for bigger and more impactful movements.

In this review, we worked diligently to ensure that credit for these words, ideas, and perspectives are given to the Black, Brown and/or LGBTQ+ activists who developed them, while also taking responsibility for the ways that we are engaging their work towards the goal of engaging white cisgender men in particular. Still, we recognize that our analysis may have shortcomings as we continue the process of learning and unlearning in relation to our own positionality and context in this work. We welcome those who want to call us in so that we may continue to make our work stronger, more relevant, and more impactful across a wider audience.

In solidarity,  
Laura & Lana

## Executive Summary

*CallinMen: Mobilizing More Men for Violence Prevention and Gender Equality in Canada* is a knowledge synthesis research project led by Shift: The Project to End Domestic Violence, a primary research hub with the goal to stop violence before it starts. Shift is based out of the Faculty of Social Work at the University of Calgary (Shift/UCalgary). As part of the *CallinMen* project, nine rapid evidence reviews were conducted on evidence-informed *primary prevention* approaches to engage and mobilize men to prevent and disrupt violence and inequalities, with the goal to share these findings with those funding and working with men and male-identified people to prevent violence and advance equity. To support and advance work to engage and mobilize men, both well-known and emergent approaches that show promise in engaging and mobilizing men were identified for review. This review synthesizes the literature on how a *calling in* or using compassionate accountability in our approaches should be used to engage and mobilize men to prevent violence and advance equity.

**Definition:** Calling in, a term credited to Ngọc Loan Trần, a Việt/mixed-race disabled queer writer and educator based in the U.S. South<sup>1</sup> as a practice of inviting people/organizations who are causing/have caused harm into a conversation in which learning and growth is the goal, fosters an environment in which people are more likely to become receptive and have an opportunity to grow, provides clear and appropriate feedback in the form of a two-way conversation, and starts from a place of hope that change is possible.

Calling in is considered on the other end of the spectrum to “calling out,” which tends to be a one-way declaration focused on punitive efforts that push people out/away, or “cancel” them, usually through shaming and blaming, and often publicly. Other related terms used is “compassionate accountability.”

### What does the evidence say?

Six key reasons were identified in the literature for why calling in is an essential tool to utilize in social change movements. They are:

1. Current calling out practices perpetuate cycles of harm. By focusing on punitive efforts, the humanity of all involved is compromised, and the root causes of cycles of harm are obscured.
2. People are not disposable. Attempting to remove harm by dismissing or throwing away individuals not only blinds us to systemic patterns of harm, but it raises questions about the harm that gets replicated in doing so as well as the effectiveness of such an approach (it is not very effective, and sometimes even counter-productive).
3. Using shame or creating a culture of fear are ineffective approaches that cause damage. Shame is a dangerous and ineffective tool of oppression, and shame perpetuates cycles of hurt and humiliation rather than achieving justice. Black and Brown activists also argue that these cycles of harm and aggression also contribute to a culture of fear *within* movements, which limits solidarity building and fosters cultures of silence—part of what call out culture historically attempted to change in the first place.

4. Choosing love over hate. Adrienne maree brown often describes this as a choice between destruction and “life-affirming principles and practices”<sup>2</sup> and activists emphasize the generative possibilities of calling in, and the necessity of healing for all. Calling in advocates also speak to the need to develop and focus on strategies to meet one’s *end* goal (e.g., ending violence against women; creating a loving, just, kind, equitable world) rather than getting bogged down in the short-term goals of punishment and shame. Importantly, calling in proponents also make clear that they are not disavowing justifiable anger, or the potent possibilities of productive anger and rage, but rather noting the destructive capacity of *only* making space for anger.
5. Meeting people where they are versus where we want them to be. Where one *wants* people to be may differ from where people *actually are*, and in that recognition is the choice to double down on exclusion and shaming or, as a calling in practice would encourage, to identify strategic ways to meet people where they are so that they can hear and become motivated by one’s message.
6. In reviewing evidence on the impairments associated with the human threat response, the power of cultivating a sense of belonging, and what we know about how to actually achieve behavioural change, calling in practices are much more adept at navigating people’s threat response than calling out, and much more likely to result in sustained prosocial behaviour change. Calling in practices also require the person doing the calling in to be able to regulate one’s emotions and other responses to perceived threat.

The review on calling in took a less traditional form than other rapid reviews, and is based primarily on the knowledge and lived experiences of eight voices from equity-seeking populations, and in particular Black, Brown, Indigenous, and LGBTQ+ social justice activists including adrienne maree brown, Loretta Ross, Maisha Johnson, and B.K. Chan.

In conducting this review, our aim was *not* to make excuses for men, or to diminish the necessity of holding men accountable. Rather, we sought to better understand ways to hold men accountable effectively and sustainably for the harm they cause, in ways that engage and mobilize men for the long term so that the harm is prevented in the first place, and men are key allies and welcomed advocates in gender and social justice movements.

### **Insights from calling in research for engaging men**

Emergent evidence supports the adoption of calling in practices, and they show strong potential for engaging and holding men accountable. Calling in is a concrete strategy that helps to shift the conversation from men as an inevitable part of the problem, to an essential component of the solution. The research also tells us:

1. It is time to think radically and creatively about how to meet men where they are, rather than doubling down on the exasperation and rage of where many are, even as these reactions are understandable.
2. There is urgent need to take more seriously not only the need to understand where men are, in their various settings, but also to scale up efforts to apply innovative approaches, such as using nudges and gamification and other creative means in order to reach men where they are at, for it is the only place from which they can move forward.

*“The world that we want to build, a world that is just, and equitable, and kind, a world of love, and abundance, and joy, and connection that works for everybody, and every body, is a world that we have to first build inside of us.” — Sonya Renee Taylor<sup>3</sup>*

*“I have a vision of movement as sanctuary. Not a tiny perfectionist utopia behind miles of barbed wire and walls and fences and tests and judgements and righteousness, but a vast sanctuary where our experiences, as humans who have experienced and caused harm, are met with centered, grounded invitations to grow.” — adrienee maree brown<sup>4</sup>*

## 1.0 Introduction

In 2020, Shift/UCalgary was awarded a research grant from Women and Gender Equality Canada (WAGE) for a knowledge synthesis research project entitled *CallinMen: Mobilizing More Men for Violence Prevention and Gender Equality in Canada*. Little knowledge synthesis work has been done to date to increase understanding of what strategies and approaches meaningfully engage and mobilize men to prevent violence and advance gender equality, diversity, justice, and inclusion in Canada; this research fills that gap. Specifically, CallinMen advances the state of knowledge by identifying and reviewing the evidence base for key strategies and approaches that show promise and develops an evidence-informed “behaviour change toolbox” that consolidates these strategies and approaches. To maximize the value added from this project, critical learnings will be tailored to three distinct stakeholders across Canada: government, private sector, and human service organizations.

In order to identify and review promising approaches to engaging and mobilizing men to prevent violence and advance gender equality, diversity, justice, and inclusion, nine rapid evidence reviews<sup>i</sup> of the academic and grey literature were conducted<sup>ii</sup> in 2021 with the goal to share these findings with those funding and working with men and male-identified people to prevent violence and advance equity. This review, which is a less traditional but still evidence-based rapid review than the others, reports on the findings from a review of the literature on how a *calling in* or using compassionate accountability in our approaches should be used to engage and mobilize men to prevent violence and advance gender equality, diversity, justice, and inclusion.

The authors recognize that there are multiple ways of knowing, from scientific method to beliefs

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<sup>i</sup> A rapid evidence reviews is a process that synthesizes knowledge through the steps of a systematic review, but components of the process are simplified or excluded in order to shorten the length of time required to complete the review. The process includes identifying specific research questions, searching for, accessing the most applicable and relevant sources of evidence, and synthesizing the evidence.

<sup>ii</sup> Rapid evidence reviews were conducted on: bystander approach, social norms approach, nudge approach, virtual reality, gamification, data science, fatherhood, calling in, and community justice.

and intuitions to lived experiences, all of which have their own strengths and gaps in terms of validity and scope of knowing.<sup>5</sup> For this review, we knew that the most important and relevant content came from the knowledge and lived experiences of equity-seeking populations, and in particular Black, Brown, Indigenous, and LGBTQ+ social justice activists. As such, it is imperative to explicitly note that the credit for the terms, ideas, and insights belongs to these individuals and groups, and that we only summarize their work here, with additional analysis on ways these insights could be further leveraged to hold men, and in particularly white men, accountable. Quotes are frequently used to ensure their words are as accurately represented as possible.

It is also important to note that this research project is focused on advancing *primary prevention* approaches, meaning that we are focused on identifying strategies that change the root causes of violence, discrimination, and gender inequality in order to prevent initial perpetration and victimization of violence, harassment, discrimination, and inequities<sup>6</sup>. In line with this focus, our research seeks to understand strategies and approaches that incubate and catalyze prosocial behaviours and dismantles systems of oppression to create the conditions for healthy relationships. We specifically wanted to understand racial justice leaders understanding of this approach to centre their voices to advance the field.

The specific research questions that guided the current literature review were:

1. What are Black, Brown, and Queer social change activists and practitioners saying about the role that calling in and/or compassionate accountability has in their work?
2. What are the key components of calling in and/or compassionate accountability, and how is a calling in approach being employed to advance behaviour, norms, and systems change for the purposes of preventing violence and advancing equity, inclusion, diversity, and justice?
3. How does the human brain respond to feeling under attack, stressed, or threatened, and how does this impact one's ability to be receptive to new information, lessons, and behaviour, norm, and systems change? How does this inform the use of a calling *in*, as opposed to a calling *out*, approach?

## 2.0 Methods

A rapid evidence synthesis/review (RES) was conducted in November 2021. RES is “a form of knowledge synthesis that follows the systematic review process, but components of the process are simplified or omitted to produce information in a timely manner.”<sup>7</sup> The process includes identifying specific research questions, searching for, and accessing most applicable and relevant sources of evidence, and synthesizing the evidence.

However, because the approach of *calling in* (and compassionate accountability) is relatively emergent, the search strategy for this review took a less traditional form. A systematic search strategy was initially performed using a combination of keywords. The keywords were: (“calling in” or compassionate accountability”) AND all relevant terms relating to gender inequality, gender-based violence, racism, as well as equity, diversity, and inclusion: (“gender-based violence” or “gender based violence” or GBV or “family violence” or “domestic violence” or “domestic abuse” or



“intimate partner violence” or IPV or “violence against women” or VAW or rape or “sexual assault” or “sexual violence” or “sexual abuse” or “sexual harassment” or “sexual misconduct” or “gender equality” or “gender equity” or “gender justice” or “gender parity” or “gender transformative” or “bullying” or “alcohol” or “empathy” or “belonging” or “addiction” or “harm reduction” or justice or diversity or equity or inclusion or discrimination or “racism” or “anti-racis\*” or antiracis\* or Indigenous or “First Nations” or Inuit or Metis). Searches were conducted in EBSCO, which included all databases, including Academic Search Complete, Academic Search Elite, and CINAHL Plus with Full Text.

The academic database search produced no relevant results, which confirmed the need to focus on grey literature for this review. The authors were already aware that the most relevant literature has been written by Black and/or queer activists and practitioners and other experts from BIPOC communities who have extensive lived experiences working in social change movements. Through their experiences, these individuals have seen and spoken about the necessity of compassion and love in the processes of holding people accountable to support healing and recovery as part of social change. As such literature is not found in academic journals but in books, blogs, podcasts, and other grey literature, this is where this review pulled from. The first author spent approximately two hours searching Google for relevant blogs, case studies, and podcasts or videos related to calling in and compassionate accountability, in addition to pulling from key books and websites already known to the author. Grey literature websites included: Loretta Ross’ website, Transform Harm, Black Girl Dangerous, and searching XY Online for “calling in” and “compassionate accountability”.

To complement the literature identified on calling in, this review also sought available evidence on the cognitive workings of how humans respond to threat, and how these responses impact one’s receptivity and ability to learn. This search included systematic searches on academic databases for a combination of the following terms: “human response” and “threat or danger or risk”, “human defensive response”, and “learning” or receptivity or “cognitive capacity.” It also involved one hour of grey literature searching for a combination of relevant words.

Identified sources (including blogs, podcasts, videos, reports, and books) had to be published between 2010-2021, in English, and were screened to the following criteria:

- Describe a calling in and/or compassionate accountability approach
- Provide details on why and how a calling in/compassionate accountability approach is useful, with preference to sources that provide evidence on the impact of calling in and/or compassionate accountability on preventing violence and/or advancing gender equality, diversity, inclusion, and/or justice.
- Literature may come from anywhere in the world; however priority will be to locate literature focused on Canada or in other countries with similar economic, social and cultural similarities to Canada (such as the United States, Australia, New Zealand, England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, Republic of Northern Ireland, Norway, Denmark, Sweden, Finland and Iceland).
- Articles that do not meet the criteria but seem relevant/valuable will be included in discussion/recommendations or where appropriate.

Literature that did not describe a calling in approach, focused on areas outside of violence prevention and/or advancing gender equality, justice, diversity, and/or inclusion, focuses on populations under the age of 18 or on response or rehabilitation (not primary prevention) were excluded.

For the literature on the human threat response and behaviour change, literature had to either specifically describe how and why humans experience perceived threat or stress, how the stress response inhibits people's ability to learn or change their behaviour, or how to facilitate behaviour change related to social change.

### 3.0 Results and source characteristics

Based on the literature identified and the work already known to the authors, eight voices, all of whom are from BIPOC communities and work in movements for social change, comprise the majority of the work this review is based on. These are:

- adrienne maree brown— *Writer, doula, activist and Black feminist who has authored numerous books relevant to this review as part of her Emergent Strategy series*
- B.K. Chan—*Canadian emotional literacy and sex educator*
- Aya de Leon—*feminist activist, American novelist, and woman of colour*
- Maisha Johnson—*Black writer, digital strategist, survivor of trauma, and social change advocate*
- Loretta Ross—*Black feminist civil rights and reproductive justice activist and scholar with decades of experiences practicing calling in*
- Sonya Renee Taylor—*queer Black feminist and social justice leader and bestselling author of The body is not an apology: The power of radical self love*
- Ngọc Loan Trần—*Việt/mixed-race disabled queer writer and educator based in the U.S. South. Credited as originator for the term “calling in”*
- Resmaa Menakem—*an American Black man and trauma specialist, somatic therapist, best-selling author, and leading voice on racialized trauma*

In addition to the individuals listed above, the work of two white clinical psychologists (Dr. Nate Regier and Dr. Rebecca Acabchuck) on compassionate accountability and Kim Scott's work on radical candor is briefly discussed, Brene Brown's work on shame is pulled from, and masculinities expert Mark Greene's work on the closed loop of dominant-masculinity is referred to in this review.

The literature identified was rich in terms of describing why a calling in approach is necessary and valuable, and includes examples from lived experiences of why, when, and how a calling in approach can be most promising for fostering generative and long-term social change. However, there was little evidence that specifically spoke to a part of this review's second research question, which was on how a calling in approach is being employed to advance behaviour, norms, and systems change for the purposes of preventing violence and advancing equity, inclusion, diversity, and justice. The research and conversation around a calling in approach is still emergent; as such

this review focuses more on synthesizing what the literature says about what the key components of a calling in approach are in working towards positive and sustained social change.

The details of the literature on the human threat response and behaviour change are covered in that section of the review.

## 4.0 But first: This is not easy work

Before delving into the literature on calling in, it is imperative to situate this review within current cancel culture and note the messiness and inherent tensions in discussing calling in practices as they relate to engaging and mobilizing men to stop violence before it starts. First, there are issues with toxic callout culture *within* social justice movements, where everyone seeks to prove their “wokeness” and, in the process, the movements end up “eating their own” instead of being in principled struggle. Black social change activist and writer adrienne maree brown describes “principled struggle” as having integrity to movement, “to struggle for the sake of deeper understanding (not just to be right), to be responsible for our own feelings and actions...to gossip and vent yes, we are human—but keep returning to the work we can and must do together.”<sup>8</sup> Proponents of calling in note that calling out is happening with increasing frequency and voracity within movements, aimed towards one another, and that this approach needs to be reconsidered if solidarity among and progress by social change groups is possible.

Second, there is the broader public callout culture, which can and should be used in appropriate situations and to call out people who otherwise are unable to listen to calls for change. That is, it is important to emphasize that there is a difference between those who are problematically complicit with perpetuating harm and need to be held accountable, and those who have taken their harm to a whole other level, such as the Harvey Weinsteins and Donald Trumps of the world. These individuals actively and intentionally build systems around themselves and others to wield and sustain harm, cruelty, inequality, and abuse towards others. These individuals, as adrienne maree brown notes, are “out of alignment with life, consent, dignity, and humanity [and] who will only stop when a light is shined onto their inhumane behavior”<sup>9</sup>—and, even then, some still won’t stop. For these individuals, calling in practices are very likely to be ineffective and a waste of precious time that could be used for more productive efforts.

Third, the broader “cancel” culture raises question about who people are accountable to, and who gets to be the judge/jury in deciding what “punishment” is “deserved.” In its current form, the tactics of callout culture are overused, and irreparable damage is done to those implicated in harm-doing, often without consideration or sufficient attention to the needs and preferences of the victims of that harm. For example, in the summer of 2020 a white woman named Amy Cooper called the police on a Black birdwatcher, Christian Cooper (the two are unrelated) in New York City’s Central Park. Referring to him as an “African-American” to the police, she falsely accused Christian of threatening her life after he requested she put a leash on her dog in an area of the park that requires dogs to be leashed. Christian’s video of the interaction went viral (as of June 2020, it had been viewed over 40 million times<sup>10</sup>), and Amy’s racist action and visibility of the incident led her to being fired from her job and intensely shamed by the public discourse around the incident. In follow

up interviews with Christian Cooper, he expresses misgivings about the extent to which Amy was punished for the incident by the public, even as he denounced her racist and malicious actions. In Christian's words, "I'm not excusing the racism, but I don't know if her life needed to be torn apart."<sup>11</sup>

Fourth and finally, many also recognize that healing must happen across the board, that differentiating between those "in" and "out" of movements may itself be self-defeating to efforts to engage people, and that harm is usually committed by those who themselves have been harmed in some way(s). For example, writer, doula, activist and Black feminist adrienne maree brown focuses her book *We will not cancel us* on "bringing transformative justice to life *within* our movement spaces...growing the capacity to invite others into"<sup>12</sup> while also incorporating an explicit desire for wanting "healing for all."<sup>13</sup> She writes, "I want us to help end the cycles of harm for Black and Brown people, which, in the spirit of the Combahee River Collective, necessitates ending these cycles for everyone."<sup>14</sup>

In an effort to learn from and build on the expertise of the lived experiences of those practicing calling in within social justice movements, this document pulls from the insights and invaluable expertise of Black and Brown feminist and social change activists with an emphasis on where and how calling in practices could be applied to work engaging and mobilizing men. The goal in doing so is *not to give men a pass* or dilute the necessity of holding men, and the institutions and systems designed to favour them, accountable. Rather, the goal is to focus on the long term goal of creating a just and loving world, and consider what courageous and innovative approaches are needed to get everyone involved to realize such a world.

## 5.0 "Calling in" and the practice of compassionate accountability

### 5.1 Calling in

The term "calling in" was initially coined by Ngọc Loan Trần, a Việt/mixed-race disabled queer writer and educator based in the U.S. South. Posted on Black Girl Dangerous (BGD)<sup>iii</sup> in 2013, Trần's article was entitled "Calling IN: A Less Disposable Way of Holding Each Other Accountable."<sup>15</sup> They realized the necessity of a calling in practice during a racial justice conference in 2012 in which they witnessed people trying to work towards the same overarching goal but treating each other poorly and perpetuating an unhealthy culture of calling out. Since then, many other writers, educators, activists, and facilitators from communities of colour working in social change movements have echoed Trần's warnings that a ubiquitous calling out culture is problematic and built upon their call for deepening and expanding calling in practices. The work of these individuals forms the basis for this review.

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<sup>iii</sup> Black Girl Dangerous is a reader-funded, non-profit that includes a blog which aims to amplify the voices of queer and trans people of colour.

There is not one regularly used definition of calling in, but generally it can be understood as a practice of inviting people/organizations who are causing/have caused harm into a conversation in which learning and growth is the goal, fosters an environment in which people are more likely to become receptive and have an opportunity to grow, provides clear and appropriate feedback in the form of a two-way conversation, and starts from a place of hope that change is possible.

Calling in is considered on the other end of the spectrum to “calling out,” which tends to be a one-way declaration focused on punitive efforts that push people out/away, or “cancel” them, usually through shaming and blaming, and often publicly.

Canadian emotional literacy and sex educator Karen B.K. Chan explains calling in as keeping the “good stuff”—namely accountability—from call outs, but focusing on staying connected to another person while having hard conversations.<sup>16</sup> She notes that part of the power she has experienced in taking a calling in approach is that it allows her to leave conversations feeling true to herself, and that it means that she doesn’t let the situation take the “softness and kindness” away from her.<sup>17</sup> Chan provides examples of her own experiences calling out and calling in to illustrate this point. She first describes being at the beach with a group of friends, most of whom were Asian (like Chan), when a white tourist approached them to take a photo of his group but began by asking “Do you speak English?” Chan recounts the rage she felt at perceiving this white tourist to have a stronger sense of belonging in Canada than Chan and her friends and expressed this by an extended episode of shouting a stream of expletives at the tourist. In explaining this experience of calling out, Chan notes that the rage and anger which fueled her knee-jerk response to this tourist were grounded in her cumulative experiences of situations like this one, but that the pain built up from these experiences did not feel healed by responding from this place of rage and hurt.

Chan then describes a situation that is rather common for her, in which older white men approach her and mistakenly believe her to be Japanese and embark on a conversation based on this assumption. She notes, “this happened so many times in my life that there were so many opportunities to try out different answers, different ways of engaging, or disengaging.”<sup>18</sup> She explains that she now applies a calling in approach, which she describes in this way: she pauses the conversation and asks the man to recall how this conversation began. Often having a different recollection of how the conversation started (e.g., believing that she responded and that she is Japanese), she will calmly remind them how the conversation actually began, and then she asks them to listen to her experience, explaining the feeling of invisibility when someone comes up and makes assumptions without listening to her at all. When they try to explain themselves (which they usually do, she explains) she pauses them again and tells them, “I just need to know one thing: does it matter to you how I feel? Because so far in our conversation, it has felt like it does not matter.”<sup>19</sup> If they clarify that they do feel she matters, she offers them suggestions of how they can behave so that “their words and their actions match.”<sup>20</sup> She acknowledges that this approach can take longer than immediately shutting the other person down, but that this process allows her to have a better opportunity to walk away with “some trust, and hope in humanity. And I’m asking directly for it,” which helps her feel more in control of the interaction<sup>21</sup>

## 5.2 Calling on

Some have raised the important issue that the practice of calling in can create undue burden on those who have been harmed and who already carry excessive burdens as oppressed individuals. That is, the expectation is not only to remain in connection with the person/institution, which may be incredibly challenging given the harm and/or trauma that has been experienced, but also to walk with/support the harm-doer in identifying and adopting more prosocial behaviour. Chan's example above illustrates this well, and highlights the reality that, for many visible minorities, instances warranting a response (calling in or otherwise) can happen so frequently it can be exhausting. With this in mind, queer Black feminist and social justice leader Sonya Renee Taylor offers an alternative to calling in, which she terms "calling on" and suggests this as another choice along the spectrum between calling *out* and calling *in*. As Taylor describes the practice of calling on, "we return the responsibility of rectifying harm back to its rightful owners."<sup>22</sup> She explains that calling on involves informing the harm-doer of what they did and how their actions harmed you, but then rather than supporting them through the changes that need to be made, they are left alone to figure out how to do less harm in the future. Putting the onus on the harm-doer to engage in their own work.

## 5.3 Compassionate accountability

The term "compassionate accountability" has a similar meaning to calling in, though the origin of the term is not as clear, and it has tended to be used more by white people, particularly related to the fields of leadership and psychology. One of the most well-known proponents of compassionate accountability is Dr. Nate Regier, a white man who is a trained clinical psychologist and author of the book *Conflict without casualties: A field guide for leading with compassionate accountability*. He defines compassionate accountability as "using the energy of conflict to create, by struggling with self or others, in a spirit of dignity."<sup>23</sup> Compassionate accountability has also specifically been used as an approach to help people build their capacity in self-regulation and behaviour change, such as health behaviours (e.g., alcohol use, exercise). For example, a person is much more likely to succeed in a weight loss program if they apply psychological tools that help them practice self-compassion alongside motivational techniques, rather than being driven by internally-produced shame and criticism from one's "inner critic." Along these lines, clinical psychologist Rebecca Acabchuk and her colleague developed a model to facilitate behaviour change that they also describe as also being applicable to practicing anti-racism. Although not published in a peer-reviewed academic literature, they provide a brief explanation of their work for the U.S.-based Mind & Life Institute, defining compassionate accountability as

acknowledging personal responsibility to create change with realistic expectations of the change process, mindfulness, self-kindness, and curiosity when encountering challenges, and the willingness to value and celebrate any step forward. A critical aspect of this model is the balance between self-compassion and accountability.<sup>24</sup>

Their model "proposes that cultivating both self-regulation and self-compassion in tandem will promote positive health behaviors and reduce risk behavior." They offer a table to illustrate the relationship between self-compassion and accountability, with "Victim mentality (blame)" in the top left quadrant, "Helplessness/hopelessness, despair" in the bottom left quadrant, "Harsh self-



criticism (shame)” in the bottom right quadrant, and then “compassionate accountability, hope” as the goal to move towards in the top right quadrant.<sup>25</sup>

Black queer feminist Sonya Renee Taylor’s work on radical self-love also offers a useful framework for understanding the relationship between one’s capacity for self-compassion, and one’s ability to offer compassion outwards to others as part of minimizing and preventing harm. Taylor’s work centers on the conviction that people’s lack of self-love is the origin of the harm people cause to others, and that personal transformation fuels social transformation. In her TED Talk she quips, “I spend my days trying to convince you that you are inherently worthy, divine, and enough exactly as you are, in the bodies you are in today...I do this because I am convinced that your sense of a lack of enoughness is totally messing up my life and I’d like you to stop it.”<sup>26</sup>

Another model that does not use the term “compassionate accountability” but offers a similar approach is the Radical Candor Framework, developed by Kim Scott, a white female leader from the tech industry who co-founded the companies Radical Candor and Just Work which aim to develop equitable and successful workplaces.<sup>27</sup> The Radical Candor Framework is an approach which centers caring about others with providing direct feedback, and the framework is presented through a four quadrant visual that focuses on four different ways of providing other’s feedback (including holding them accountable): ruinous empathy, manipulative insincerity, obnoxious aggression, and radical candor.<sup>28</sup> The visual can be seen in Figure 1 below.

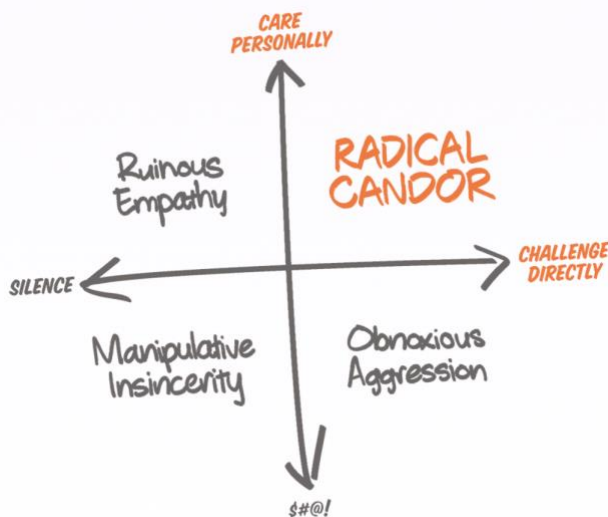


Figure 1: Kim Scott's Radical Candor Framework<sup>29</sup>

In speaking specifically to how “compassion” is understood by those working at the intersections of compassion, trauma, race/racism, and accountability, Resmaa Menakem provides valuable insight. Menakem, a Black man and trained trauma specialist, somatic therapist, best-selling author, and leading voice on racialized trauma, speaks about the importance of recognizing white people’s trauma that is yet unprocessed, which results in this trauma “blowing through other bodies” — namely Black and Indigenous bodies. He is very direct on the imperative that white people need to deal with their own trauma in order for them to be able to make the necessary space for Black and Brown people to heal. In an interview through the University of Arizona’s Center for Compassion Studies, Menakem describes compassion as a “robust principal” that is oriented towards

“movement.”<sup>30</sup> Menakem’s emphasis on thinking about compassion as a way to move progress forward, to get things done, challenges the assumption often made that calling out and “cancel culture” is more productive than the so-called too-soft, ineffective alternative of compassion.

For the purposes of this review and in the interest of amplifying Black and Brown voices such as Ngọc Loan Trần, adrienne maree brown, and Loretta Ross and the terms they coined and primarily engage with, we will primarily use “calling in” throughout this review as well as refer to the spectrum from calling *in* to calling *on*, to calling *out*, although compassionate accountability will also be intermittently used where relevant.

The following table, adapted from Dozois and Wells (2020),<sup>31</sup> provides a useful overview of the differences between calling in, calling on, and calling out.

Calling in	Calling on	Calling out
Two-way communication; a conversation	Usually a one-way conversation, although does not foreclose on possibility for conversation	One-way communication; an accusation or declaration
Tends to be private, with an emphasis on face-to-face communication	Can be either private or public	Tends to be public
Based on expectation that this is an opportunity for growth for harm-doer, and grounded in hope that change is possible	Based on expectation for growth, but leaves responsibility for this growth largely up to harm-doer	Based on assumption that you should have already grown, and has largely foreclosed possibility for harm-doer to change
Treats all involved with dignity and respect, allows person calling in to remain in principled struggle	Treats all involved with dignity and respect	Treats harm-doer as disposable
Focus is on healing and repair; based on the understanding that most people do not intend to harm others. Has great potential for ending cycles of harm	Focus is on giving harm-doer opportunity to learn while leaving the responsibility of identifying path for rectifying harm to the harm-doer (not person calling on them)	Often punitive and based on the assumption of bad intent. Tends to perpetuate cycles of harm.
A process that typically involves: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Active listening</li> <li>• A space for clarifying questions and discussion</li> <li>• Options for alternative ways of behaving</li> <li>• Follow-up and support</li> </ul>	A process that typically involves: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sharing how a person/persons harmed you and what they did through clear and direct feedback</li> <li>• Maintaining dignity and respect for all involved <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leaving the choice for what to do/how to rectify harm up to harm-doer</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	An event that typically begins and ends with a call for accountability (i.e., doesn’t usually help to outline a reconciliatory path that would help the accused to know how to make things right)



Thoughtful; requires self-regulation and being able to calm yourself first and think about the best way to proceed	Allows some flexibility in cases where self-regulation is challenging, but still requires the person calling on to do so without an aggressive or shaming tone	Typically reactionary; tends to be done in moment of anger
Is about deepening the person's connection to the community by helping them to engage in ways that are less hurtful or alienating for others	Is about offering a lifeline to someone who has caused harm, but leaving the choice of whether to hold on to the lifeline up to the harm-doer	Often serves to isolate or exclude people from the community
Based on a goal of mutual learning as you try to better understand the dynamics that gave rise to the behaviour	Requires less of a burden to be carried by the person doing the calling on	Typically based on the assumption that the other person is the only one of the two of you who has something to learn

Table 1: Overview of calling in, on, and out. Adapted from Dozois & Wells (2020).<sup>32</sup>

## 5.4 The case for calling in

A review of the available literature on calling in makes clear five key themes in the conversations around why calling in is an essential tool to utilize, and the role the practice plays in social justice movements. This section outlines the following themes:

- 1) Current calling out practices perpetuate cycles of harm;
- 2) People are not disposable;
- 3) Using shame or creating a culture of fear are ineffective approaches that cause damage;
- 4) Choosing love over hate; and
- 5) Meeting people where they are versus where you want them to be.

### 5.4.1 The Current calling out practices perpetuate cycles of harm

*“We think it will assuage our fears and make us safer if we can clarify an enemy, a someone outside of ourselves who is to blame, who is guilty, who is the origin of harm. Can we acknowledge that trauma and conflict can distort our perspectives of responsibility and blame in ways that make it difficult to see the roots of the harm?”<sup>33</sup>*

Calling out practices tend to perpetuate cycles of harm, violence, and oppression. As Black writer, digital strategist, survivor of trauma, and social change advocate Maisha Johnson describes in a blog challenging the assumption that call outs are always about accountability, “because we’re trying to build a more just world, right? One where we treat each other with respect, and have liberation instead of cycles of oppressive violence. But sometimes we forget about that part, and in standing against oppression, we end up replicating the same harmful cycles.”<sup>34</sup> Not unlike Black lesbian feminist Audre Lorde’s famous quote “the master’s tool will never dismantle the master’s house,”

the caution here is that by focusing on punitive efforts, on destroying the “enemy,” and by reducing people down to their worst actions<sup>iv</sup>—despite the aim to hold harm-doers accountable, the result is that the humanity of all involved is damaged, and the root causes of the cycles of harm are obscured.

Many of the writers cited in this review explain that it is incredibly challenging to break such cycles of harm and pain, particularly as “instant judgement and punishment are practices of power over others.”<sup>35</sup> The desire to wield such power by those who have historically been denied power and continue to be systematically disempowered is understandable, and the propensity to pull from the set of tools one is most familiar with is also tenable, even if they result in more damage. In adrienne maree brown’s words, “the tools of swift and predatory justice feel good to use, familiar, groove in the hand easily from repeated use and training, briefly satisfying. But these tools are often blunt and senseless.”<sup>36</sup>

#### 5.4.2 People are not disposable

*“What I’m making a case for is that disposability is a concept that might be the most villainous for our species: to think that there’s some way we can get rid of people who commit harm, and that will remove the harmful behavior and the harmful belief systems from our communities. And when it doesn’t—it hasn’t—at a certain point we have to ask ourselves, what are we doing?” — adrienne maree brown<sup>37</sup>*

One of the most powerful messages that comes through in the writings of those championing calling in practices is that “cancel culture” treats people as if they are disposable, and efforts to treat humans as such should be met with alarm and caution. Tràn noted this issue early on<sup>38</sup> and adrienne maree brown speaks to this in her book *We will not cancel us* when she writes:

We won’t end the systemic patterns of harm by isolating and picking off individuals, just as we can’t limit the communicative power of mycelium by plucking a single mushroom from the dirt. We need to flood the entire system with life-affirming principles and practices, to clear the channels between us of the toxicity of supremacy, to heal from the harms of a legacy of devaluing some lives and needs in order to indulge others.<sup>39</sup>

Brown and others importantly note that the desire to identify the “enemy” and get rid of them is understandable but raises questions both about the harm that gets replicated in doing so, and the effectiveness of such an approach. In an article by feminist activist, American novelist, and woman of colour Aya de Leon, de Leon writes about the case of Junot Diaz, a Dominican-American writer and creative writing professor accused of sexual assault, verbal abuse, and bullying of women who has also written about his own experiences of trauma, including being raped as a child. She challenges the intense outcry against Diaz with a call for more compassionate accountability (her

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<sup>iv</sup> This is inspired by the work of Black American lawyer and social justice activist Bryan Stevenson who defends those on death row or sentenced to life in prison and is known for his reframe, “each of us is more than the worst thing we’ve ever done.”

term), cautioning those in the #metoo movement around their desire to treat such men as damaged goods to be thrown away. She writes,

They're not a bad batch that we can throw away and get a new set. These are the men on our planet, in our communities, in our families, and in our beds (not all of us, but many). I want men to stop brutalizing women. I want them to stand up to other men's misogyny...I want all that shit to change. And in order to change those behaviors, men need to grow their capacity for empathy and bravery by addressing their trauma. By his own account, Junot has begun to do so, but it's far from perfect.<sup>40</sup>

In her piece, de Leon notes that her overarching goal is to end sexual violence against women and girls and ending male domination, and powerfully argues that rather than attempting to “cancel” or “dispose” of Junot Diaz and similar men, it will be far more effective in achieving her bigger goal to recognize men's own needs to “heal individually and in groups,” which requires “both compassion and accountability: men need to reconnect with their empathy, and to be accountable for the harm they caused.”<sup>41</sup>

#### **5.4.3 Using shame or creating a culture of fear are ineffective approaches that cause damage**

*“When we act this way, we instill fear and frustration in our allies, immobilizing them. Before you respond, ask yourself what do you want the result to be? Proving that you are ‘right’ or developing a stronger, more capable ally?”—Cody Charles<sup>42</sup>*

Core to the mechanisms of oppression and violence are shame, its cousin blame, and the culture of fear that such tactics fuel. As world renowned shame and vulnerability researcher Brené Brown explains, shame is “the intensely painful feeling or experience of believing that we are flawed and therefore unworthy of love and belonging.”<sup>43</sup> Brené Brown's work highlights the hard-wired human need for connection, love, and belonging, and shows how shame ignites the fear of being disconnected to others, a core need for survival, which in turn sparks survival-driven responses that tend to mean that shame is neither helpful nor productive—if the goal is growth and positive change. Loretta Ross, a Black feminist civil rights and reproductive justice activist and scholar who has been practicing calling in for decades, argues that calling out “is not an invitation for growth; it is the expectation that you have already grown.”<sup>44</sup> Black and Brown activists also argue that these cycles of harm and aggression contribute to a culture of fear *within* movements, which is detrimental to solidarity building, and fosters cultures of silence—part of what call out culture historically attempted to change in the first place. In understanding the role of shame and blame in call out culture today, it is helpful to explore the way call outs have historically been used in social justice movements. Adrienne maree brown explains:

Call outs have a long history as a brilliant strategy for marginalized people to stand up to those with power. Call outs have been a way to bring collective pressure to bear on corporations, institutions, and abusers on behalf of individuals or oppressed peoples who cannot stop the injustice and get accountability on their own. There are those out of alignment with life, consent, dignity, and humanity who will only stop when a light is shined onto their inhumane behaviour.<sup>45</sup>

But, brown warns, “call outs don’t work for addressing misunderstandings, issuing critiques, or resolving contradictions”<sup>46</sup> and yet such tactics are increasingly being weaponized to “shame and humiliate people in the wake of misunderstandings, contradictions, conflicts, and mistakes.”<sup>47</sup> Brown and others writing about calling in argue that shame and blame may work in certain moments and for certain purposes, but the results tend to be short term, and raise questions about what the goal of such tactics are. Brown writes,

If the kind of call outs currently sweeping through online organizing space and spilling into real-life formations actually stopped harm, resolved conflict, ended supremacy, transformed people, I’d be a gung-ho call out machine! I love functional tools. But what happens more often is that people step back, move through their shame, leave the movement, or double down and return with even more egregious acts of flagrant harm and/or unprincipled struggle methods.<sup>48</sup>

Furthermore, Loretta Ross explains that calling out, through shaming and blaming, invites people to a *fight*, not a conversation, which limits opportunities for growth and connection.<sup>49</sup> Citing fellow reproductive and racial justice activist and founder of SisterLove, Inc<sup>v</sup>, Ross says that Dázon Dixon Diallo believes that “calling in will be to this digital age human rights movement of the 21<sup>st</sup> century what nonviolence was to the civil rights movement in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.”<sup>50</sup>

#### 5.4.4 There is need to choose love over hate

*“I’m a survivor of racial violence, rape and incest, and I needed to find another moral compass for my life’s work. And that compass had to shift from hate to love.”—Loretta Ross<sup>51</sup>*

In its most basic form, proponents of a calling in approach argue that it is a matter of choosing love over hate. Those who make this argument also tend to see the value of calling in as a practice to use regardless of race, gender, and/or political leanings. Loretta Ross, who has decades of experience doing calling in work with white men, including working with ex-Klu Klux Klan members in the 1970s, explains her reasoning for choosing love over hate in the quote above. She also offers powerful words from her mentor, Reverend C.T. Vivian, who was also a close friend and lieutenant of Martin Luther King Jr., who said “when you ask people to give up hate, you need to be there for them when they do.”<sup>52</sup>

Adrienne maree brown often describes this as a choice between destruction and “life-affirming principles and practices,”<sup>53</sup> anger versus “viable, generative, sustainable systemic change.”<sup>54</sup> In emphasizing the generative possibilities of calling in, brown highlights the necessity of healing for all and, similar to Resmaa Menakem’s description of compassion, the energetic capacity of compassion and love. These activists make clear in their work that they are not disavowing justifiable anger, or

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<sup>v</sup> SisterLove, Inc. was founded by Dázon Dixon Diallo in 1989, making it first women’s HIV/AIDS and Reproductive Justice organization in the southeastern United States.

the potent possibilities of productive anger and rage, but rather noting the destructive capacity of *only* making space for anger.

#### 5.4.5 Meeting people where they are versus where you want them to be

*“Regardless of our intentions, sometimes the only impact of calling someone out is that we get to feel like we punished them for what they did wrong. These are good questions to consider when you’re determining the best strategy for the situation. Just like choosing your battles, you can choose a strategy by meeting people where they’re at.”—Maisha Johnson<sup>55</sup>*

A key aspect of calling in practices is recognizing when one’s *intention* and *impact* are not aligned with one another—and the necessity of asking difficult questions to get to the heart of how to achieve one’s overarching goal. As Maisha Johnson writes with regards to the exhaustion and demoralization of replicating cycles of harm, “one way to heal this emotional drain is to consider what change you’re hoping for. Do you actually want this person to learn and do better, or just to feel bad about what they did?”<sup>56</sup> She describes in the above quote that one of the strategies to consider instead is meeting people where they are at.

Johnson’s compelling insight helps to illustrate the challenge between bridging justifiable anger (and frustration, and exhaustion) on the part of the person/group who has been/is being harmed, and the desire to achieve concrete prosocial change at the behavioural, social norms, and systems levels. Much of this has to do with the reaction that individuals have when they perceive a threat, as explored in a later section of this review. The other aspect is the necessity of recognizing that where one *wants* people to be may differ from where people *actually are*, and in that recognition is the choice to double down on excluding and shaming or, as a calling in practice would encourage, to identify strategic ways to meet people where they are so that they can hear and become motivated by one’s message. Resmaa Menakem shares a useful example of this in relation to promoting equity, diversity, and inclusion. He argues that a lot of the equity, diversity, and inclusion work has not been effective because it has started from a place of focusing on the need for diversity, without first honestly engaging with what we want diversity *from*, and recognizing that white people often don’t have the ability to articulate this from their own perspective. In doing so, these efforts are not effectively meeting white people where they are at. Menakem explains,

...we’re starting with a frame that doesn’t work to get at it...Diverse, from what? Because if you’re saying diversity, you’re saying, you’re starting with a standard first and you want to diversify from that standard. What is the standard that we all know? But we never say. We all know that when we’re talking about diversity, we’re talking about diversifying from the white body as being standard, but if you never say it, then diversity can mean color green Wednesday, it can be you can see her on Tuesday, it can be dreamcatcher Thursday. You know what I mean? It becomes this kind of very surface understanding of culture and what we’re dealing with. And what I would say is that part of the problem is we haven’t defined diversity in a way that actually allows white people to actually deal with the pain of it in their gut, and work with it.<sup>57</sup>

## 6.0 Turning to brain science: responding to threat and how to (really) change behaviour

The emergence of brain science has been fundamental to challenging what has previously been assumed about human behaviour, and helps to pave a more productive and sustainable path for prosocial behaviour change. For example, traditional approaches to behaviour change assumed that increasing knowledge would lead to desired changes in behaviour, and also that attitude change was prerequisite for behaviour change. Research now makes it clear that humans are not so rational—there is actually quite a weak association between the intention to engage in a behaviour and actually engaging in a behaviour;<sup>58</sup> similarly, attitudinal change does not always lead to a change in behaviour and, conversely, changing behaviour does not always require a change in attitude as a precursor.<sup>59</sup>

Brain science is also incredibly insightful in helping to explain why calling in practices have the capacity to catalyze more transformative changes than calling out. To this end, this section pulls from research on how the human brain responds to both perceived threat and safety in order to understand how and why calling in can be a more effective and sustainable approach to changing both attitudes and behaviours. Given time and budget constraints this section is far from an exhaustive review of the literature, but rather an initial glance at relevant literature found through a combination of academic and grey literature searching. However, due to limited relevant search results in the academic literature, much of what is included here comes from science-based grey literature, where more relevant information was available.

It is essential to note that in exploring this component of calling in, our goal is *not* to suggest that men are “under threat” and therefore people should “go easy” on them, or that threat in the context of being called out is comparable to threat in terms of bodily harm or any form of abuse. Furthermore, we recognize that understanding the human threat response also applies to understanding the responses of those doing the calling in (or out), and why calling in can be so challenging when one’s brain is flooded with stress. We are interested here in understanding how to most effectively hold men accountable such that they become key allies in social change movements, and examining how humans respond to threat is a part of this puzzle.

Over the last few decades research has helped to uncover the ways in which being under threat creates an experience of overwhelm, thus shutting down most people’s capacity for listening and learning. When a person feels fear or perceives a threat, their stress response is activated. Threats can take many forms, from physical to biological (e.g., pain or illness) to environmental or social. This instinctual response is an evolutionary life saver, and helps the person prepare for the most appropriate defense, which can generally be understood as flight, fight, flop, or freeze. However, even though our daily stresses tend to be quite different than they were when these systems evolved, humans are still wired to this “lizard brain” response, and thus our reactions are similar, even if the threat itself has changed.<sup>60</sup> And, given the human drive for belonging and the need for human companionship to survive, social rewards or threats such as facial cues to the spoken word are particularly powerful and can heavily influence human behaviour.<sup>61 62</sup> When one’s threat



response has been activated, one's rational mind initially becomes hijacked, or "goes offline" by these more instinctual responses that hone in on the stressor and struggles to notice anything else.<sup>63 64</sup> In this state, one's openness to learning is compromised; in fact, fear is one of the primary impediments to curiosity.<sup>65</sup> Furthermore, this defensive response often causes people to experience other forms of impaired functioning, such as a loss for words, reduced ability to read social cues, irritability, and aggressive or submissive behaviour.<sup>66 67</sup> Physiological symptoms include a racing heart, chest tightness, sweating, tingling hands or feet, and shaking.<sup>68</sup>

However, the prefrontal cortex has the capacity to play a key role in responding to stress, as it is central to cognitive functioning and helps to control one's thoughts and actions. Specifically, the prefrontal cortex can assist the amygdala in understanding the degree of threat and either helping the person to calm down if the threat is not as dangerous as initially perceived, or helping to calm down after the threat has passed.<sup>69</sup> Without learning and practicing self-regulation and self-soothing practices, the experience of feeling under threat can result in people shutting down (freeze/flight) or lashing out at others (fight), and leave the person in a perpetual state of hypervigilance and defensiveness.<sup>70 71</sup> For men, who are socialized to disconnect from themselves and others, actively taught out of empathy and told that vulnerability and seeking help are for the weak, it is not surprising that many men's ability to bring their prefrontal cortex back online in instances of perceived threat is hindered. This also helps to explain why people feel so compelled to opt for calling out during a heated moment, and why calling in takes practice.

In Sonya Renee Taylor's TED Talk on alternative accountability practices, she describes her bodily response to the experiences of being called in and out, as well as being the one who holding others accountable. She describes that in all of these instances the initial response was similar—defensiveness, beads of sweat, increased heart rate—but that her knowledge of self-soothing and self-centering techniques were essential in recovering from this initial stress-induced response. She argues that part of the goal is "getting better at the threat response" through these practices, though she grounds this recommendation in her central goal of "radical self-love" for everyone, recognizing that the kind, loving, connected, and equitable world people desire "is a world that we have to first build inside of us."<sup>72</sup> And, as B.K. Chan argues, the choice to call people in is also about healing oneself, recognizing that being fueled by one's own values and hope in humanity is more generative than only being fueled by rage and pain.<sup>73</sup>

Another way that Taylor's suggestion of "getting better at the threat response" can be understood is the Window of Tolerance, or WoT, which was proposed by psychiatrist Dr. Dan Siegel.<sup>74</sup> The WoT describes the optimal zone where someone can function well, process stimuli, and make decisions calmly despite experiencing a stressful situation, as a result of well-regulated physical and psychological reactions and a healthy central nervous system. On the other hand, repeated exposure to traumatic events or extreme stress can "push" people outside of their window of tolerance, resulting in an increased likelihood of becoming hyper- (lashing out) or hypo- (shutting down) aroused.<sup>75</sup> One's window of tolerance can be increased through practicing strategies to calm one's central nervous system and regulate one's physical and psychological responses to a perceived threat (e.g., deep breathing, supportive and compassionate self-talk as opposed to harsh and critical internal dialogue). Many of these techniques are in conflict with dominant notions of

masculinity, including the ways that boys are taught from a young age to be “tough”—without learning health-sustaining strategies for being *resilient*. For BIPOC communities, whose members have experienced intergenerational cycles of violence, oppression, and poverty as a result of white supremacy, brutality, and colonialism, it would also be expected that many would struggle with smaller windows of tolerance as well.

Furthermore, humans are not well equipped to detect distant threats, such as ones that we perceive as either too macro or micro to warrant our attention, or too messy to be able to hone in on and understand our role in contributing to positive change.<sup>76</sup> Getting people to see the urgency of climate change, for example, is challenging as it feels so distant and amorphous to many, and climate scientists have often not done well at translating this urgency into something that resonates with the average citizen.<sup>77</sup> Once again, for men who are disconnected and lack empathetic skills to connect with others’ plights, what may seem an imminent threat to others feels distant as a result of the isolation that masculine norms provoke.

This brief overview helps to illustrate why the human response to perceived threat impedes one’s ability to learn and engage productively with others; what about some of the key facilitators for people’s learning, and for behaviour change? In *New York Times* bestselling author Daniel Coyle’s book, *The Culture Code*, Coyle offers a well-researched and detailed account of the game-changing potential that cultivating a sense of belonging has in improving the performance and productivity of organizations and groups. Coyle notes that this sense of belonging is built on subtle cues that we as humans are very adept at noticing. Just as subtle cues such as facial expressions can trigger someone’s threat response, so too can everyday behaviours and cues create a sense of psychological safety and belonging, and that key to creating psychological safety “is to recognize how deeply obsessed our unconscious brains are with it.”<sup>78</sup> Critically, and in line with calling in practices, Coyle notes that these successful workplace cultures are not lighthearted, conflict-free places, but rather “at their core their members are oriented less around achieving happiness than around solving hard problems together. This task involves many moments of high-candor feedback, uncomfortable truth-telling, when they confront the gap between where the group is, and where it ought to be.”<sup>79</sup>

Furthermore, humans are designed to be threat-averse and motivation-driven, and in addition to the influential power of cultivating a sense of belonging, one of the key learnings that can inform calling in practices for engaging men is that our brains are trained to favour familiarity, and consequently, new information is more easily digested when it is composed of familiar elements.<sup>80</sup> As such, for those who are unfamiliar with the key issues driving movements, if these issues are not translated in a way that resonates with and is familiar to these individuals, the chances of them understanding and being able to learn, and thus connect, with the issues is low. This also means that leveraging peer networks, where the messenger is familiar to the person/group one is trying to reach, is invaluable. In addition to the importance of the messenger, the human propensity to “go with the flow,” prefer the familiar, and be drawn to that which resonates with us, Shift’s rapid review on using nudges to engage men breaks down additional key ways to influence human behaviour, such as the power of our emotional associations, and the recognition that we act in ways that make us feel better about ourselves.<sup>81</sup>



Other useful insights can be drawn from the growing body of literature around how to create healthy habits, and how humans adapt to healthier behaviours. This literature comes from the cognitive sciences, psychology, social sciences, as well as nutrition and health sciences. For example, successful behaviour change strategies aim to make adopting behaviours easy, offer the right kind of feedback, focus on the positive and provide regular encouragement, and orient towards inviting people in of their own volition rather than pressuring or forcing them. Shift’s rapid review on gamification for engaging men also helps to break down some key take-aways to sustain engagement and capture an audience’s interests, including helping the audience connect through narrative, positive feedback, having fun, feeling a sense of progress and mastery, and social connection.<sup>82</sup> *The Behavioural Drivers Model*, produced in 2019 by UNICEF, is also an incredibly useful, comprehensive, and empirically grounded account of behavioural drivers.<sup>83</sup>

A relevant example of successfully engaging people towards positive social change goals is Handprinter, a website that focuses on supporting people to do “more good than harm.”<sup>84</sup> Handprinter centers its approach in a lens of positivity, both in terms of where they focus their measurements (on the “good” you do through using renewable energy, riding a bike to work, composting), but also in terms of how they orient you in your goals: that it is all about taking small steps, making incremental improvements, and getting positive feedback as you do. In addition, Handprinter uses a life cycle approach to help breakdown the impact of one’s footprint, thereby making it easier for you to find how to work towards making your “handprint” bigger than your footprint. In doing so, Handprinter applies many of the successful behaviour change strategies listed in this section towards positive social change goals.

In reviewing evidence on the impairments associated with the human threat response, the power of cultivating a sense of belonging, and what we know about how to actually achieve behavioural change, what becomes clear is that calling in practices are much more adept at navigating people’s threat response than calling out, and calling in is well-aligned with what we know about how to change behaviour. Namely, calling in practices are about inviting people in, providing ongoing encouragement and appropriate feedback, and meeting people where they are so that they have familiar footing from which to improve their behaviour and advance their understanding. They also require the practitioner to have self-awareness, self-regulation skills, and self-compassion. As such, while the evidence documenting behaviour change as a result of calling in was limited to personal stories and experiences, there is solid evidence to support the use of calling in practices to engage and mobilize men for violence prevention, gender equality, equity, diversity, and inclusion.

## 7.0 Implications for engaging men through calling in practices

*“‘Why?’ is often the game-changing, possibility-opening question. That’s because the answers rehumanize those we feel are perpetrating against us. ‘Why?’ often leads us to grief, abuse, trauma, often undiagnosed mental illnesses like depression or bipolar disorder, difference, socialization, childhood, scarcity, loneliness.”— adrienne maree brown<sup>85</sup>*

The propensity to treat others as if they are disposable can be quite easily traced to harmful

masculine norms that create an “isolating and violent trap”<sup>86</sup> for men and all those whose lives are impacted by men and the systems men create. Well-known masculinities expert Mark Greene, whose work also extends into inclusion and diversity, provides a useful frame for understanding the relationship between restrictive and harmful masculine norms and their role in perpetuating the dehumanization of others. Greene explains “the closed loop of dominant-based masculinity” over 11 steps, starting from infancy and the ways that boys are pressured to “hide their emotional expression, physical pain, and fear.”<sup>87</sup> He explicitly draws linkages between the systematic ways men are “trained out of connection”<sup>88</sup> to the ways in which they are taught to dominate and denigrate others. Greene argues that men are pressured to disconnect from themselves and others, while at the same time are taught to dominate and perceive an inferiority in women and, consequently, other minority groups. He argues that “denigrating the feminine is key to suppressing boys’ expression and connection”<sup>89</sup> and that “once boys are taught that women are less, it takes little effort to convince them that BIPOC, LGBTQI+ people, immigrants are also ‘less.’”<sup>90</sup> This, in turn, he argues, loops men back into disconnection. As Greene so clearly illustrates, the cycles of harm perpetuated through the closed loop of dominant-based masculinity are not only incredible damaging to men, but wreak havoc on everyone else. Aya de Leon offers a similar sentiment when she writes, “my goal is to end sexual violence against women and girls. And in order for that to happen, we need to end male domination. If our society weren’t male dominated, males wouldn’t form a hierarchy in which they abused each other, and females wouldn’t be a dumping ground for men’s toxicity and trauma.”<sup>91</sup>

The expectation is often that men should join “the cause”—whether for gender equality, or for white men in particular, for racial justice—because it is assumed that all men will see the urgency. But for many men, they cannot, they do not. They have been socialized in cultures that foment disconnection of men from others from day one, that actively seek to sever men from their human inclination towards empathy, and to feel and express emotions beyond anger. Being socialized in such a way carries its own traumas, aside from the other trauma many men carry with them from personal experiences, including being bullied, experiencing homophobia, and being victims of sexual violence. Without tending to these wounds, to delving more deeply into what harms may have led to the harms so many men perpetuate, the ask is to have men “wake up” and find urgency in these issues, while at the same time being reminded that they are to blame for these issues in the first place. Is it surprising, then, that these expectations are met with ambivalence at best, or aggression and violence, at worst? Instead, there is need to first find the urgent issues for men—how to relearn connection, reclaim their humanity as individuals deserving of giving and receiving love, how to cultivate belonging in groups without doing so at the cost of harming others; this work requires calling in practices to continuously and creatively invite men to the table. Reflecting on the literature reviewed on calling in practices as it relates to engaging men, we find ourselves asking: “How can we most effectively and sustainably hold men accountable for the harm they’ve caused, in ways that engage and mobilize men for the long term so that the harm is prevented in the first place?”

## 8.0 Meeting men where they are: the only place from which they can move forward

*It's a tall order, but I refuse to give up on half the population. Women are not going to be able to take down the patriarchy without men backing us. And they need to be clear that they're doing it to reclaim their own humanity, not as a favor to us.<sup>92</sup>*

Aya de Leon writes about the need for men to reclaim their own humanity. For some, the assumption is that the path for men to reclaim their humanity begins with them understanding how they have dehumanized others. But, as noted in the above section, that path—for some men, and in some contexts—may actually need to begin with men understanding that they have been socialized to dehumanize others, and thus where their own humanity has been denied, how they have been hurt, and from there find the path towards understanding others. While not a clear cut or necessarily linear path, the limited impact that many of the feminist efforts to engage men as well as efforts such as those relating to justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion (JEDI) work is recognizing that we may not be doing enough to meet men (and people) where they're at, which is the only place from which they can move forward. As adrienne maree brown reminds us, "it is easy to decide a person or group is shady, evil, psychopathic. The hard truth (hard because there's no quick fix) is that long-term injustice creates most evil behavior. The percentage of psychopaths in the world is just not high enough to justify the ease with which we attempt to label that condition to others."<sup>93</sup>

Individuals and movements are faced with the decision to either continue shouting at and shaming men who are complicit in systems of oppression and injustice, or identify ways to reach them where they are, even if this can, understandably, be incredibly frustrating at times. In considering ways to engage men from where they are, this may mean creatively moving away from trying to bang down the "front door" (i.e., talking to them about why they should care about violence against women) to either knocking differently and being invited in, or creatively identifying side doors through which they can integrate themselves into the goings on inside, and the questions of who is on the inside or outside become obsolete. The beginning place for engagement should refocus on identifying "where the shoe pinches"<sup>vi</sup> for men, in all of their diversity, so that men can identify their own motivations and vested interest in the causes and movements they can and should be aligned with.

For example, this could mean engaging men in a discussion around how to build a sense of belonging and connection in their own peer groups, or discussing the trauma experienced by men from other men, rather than starting from why they should focus on ending violence against women. In her transformative work on facilitation and mediation from within movements, adrienne maree brown emphasizes the importance of inviting people "continuously, towards their own vision, their own rigor. Invite them to participate in their own liberation."<sup>94</sup> Borrowing from Menakem's framing, we need to facilitate men's understanding of the damages done by harmful masculine norms so that they can "actually deal with the pain of it in their gut, and work with it."<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>vi</sup> The first author is indebted to South African community activist Zithulele Dlakavu who first introduced this term to her.

Calling in practices offer the transformative potential by starting from where men are, including addressing men’s trauma and interpersonal struggles, and efforts to design, pilot, test, and scale up such efforts are sorely needed.

## 9.0 Conclusion

This review had a challenging task: pulling primarily from Black and Brown activists, writers, scholars, and practitioners—most of whom were women or gender non-binary—to identify and synthesize the evidence for how and why a calling in approach is valuable for the work of engaging men for violence prevention, gender equality, diversity, inclusion, and justice. The goal of this review was to help parse out how to identify the root causes of harm and explore ways to end cycles of violence and harm, recognizing that those who perpetuate harm usually have their own histories of harm and, often, trauma. In doing so, our aim was *not* to make excuses for men, or to diminish the necessity of holding men, and particularly white men, accountable. Rather, we sought to better understand ways to effectively and sustainably hold men accountable for the harm they cause, in ways that engage and mobilize men for the long term so that the harm is prevented in the first place, and men are key allies and welcomed advocates in gender and social justice movements.

There are three key takeaways from examining how calling in practices can contribute to this goal. The first is that there is ample support for calling in practices, and a growing body of evidence from the lived experiences of Black and Brown activists and practitioners has helped to build clarity on the damage being done by calling out practices and the critical role that calling in has in movements that seek to create “viable, generative, sustainable systemic change.”<sup>96</sup> Those encouraging the uptake of calling in practices specifically note the importance of staying clear on one’s end goal (e.g., ending violence against women; creating a loving, just, kind, equitable world) and developing strategies to meet that goal, rather than getting bogged down in the short-term goals of meting out punishment and shame. There is growing understanding that calling out practices tends to replicate cycles of harm, that shame and a culture of fear are short-sighted and damaging, and that treating people as disposable is dangerously close to denying people their humanity.

The second key takeaway is that calling in practices are based on compassion, love, and relationship-building—not just to be *nice*, or to avoid conflict, but rather because calling in practices are far better aligned with what is known about how to successfully create meaningful and long lasting behaviour change. Calling in invites people in, fosters an environment in which people are more likely to become receptive and have an opportunity to grow, provides clear and appropriate feedback in the form of a two-way conversation, and starts from a place of hope that change is possible.

The third and final takeaway is that more needs to be done to think radically and creatively about how to meet men where they are, rather than doubling down on the exasperation and rage of where many are, even as these these reactions are understandable. Instead, and to stay focused on the end goal of creating “a world that is just, and equitable, and kind, a world of love, and abundance, and joy, and connection that works for everybody, and every *body*”<sup>97</sup> there is urgent need to take more seriously not only the need to understand where men are, in their various

settings, but also to scale up efforts to apply innovative approaches, such as using nudges and gamification and other creative means in order to reach men where they are at, for it is the only place from which they can move forward.

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