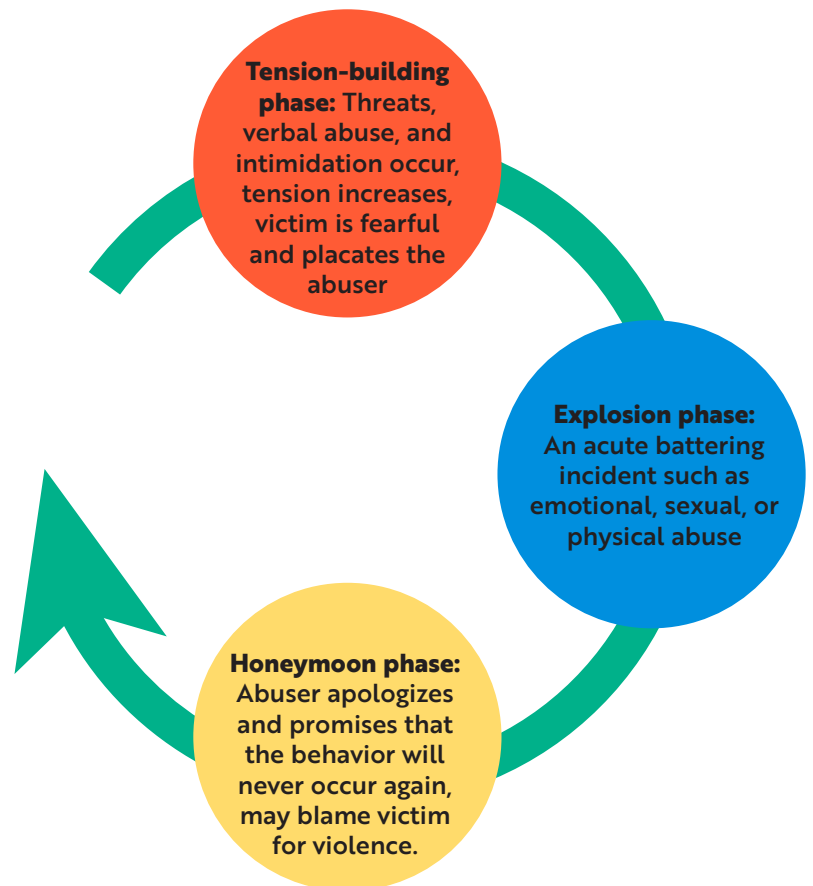


THE “CYCLE OF VIOLENCE”

Why It Is No Longer Widely Used to Understand Domestic Violence

The “cycle of violence” is a model that describes a pattern of predictable repeated domestic violence. Psychologist Lenore Walker, Ph.D., formulated it as part of the “battered woman syndrome” in an influential book published in 1979.¹ The model describes a three-stage cycle that repeats itself. Over time, violence increases and the length of time between stages becomes shorter.



WHY WAS IT IMPORTANT?

The cycle model contributed to understanding domestic violence, in part because it refuted several myths that were widely believed at the time. One myth was that people experiencing violence stay in abusive relationships because they are masochistic or otherwise experiencing serious mental or emotional issues. Other myths included the perceptions that domestic violence occurs infrequently, randomly, and primarily among people living in poverty. Walker’s books and articles suggested that abuse or domestic violence is common and occurs in all social classes, and provided an alternative way of understanding why survivors may stay in these relationships.² Additionally, the “cycle of violence” theory also began the process of shifting the “ownership” of the violence from the victim to the partner who uses violence.

WHY IS THIS MODEL NO LONGER CONSIDERED A CURRENT WAY TO UNDERSTAND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE?

The short answer to this question is that the past 40 years have expanded evidence and diverse survivor voices and experiences, along with recognition that domestic violence is more complicated than originally thought. The primary criticisms of Walker's "cycle" model follow:

It is based on an unrepresentative sample of White heterosexual women in Colorado who volunteered to be interviewed.³ Even Walker (1979, xiii) noted her sample "cannot be considered a legitimate data base from which to make specific generalizations."

It assumes that some phases (the honeymoon phase for example) are safer for survivors to leave than others. This is an inaccurate and unsafe assumption. Leaving at any time often escalates the violence and danger.

It does not apply to all abusive relationships. Many survivors experience no "honeymoon" stage at all, especially after a first incident, and describe tension as chronic rather than episodic.⁴

It takes the relationship out of its social context, which may include marginalization and oppression based on race, ethnicity, gender identity and expression, and geographic location, among other factors.⁵ It doesn't consider the challenges, increased vulnerabilities, or the increased danger that oppression from systems creates for the victim/survivor (i.e., criminal justice system, civil courts, child welfare).

The term "battered woman syndrome" describes domestic violence as a personal problem, and does not focus on the societal factors that cause it.⁶

It focuses on the abusive partner's behavior while ignoring the victim/survivor's reactions, strategies and resilience (also noted by Serrata, 2017). In addition, it doesn't consider health issues that may impact the victim/survivor's ability to seek help, nor the layers of trauma, historical and current, that the survivor has endured.

THE PAST 40 YEARS HAVE EXPANDED EVIDENCE AND DIVERSE SURVIVOR VOICES AND EXPERIENCES, ALONG WITH RECOGNITION THAT DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IS MORE COMPLICATED THAN ORIGINALLY THOUGHT.

Walker's "cycle" model takes the relationship out of its social context, which may include marginalization and oppression based on race, ethnicity, gender identity and expression, and geographic location, among other factors.

OTHER MODELS, THEORIES, AND LENSES TO CONSIDER

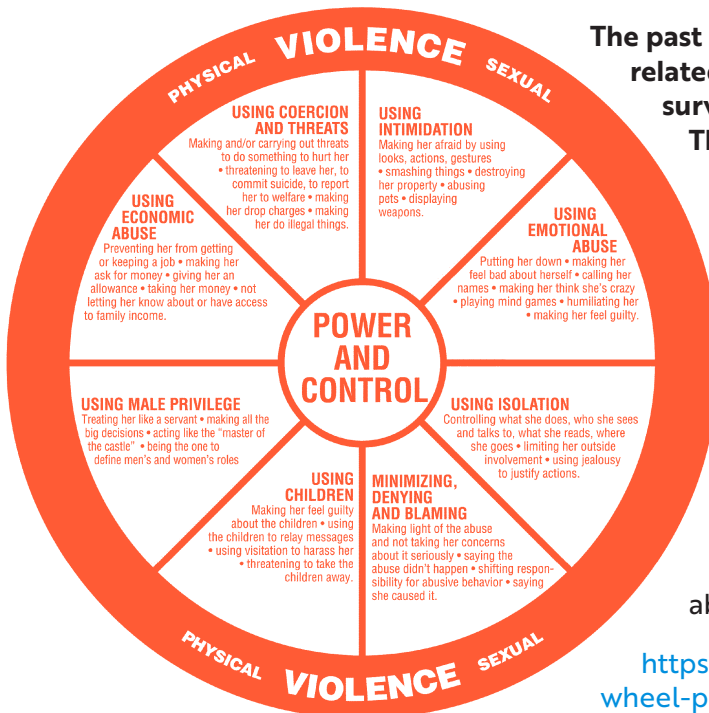
The past 40 years have expanded the theoretical frameworks related to domestic violence. These are based on diverse survivor voices and increased knowledge and awareness. These are just a few examples of models to consider:

The Duluth Model⁷

Domestic violence is dictated by the power and control tactics of the abuser. Because of the central role of this dynamic, the Domestic Abuse Intervention Project (DAIP) developed the Power and Control Wheel. By convening focus groups and hearing the stories of countless survivors, DAIP developed the spokes on the wheel. These are just some examples of power and control that can be used in an interpersonal relationship. This

list is not exhaustive and the approaches that the abuser uses can vary over time.

<https://www.theduluthmodel.org/product/power-control-wheel-poster/>

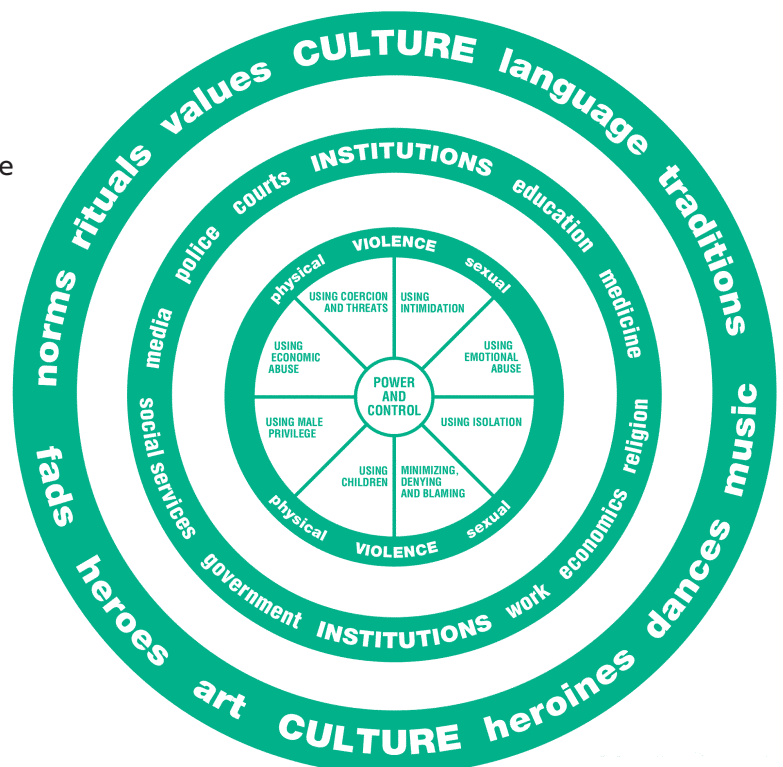


Many models of the Power and Control Wheel have been developed. For instance, DAIP also created the Culture Wheel. This is a "visual representation how cultural norms, values and institutions reinforce violence against women."⁸

<https://bit.ly/3DBrVxq>

More information on the Duluth model can be found here:

<https://www.theduluthmodel.org> and <https://bit.ly/2YmAYDi>

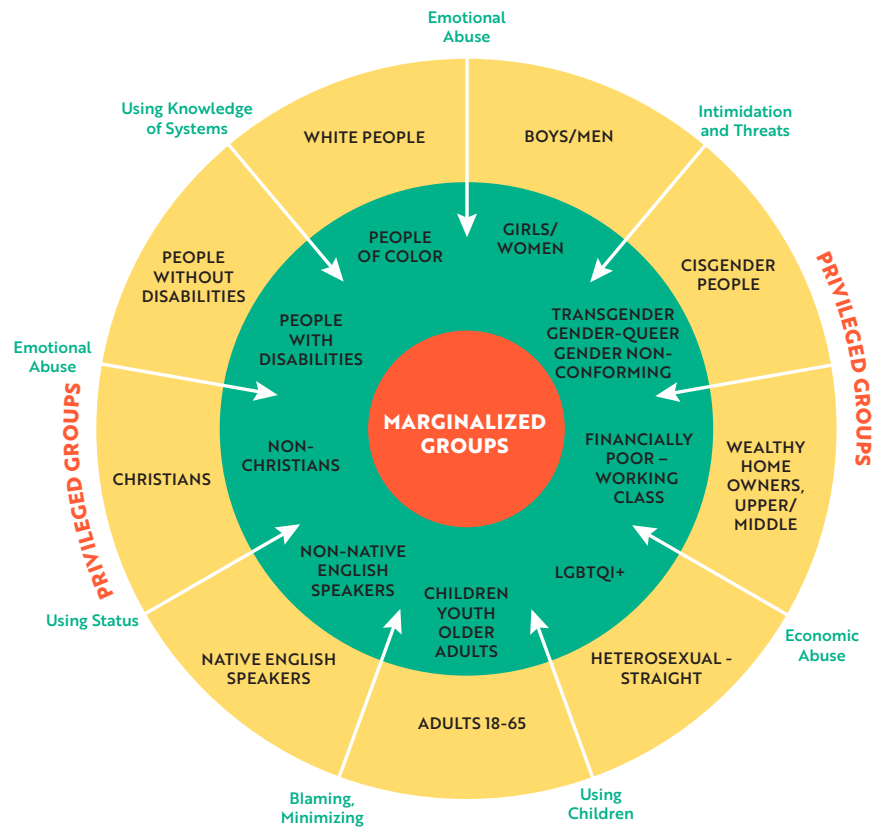


Coercive Control Model

Developed by Dr. Evan Stark, this model is less focused solely on physical and emotional abuse, instead considering the “strategic form of ongoing oppression and terrorism that invades all arenas of a woman’s activity.”⁹

These elements of coercive control are often not considered abusive, which only contributes to the continued abuse. More information about coercive control can be found here:

https://cdar.uky.edu/coercivecontrol/docs/Partner%20Abuse%20Looking%20Beyond%20Physical%20Assault%20to%20Coercive%20Control_health%20professionals.pdf



Intersectionality Theory

Developed by Dr. Kimberlé Crenshaw, this concept focuses on the intersection of gender, race, sexuality, immigration/documentation status, and other personal identities and how “these intersect to multiply oppressions and vulnerabilities to injustice”.¹⁰ The impact and prevalence of domestic violence can be higher when domestic violence is layered with forms of oppression in race, gender, sexuality, and class.¹¹ In addition, the response to domestic violence from service systems is not equal. Victims may also face discrimination in the service systems that they encounter. For more information, please visit:

http://www.vawlearningnetwork.ca/our-work/issuebased_newsletters/issue-15 and <https://www.cpedv.org/post/intersectionality-privilege-oppression-and-tactics-abuse>.

Oppression Theory

“Oppression is a root cause of domestic violence. Therefore, doing anti-oppression work is sexual violence prevention.”¹² The focus of oppression theory is to assess power differentials at the individual (couple) level and, equally as important, at the system level (defined as oppression).¹³ Therefore working to reduce the impact of oppression will break down the social structures that perpetuate domestic violence. Find more information here: <https://www.futureswithoutviolence.org/health/racism/>.

The Oregon Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence defines this as the Prevention through Liberation Theory and Framework.¹⁴ More information about this framework can be found here:

<https://www.ocadsv.org/resources/browse/71583>.



ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

There are vast resources available about domestic violence, oppression, and the intersection of domestic violence with culture, gender, ethnicity, and religion. Here are a few examples:

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NYS Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence. Q and A with Evan Stark, Ph.D. MSW. Retrieved September 15, 2021 from <https://opdv.ny.gov/professionals/abusers/coercivecontrol.html>.

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Sokoloff, N.J. & Dupont, I. (2005). Domestic Violence at the Intersections of Race, Class, and Gender: Challenges and Contributions to Understanding Violence Against Marginalized Women in Diverse Communities. *Violence Against Women*, 11(1), 38-64.

Sokoloff, N.J. & Pratt, C. (2005). *Domestic violence at the margins: readings on race, class, gender, and culture*. Rutgers University Press.

Stark, E. (2007). *Coercive Control: How Men Entrap Women in Personal Life*. Oxford University Press.

Szurgyi, M. (2017). *Intersectional Faces of Domestic Violence: Race, Class and Sexuality in Addressing Partner Abuse*. [PowerPoint Slides]. State University of New York Brockport.

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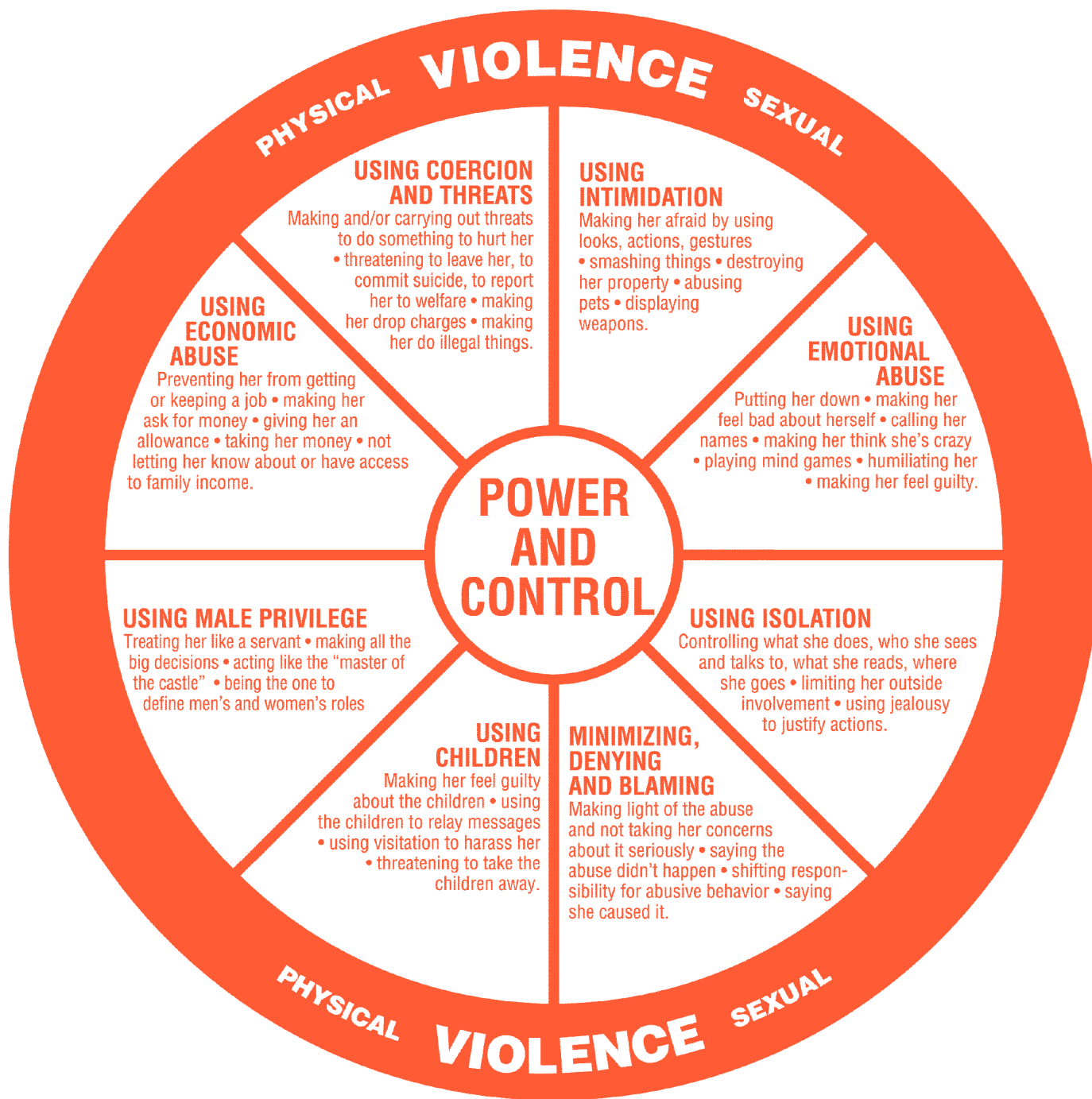
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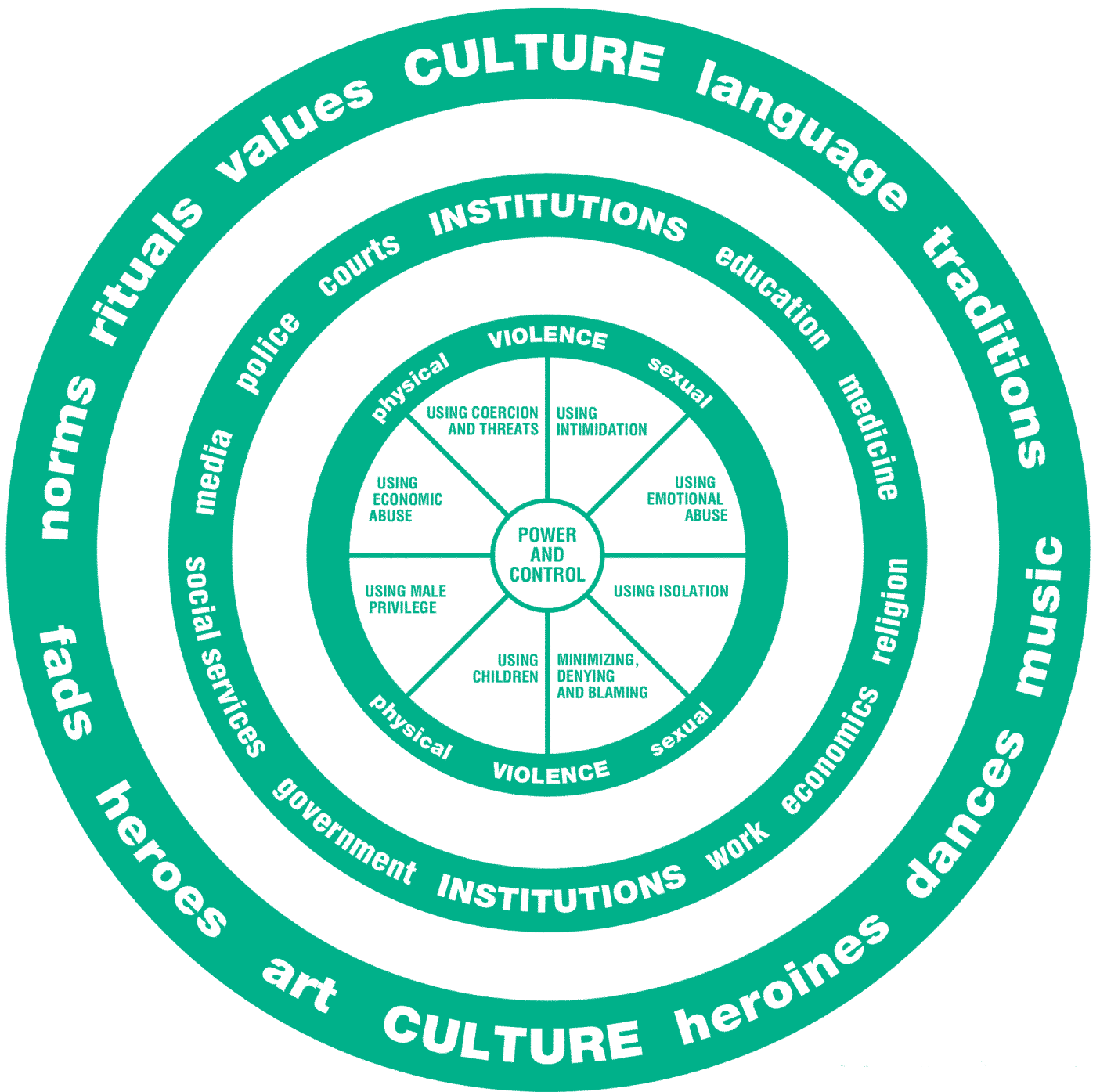
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END NOTES

¹ Walker, L. (1979).
² Ibid.
³ Dutton, M.A. (2009).
⁴ See, for example: Stark, E. (2007).
⁵ For this and other critiques, see: Serrata, J. (2017).
⁶ Wilson, J.K. (2019).
⁷ Domestic Abuse Intervention Programs. Wheel Information Center.
⁸ Domestic Abuse Intervention Programs. Culture Wheel Poster.
⁹ NYS Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence.
¹⁰ Szurgyi, M. (2017).
¹¹ Sokoloff, N.J. & Dupont, I. (2005).
¹² Adkison-Stevens, C. and Timmons, V. (2018).
¹³ Ibid.
¹⁴ Ibid.



Power and Control
from page 3



Culture Wheel
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This resources was developed by Rebecca Hoffmann Frances, LMFT of Maine Behavioral Healthcare in partnership with Promising Futures.

Promising Futures is a project of Futures Without Violence.
For more information on how to transform your program to effectively meet the needs of parent and child survivors of domestic violence,

Visit: www.promisingfutureswithoutviolence.org

Email: childrensteam@futureswithoutviolence.org

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