

## **Tri-County Batterer Intervention Network Minutes January 9, 2001**

**Present:** Michael Davis (Changepoint), Christine Crowe (Choices DVIP), Songcha Bowman (Private Practice), Gustavo Picazo (Changepoint), Margaret Langslet (PSU), Paula Manly (Private Practice), Marc Hess (Multnomah County and Sage) and Chris Huffine (Men's Resource Center)

**Minutes** by Margaret Langslet and edited by Chris Huffine

Discussion Topic: Addressing Other Forms of Oppression In Addition to Sexism in Group

-In batterer intervention it is important to address sexism, but should we address classism, ageism, racism, etc.?

-You can't address sexism without addressing the other isms. Clients can't deal with their oppressing of others until they see how they are oppressed and accept it. Many clients are victimized by their own oppression.

-Kivel wrote a piece about more powerful and less powerful groups in his book Men's Work. He said that everyone is in both more powerful and less powerful groups.

-It is a privilege of the majority to be ignorant of many of the ways the minority group is oppressed. A well-known example of this was when Marie Antoinette said about the poor "let them eat cake". She had no comprehension of what it truly meant to be without food. She assumed that everyone had access to food the way she did. So if she ran out of bread, she'd simply eat cake instead, which she ignorantly assumed the poor could do as well.

-We live in an oppressive society and the minority are much more aware of that oppression.

-Sizeism is another form of oppression that is often overlooked. Sizeism can be seen as really being a class issue because it changes with culture. In the past or in cultures when only the rich had an abundance of food, being overweight was the ideal. Now that the majority has plenty of food in this country and common foods tend to be high in fat, being underweight is the ideal. This is the same case when it comes to being tan. When the lower class was working outdoors pale was the ideal. After industry the poor moved inside and now being tan is seen as ideal.

-As soon as people start labeling people they stop seeing that person. People label me as an Asian woman and then they stop there instead of labeling me for who I am. There was an interesting piece of research reported in the newspaper recently. Researchers found that the

reason that people of other ethnic groups “all look the same” to the majority is because they (the majority culture) are likely to spend less time closely scanning that person’s face. Once they have labeled that person a certain racial background, they simply stop scanning, which leads to the misperception that there are fewer facial differences among members of that group.

-If you spend too much time on other isms in intervention then you may be letting the men avoid addressing their own abusive behavior as well as their sexism. You should use the other isms, but always bring it back to the idea of sexism.

-I have an interesting background because I am Jewish. I hear all the stereotypes and attempted genocide wasn’t that long ago, yet being Jewish is often not considered an oppressed group by some people.

-What happens in violent relationships when the wife makes more money? This is a risk factor for many people. Other people feel it varies. Some men are comfortable and some have resentment, but it hasn’t been a major issue. This issue is different when it comes to psychopathic men. Psychopathic men are more prone to seek out women who make more money so they can leech off of them. In Asian culture this is a very important issue. Many times if a woman makes more than her husband the minister will talk to the woman. Culture differences play a large role in this topic. In many cultures it is demasculinizing for the wife to make more money. It is a threat to many men. But, it depends on how you define yourself as a man, which is very important to cover in groups.

-Class is not solely defined by one’s income, but also one’s cultural identity and values.

-Another critique of talking about the different isms is that we may tend to be more liberal than our clients. It is important in intervention not to bring up politics. The men can feel like the intervention is a ‘liberal agenda’ and it can sound like brainwashing and alienate clients. The goal of becoming nonabusive and noncontrolling is not the agenda of any one political party, it is something that can presumably be embraced by people of all political backgrounds.

-Addressing homophobia is important because it ties into sexism. Many men are homophobic because they have such a fear of being feminine.

-In our culture you still have permission to use homophobia and sizeism. Also racism against immigrants. Recently on one radio station it was announced that a new video game came out

called 'Beat Up the Mexican'. The game is played by acting as a guard on the United State and Mexican border.

-In groups you should go into what is behind bigotry and this goes into power over.

-When a group of people is assimilated they become part of the power and then they tend to identify more strongly with the majority culture. For example, a hundred years ago the Irish were viewed and treated as a minority culture. Today, no such distinction is made. Mexicans are more accepted if they have lighter skin and hair and speak English.

-One person uses excerpts from the movie "American History X". He shows a section of the movie where a group of racist skinheads meet and get riled up by their leader. They then go into a small store owned by immigrants and ruin the store as well as beating and torturing the owners. This is used to illustrate creating a belief system and then acting on it. This ties into power. For many people in order to feel power they need to oppress someone else.

-Another challenge is how to address being the target of prejudice without responding in an abusive manner. For example, African-American men and the harassment they are more likely to receive from the police. Some then act on the rage that they feel and retaliate with violence. One way it can be framed for them is that their violence in that circumstance gives them a false sense of having "set things right". It allows them to delude themselves into believing they've helped stop the racism, when, in fact, it continues. Instead they are encouraged to look for more constructive and effective ways of challenging that sort of racism. The Civil Rights Movement provides many good examples of non-violent alternatives. But, before the civil rights movement nobody paid attention until there was violence. Violence detracts from what is actually being said. The words are lost when abuse is used.

-What about the cultural oppression present in the batterer intervention model? It's all set up on European values. For example, self-disclosure is typically expected and required in our groups. Yet, in some cultures it is very rare and especially difficult or shameful to disclose personal information in a group setting. A problem is standardizing treatment because it tends to generalize, which may be oppressive to non-mainstream cultures. The standards need to be flexible enough to be modified to accommodate people of other cultures.

-In intervention you need human connection first, one on one contact. That way you can get to know the person and their culture. We need to be careful that we don't objectify anyone as being just from a particular cultural group. We are all human beings with a unique combination of

qualities, drawn from a variety of cultural groups as well as our own individual personalities. Be careful not to dehumanize a person by seeing them solely as “male” or as “Hispanic”, etc. Every person is multi-faceted, and not solely the member of a single cultural group. Similarly, it is important that we remain in touch with our own humanity.

-People who do this work also have to be aware of their own cultural biases and areas of ignorance.

-While it is important to acknowledge the differences due to a person’s cultural background, it is also important not to collude with the man using that cultural difference to justify his abusive behavior.

-While oppression leads to the dehumanizing of people, the most pervasive amount of dehumanizing/oppression happens within the home as the batterer dehumanizes his partner and/or his children.

-One way of defining “political correctness” in a pejorative manner is as superficial attempts to appear culturally sensitive, without truly understanding the other culture. One example of this is wishing Jewish people “Happy Chanukah” at the same time you are wishing others a “Merry Christmas”. Chanukah is a much more minor holiday for the Jews, relative to Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashanah. Yet many view it as being like a “Jewish Christmas”. This form of good intentions without true understanding is very pervasive—a more subtle form of prejudice.

-Keep in mind that religion is often perverted to justify another’s agenda. Jesus’ Jewish and African ancestry hasn’t kept the KKK from burning crosses representing him to intimidate people of Jewish and African ancestry. In fact, any set of beliefs can be twisted to push a person’s personal agenda. AMEND has a section in their book that looks at pro-DV and anti-DV scripture passages. Of ten the Bible is misquoted or taken out of context to justify DV.

-John Bradshaw speaks of the “shame hot potato”—when we are shamed we tend to quickly pass it to others. Oppression is one avenue in which this occurs. There is a scene in “Do the Right Thing” in which there are a series of quick scenes in which various groups are shown making degrading comments about another group, then that group is shown making degrading comments about another group, etc.