

Tri-County Batterer Intervention Provider Network Meeting Minutes March 8, 2016

Present: Chris Huffine (Allies in Change), Matt Johnston (Domestic Violence Safe Dialogue), Adele Atwood (Pathfinders), Linda Castaneda (Castaneda Counseling), Jacquie Pancoast (Eastside Concern), Katherine Stansbury (Eastside Concern), Jennifer Hopkinson (Clackamas Women's Services), Jessica Stanley (Clackamas Women's Services), Emmy Ritter (Raphael House), Dawn Darling (VOA Home Free), Chelsea Penning (Multnomah County Dept of Community Justice), Kendra Harding (Lifeworks), Krystal Duff (Bridges 2 Safety), Kate Sackett (Portland State University), Rachel Smith (Portland State University), Tammie Jones (Multnomah County Court)

Minutes by Rachel Smith, edited by Chris Huffine, this information distributed 8/2017

Topic: Women who are mandated to BIPs

Note: The [Oregon Statewide BIP Standards](#) define a domestic violence offender as: "(a) An adult male 18 years of age or older who engages in "battering" against women; or (b) A male minor criminally convicted as an adult of conduct against women that constitutes "battering" in whole or in part." (137-087-0005). Chris Huffine and Rachel Smith are part of a working group formed by the Oregon BIP Advisory Committee to develop a paper on female offenders. The paper is tentatively set to focus on (a) women who abuse men and (b) women who abuse women.

In Oregon, there are a number of programs for female offenders: Allies in Change (AIC), Eastside concerns (starting), Choices, Bridges 2 Safety, and ARMS, to name a few, all in the Portland metro area.

Primary versus secondary aggression. Primary aggression is about control/power, whereas secondary aggression is in response to power and control dynamics. AIC is working on developing two separate curriculums for women (one for primary aggressors and one for secondary), and is, to Chris' knowledge, the only program in the state that separates [their women's groups](#) into primary and secondary aggressors. AIC's men's groups are not separated by these distinctions because the male secondary aggressors' group would be too small and it is much more difficult to screen for secondary aggression among men. Male secondary aggressors tend to be more specific in their examples of their partner's behavior, whereas primary aggressors tend to be more vague. Theoretically, there should be more male secondary aggressors than what we actually see in practice.

There does not seem to be programs with services specific to Spanish-speaking women. When Eastside did have a Spanish-speaking program, the counselor for that program noticed that the men who were secondary aggressors and were Spanish-speaking were with women who were English speaking who then used that privilege as part of the power-and-control dynamic.

Typicalities among female primary aggressors. Display patterns of abusive behaviors, and are usually less cooperative in intervention groups. Almost all of the women AIC sees, primary and secondary aggressors, are trauma survivors. The female primary aggressors group tends to be much more volatile and have histories of trauma that affect their behaviors. Primary aggressors that are in a group with mostly secondary aggressors will follow the culture of the group.

Women in the *secondary aggressors* group are typically more cooperative, learn the program content quicker (because they typically already know a lot of it).

Bridges uses a module curriculum (for men and women), the only difference for the women's group is that the language is changed. Most of the women at Bridges are secondary aggressors. Bridges still uses an accountability approach when working with secondary aggressors, and the women in the group tend to be pretty cooperative with the curriculum. Boundaries and how to set limits, and on-going safety, are additional topics covered in the women's groups.

Program length. Eastside is looking at doing a six month program for the pilot women's group, rather than the twelve months required for the men's group. Groups typically run shorter for women in Chris' experience over the past two decades.

Group size. Smaller groups (e.g., $n = 8$) have been most effective in terms of maintaining the quality of the program for female aggressors.

It would probably be best not to mix primary and secondary aggressors groups.

Confrontation. Chris' experience with female secondary aggressors is that you have to be more gentle in how you approach confrontation with secondary aggressors because they tend to be less thick-skinned, less calloused. Whereas primary female aggressors tend to be more calloused, and thus require stronger confrontation tactics.

What about the whole social context in which women are abusive? There is something to be said for women taking on masculine normative behaviors when they are primary aggressors - it doesn't excuse or justify the behavior. Women will also excuse their behavior (when perpetrating against men) by minimizing their behavior in saying that it wasn't that big of a deal because "I can't hurt him, because I'm a girl".

Defining secondary aggressor. Somebody who has the misfortune of being in an abusive relationship and responds to that abuse with abuse. So why is there not a completely separate curriculum? When we talk about distorted beliefs, they still have it in terms of justifying their use of violence. We also see a lot of female secondary aggressors minimizing their partner's behavior and talking a lot about their abusive behaviors, whereas primary aggressors will minimize their abusive behaviors. It is important to educate and get down to all the other things that led to them being in the program, because the women in the group tend to be very hyper-focused on the specific incident that they got in trouble for. For secondary aggressors, there are also issues that

come up with having developed bad habits that sometimes include being abusive or neglectful toward the children.

Secondary aggressors who go through BI get more than just accountability training for how they respond to the abuse in their relationships, they get empowered, get skills for addressing their relationship, get safe, etc. Secondary aggressors also have an intense focus on, as well as confusion about, their responsibility. The process of the BI group may be really valuable for secondary aggressors, even though they do not necessarily need all of the content of the program. Another thing with secondary aggressors is that the moment of their arrest often occurs as a "gotcha" moment, orchestrated by the "victim" (aka the primary aggressor). Part of this is that it really comes down to having a well organized and well educated coordinated community response. Most programs that work with women acknowledge that most of the women are secondary aggressors and treat them as such, but there are programs who also assume all of the women are primary aggressors and treat them as such.

Curricula for survivors and perpetrators are extremely similar (focus on power and control, etc), it's just that the approach is different.

Same-sex violence

The [Northwest Network](#) is a great resource for addressing same-sex violence, as well as comprehensive screening and advocacy tools that could actually be applicable across gendered domains.

It is more of a challenge to figure out who is a primary versus secondary aggressor in same sex relationships. Another issue with same-sex violence is the possibility of both members of the couple seeking victims' services. Sometimes it takes a skilled counselor knowledgeable about these dynamics to recognize what is going on in the relationship. At AIC, the majority of same-sex violence is among women. Homophobia does not seem to be as much an issue for same-sex female aggressors as it does same-sex male aggressors. Men in groups where there is a gay man in the group tend to experience fear of the objectification that women go through already.

A barrier to providing services to perpetrators in same-sex relationships is not having enough referrals to hold a group for "special populations".

All of this highlights the need to check our assumptions, the importance of education, and the need for well coordinated community responses.

Additional issues not covered today:

- Should female offenders even be mandated to BI?
 - Especially secondary aggressors.

- We exist within the context of a rape culture. What are we doing to protect violence against women within the context of this culture?