

Tri-County Batterer Intervention Provider Network Minutes: 6/12/01

Present: Paula Manly (Private Practice), Chris Huffine (Men's Resource Center), Michael Davis (Changepoint), Stacy Womack (ARMS), Songcha Bowman (Private Practice), Devarshi Bajpai (ASAP), Margaret Langslet (PSU)

Minutes by Margaret Langslet and Chris Huffine

Topic: How does the gender of the facilitator affect the group in batterer intervention

-There appear to be a variety of gender combinations of facilitation among various programs. Some groups are run by co-ed co-facilitators, some groups are run by a single male facilitator, and some groups are run by a single female facilitator.

- Washington County requires co-ed co-facilitation of all men's groups.

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One of the risks of a group being facilitated only by a man is that he is at greater risk of colluding with other group members concerning issues of sexism and male privilege/entitlement. Male facilitators need to be particularly aware of their own gender issues and biases.

-Among those who have had the experience of both individual and co-ed co-facilitation, there are advantages and disadvantages to having either a male or a female facilitator. However, all agreed that co-ed co-facilitation is better, when it is possible.

-Being a single woman facilitator, age may play a role. As an older woman, men may relate to her in a more maternal fashion, whereas they may be more prone to sexualizing and responding inappropriately to a younger female facilitator. To some extent this has also happened in co-ed co-facilitated groups.

- When sitting in on batterer intervention groups with both male and female facilitators, it did not seem like much of an issue.

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Christians Addressing Family Abuse (CAFA) is a provider in Eugene that addresses power and control issues from a Christian perspective. Two of the organizers of CAFA are women and if they do not have a male facilitator available, they try to have a male mentor in the group. ARMS is planning on having both a female and male facilitator in groups.

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One of the drawbacks of co-facilitation is the financial cost. It costs twice as much to offer the same service. One solution is to pay the two people differently. While they have equal responsibilities within the group, outside one (who gets paid more) is the only one responsible for paperwork, returning phone calls, sending reports to probation, etc.

-There was some discussion around the dilemma one program is facing in trying to offer some co-ed co-facilitation with groups that have typically only been facilitated by males: It is important at times to only have a male facilitator because the level of sharing is increased and so is self-disclosure, especially around shame. Bly and Mead both think that men support what it is like to be a man and when clients share with other men it helps them in other relationships. But, these men also need a female perspective. One possible solution is to bring in a female facilitator to each group once a month so that it is expected, but not constant. One woman on the staff subs in for male facilitators and it seems like when she does the clients are trying to prove something, for example being nice to her to prove that they can be nice to women. Maybe the woman who drops in should attend groups consistently for about four weeks so that the men can develop a relationship with her. If a female facilitator only comes in once every four weeks, she could become a token woman. The clients need to develop a relationship with her so that it is a safe environment.

-In my experiences, there hasn't been much difference in disclosure due to the gender of the facilitator. It is surprising how much male clients do tell female facilitators.

-There is self-disclosure after the client develops a rapport with someone and has respect for him or her. With work, male facilitators can understand how women feel and share this with clients just as well as women. Gender is not so much the issue, but the skill, awareness, honest concern and rapport of the facilitator.

-I have facilitated alone, co-facilitated and taken groups over from women. At first the clients seem less able to trust women, but after a couple groups that fades.

- It's good to have a second facilitator, no matter what their gender is.

- When facilitators of different genders both run groups together it helps with role modeling. It models a mutually respectful and equal relationship between a man and a woman. Another advantage is that men's sexist attitudes are more likely to emerge in the ways they treat the two facilitators differently. For example, while men rarely compliment me (another male) on my appearance, that is more likely to happen with my female co-facilitator. When it does we try to point it out and process what's behind such compliments. Another example is how men, particularly newer men, may apologize specifically to the female facilitator for their use of profanity. Sometimes a female

facilitator is a lightning rod for sexism and it can help flush out any additional sexist attitudes. When clients only interact with men then there is not someone to immediately react to. Clients may be less likely to talk about gender issues with women, but they are more likely to act on their ideas. Also, many men say that they have no issues with women, but they treat women differently.

- The female facilitator is also educating the co-facilitator, not just the men in the group.

- The age of the facilitator makes a difference from my observations of working with older and younger women. Younger female facilitators get comments every once in a while and clients can sexualize and objectify them. Clients also sometimes dismiss younger women's voices, but not as much as older women. The age of the male facilitator doesn't seem to matter to the clients as much as the age of female facilitators. Many other groups and cultures have more respect for elders.

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On the other hand, some men also feel that it is easier to share with women than with men.

- It can be valuable to use videos about the history of the women's movement in groups. It shows where sexist attitudes came from and many men don't realize the struggle of women. Other men think it is just worthless and might not share this attitude if there was a female facilitator.

- Many men expect other men to agree with their attitudes.

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Regardless of their gender, the facilitators have to be an advocate and voice for battered women. Providers should talk about male privilege and women can articulate this well.

- Usually when there is co-facilitation one provider is more experienced than the other which can result in the group being able to see one is taking "the lead" more than the other (especially when one is training). How do you work with one more experienced provider, but also model equality? This may be especially tricky when the more experienced facilitator is male, since it may inadvertently create the appearance of the women deferring to the man. The only way to get around that is for the facilitators to spend time together outside of the group and plan groups and responsibilities well. It could also be good to let the woman start the group. There are subtle ways to address this problem like who collects homework and especially money.