

Tri-County Batterer Intervention Provider Network Meeting Minutes April 14, 2015

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Minutes by Paula Manley, edited by Chris Huffine

Discussion Topic: Social Media and Domestic Violence Perpetration

The evolution of technology is a lot like an arms-race in that we can never really keep up with the new technologies and ways to use them as tools of abuse and control.

One attendee provided the analogy of an "Evil Jackie Chan movie", in which everything gets turned into a weapon, which can be analogous to domestic violence and social media in that everything online can be turned into a weapon. Every time there is a new technology, there is a new weapon. With the continued widespread use of social media we are seeing how anything can be used as a tool for manipulation and abuse.

This is particularly true in terms of stalking behaviors, as the growth of social media, and the evolution of online technologies in general, have enhanced people's abilities to track others' locations and activities, especially for technologically-savvy abusers. The founder of Facebook, Mark Zuckerberg, himself [publicly stated](#) that he thinks privacy in and of itself is not a good thing and that everything being publicly available is good. [This Washington Post story](#) may also be interesting. Other popular social media sites like [Instagram](#) and [Twitter](#) do not make maintaining individual privacy very easy for the average person. [This article](#) may be helpful for advocates wanting to share some tips on maintaining privacy on social media websites. In many ways, the privacy options for the various online social media outlets are in favor of protecting the freedom of speech rights of abusers at the expense of victims' safety.

The advent of social media and the many privacy concerns that have come with it make it difficult for survivor advocates in terms of safety planning, especially with the continued advances made with [geo-tracking capabilities of social media outlets](#). It often seems that the only option for survivors to maintain their online privacy is to just turn off everything and not engage in online social media at all.

Regarding technologies in general, there are a lot of scary and evolving technologies out there that create some real safety concerns across the board, and we are going to see more-and-more of these being used as new abusive tools used as additional modes of terrorizing victims, as is often the case when social media intersects with domestic violence.

How do you implement effective safety policies for everyone while also protecting the rights of everyone?

One possible strategy to help maintain survivors' safety online may be to develop methods for BI providers to be able to identify those abusers who are technologically savvy and who use those skills as tools for their abusive behaviors, similar to how we identify who is more likely to use weapons and physical violence. Thus, technological savviness can potentially serve as another type of identifier in terms of abusive tactics used by the individuals in our BIP groups.

Education is powerful: When you are identifying tactics and definitions of abuse, you are educating someone on how to communicate with the hope that they are going to do so in a positive way. When social media comes up in our BI groups some of us have shown segments from "[Modern Primate](#)", which is a popular podcast series that covers various topics related to violence and sexism (e.g., rape culture; see September, 2014 minutes).

These shifts in technology are also affecting people differently based on generational gaps. Specifically, it seems that people in younger generations are becoming much less concerned with their own personal privacy, and possibly more convinced that personal privacy is no longer a reality when it comes to the internet, and are shifting toward having less-and-less regard for filtering what they put online (e.g., people are starting to have their relationship fights/arguments publicly online). For example, when some of us, as advocates and BI providers, are talking to people about safety and boundaries online, the importance of these issues does not always come across, especially with younger offenders and survivors.

People are becoming less and less humanly attached which is really going to affect how we operate as BI providers. Social media has created a major cultural shift in that there is a growing attitude climate characterized by an increased sense of entitlement and decreasing empathy, particularly among members of younger generations (i.e., "I am entitled to access you whenever and however I want"). For instance, there is [an ongoing longitudinal study](#) examining empathy among college students that has, so far, found a 40% decrease in empathetic attitudes among college students. We are going to start seeing more-and-more of this cultural shift among our younger clients.

As a society, we are setting ourselves up for losing impulse control and empathy. As providers and advocates, we need to be taking note and checking in about how technology is affecting our clients. One of the core aspects of BIP work that has been made more difficult by social media is getting the clients to see their partners as fully human. A potential strategy could be to have clients "friend" the BI program on Facebook so that the providers can see how they are doing on

social media, but realistically, that is probably not really part of the BI provider's job, as it gets into surveillance. The better strategy would be to get BIP clients to do their own self-surveillance and to hold themselves accountable.

Part of the issue is that technology and social media have become so integrated into everyday life. In terms of effective intervention, it goes back to having "[cultural humility](#)", learning what the clients think, and getting them to realize what is appropriate behavior and what is abusive.

One of the good things about technology and social media is that it connects people who are like-minded and can connect people around a common cause. While getting the message(s) behind our BIP work out may not be as fast as we would want it to be, we are seeing more-and-more young people taking stands publicly online against the current culture and we are seeing some real change. Also, the intricate connectivity that is inherent in social media allows us, in general, to see diverse views that oppose our own. Bringing that online inter-connectivity down to individual relationships, it is good to be in a relationship in which you do not both completely agree with each other. Still, while social media exists as a platform for getting information out there, people, in general, do not necessarily want to care or take the next step.

The issues around social media and domestic violence underscore the goal of taking the onus off of the survivor and holding the offenders accountable. As a society, we need to stand behind survivors who make the choice to be "done with his abuse". We live in a society that blames the victim and in which perpetrators are protected by so many laws, so a critical part of our role in ending abuse is to continue working toward fostering norms that say this cultural dynamic is *not* okay. Abusers are becoming much less anonymous and secluded in terms of being able to be abusive in plain sight, and it remains difficult to make sure the offenders are being held accountable without continuing to put the onus on the survivor.

There is a new culture and environment that we have to adapt to and we need to try to educate ourselves on these technologies in order to be effective in our work as BI providers. There is also a culture of "one-upping" in these evolving technological contexts in that every time we learn something new, someone else develops another new online platform or technology that we may have to deal with in our BIP work. Ultimately, however, it is our job to change the heart and the minds of abusers so that they no longer engage in abusive behaviors and endorse abusive belief systems.

People with similar beliefs cluster together and they change in clusters (re: Wendy Viola's dissertation findings - see December, 2014 minutes), which is helpful in terms of understanding how larger-scale change can occur beginning with small-scale changes via "clusters" of people. In other words, "he" is not some random guy, he is a part of a cluster with specific cultural beliefs and therefore can affect changes within his own cluster, and those changes can start with BI providers' work with the individuals in the group. This latter work can be done by leveraging rapport (but not colluding) with individuals in groups to affect changes within individuals and

then within "clusters". In doing so, we can start to see when one individual in a group has a sort of "light come on" (or an "*ah ha!*" moment), which can then spark "lights" within other group members. We can also target interventions so that we talk about how the life changes we advocate are in the self-interest of the individuals.

This is a 'men's problem' and *men* need to stand up and speak out against these behaviors. We will start getting better as a society when men start getting better.