

Tri County Batterer Intervention Provider Network Meeting Minutes March 12th, 2013

Attendance: Jennifer Hopkinson (Clackamas Women's Services), Jacquie Pancoast (Central City Concern/ChangePoint), Samantha Naliboff (VOA Home Free), Andrew Altman (Dept. of Community Justice—DV unit), Tim Logan (SoValTi), Linda Castaneda (Manley Interventions/Allies in Change), Charley Zimmerman (Allies in Change), Jennifer Warren (Seeds of Change/Allies in Change), Regina Rosann (ARMS), Debbie Tomasovic (A Better Way Counseling), Wendy Viola (Portland State University), Steve Stewart (Allies in Change), Chris Huffine (Allies in Change)

Minutes by Wendy Viola, edited by Chris Huffine

Discussion Topic: The Men's Rights Movement.

Men's rights, father's rights, and male victims of DV movements tend to intermingle. On the surface they are typically presented as advocating for men getting fair treatment. They typically focus on male victims of abuse who aren't adequately represented, fathers who are not being fairly treated in terms of their parental rights, and related ways that they assert men are being discriminated against simply by being male. However, the hidden (and not so hidden) agenda for most of these groups is to challenge widely accepted concepts of sexism and to strive to undermine the gendered analysis of clearly gendered issues (e.g., parental involvement, violence).

Chris's guess is that they started to gain energy in the late 80's/early 1990s which also saw a resurgence of energy within the women's movement. For example, there was a men's rights group that used to attend the FVCC meetings (and often tried to disrupt those meetings) in the early 1990s as the DV movement got some new energy. They often would picket anti-DV events back in the early and mid-90s. The belief within the DV movement was that they would just fade away eventually and the best thing to do was to ignore them, but they've made a resurgence on the internet in recent years. Here is a link that lists some of those sites: <http://www.splcenter.org/get-informed/intelligence-report/browse-all-issues/2012/spring/misogyny-the-sites> . The Southern Poverty Law Center recently published an article debunking a number of the claims of the men's rights movement which can be accessed via these links: <http://www.splcenter.org/get-informed/intelligence-report/browse-all-issues/2012/spring/a-war-on-women> and <http://www.splcenter.org/get-informed/intelligence-report/browse-all-issues/2012/spring/myths-of-the-manosphere-lying-about-women>.

During presentations that they give, DV advocates tend to hear the claim that men are just as likely to be the victims of DV as women. Often, these opinions are based on anecdotes. But sometimes other sources are cited. Who are the people in mainstream media who also advocate the gender symmetry argument?

A subgroup of abusive men are also quick to believe and report that women are just as abusive as men. One reason they do this is to imply that their partner was equally abusive. Others do it to

normalize their behavior. Still others do it to challenge any gendered analysis that is offered in group (e.g., male socialization, male privilege). Some BIP clients will refer providers to specific websites or books that “validate” their belief that women are just as abusive towards their adult male partners. One provider received an email from a former participant referring him to a website, shrink4men.com, that has articles about what it’s like to be married to a borderline woman. The participant found it very validating and suggested that the provider share it with other participants who might also find it validating.

A component of the men’s rights movement is claiming to be victimized by being falsely accused of perpetrating sexual assault. RADAR: Respecting Accuracy in Domestic Violence Abuse Reporting, is a website that offers information and resources for men who believe that they are victimized by their female partners. Registerher.com is a website for men to vilify women who have accused them of perpetrating sexual assault. It might be helpful to have a list of men’s rights organizations or websites so that we can be aware when people bring up names of organizations that they’ve found useful. A lot of these websites are clearly reactive to something or aggressive towards something. It’s not too hard to tell by looking quickly at some of these websites that they have a reactive agenda.

Where can we send men who really are victims? Occasionally they may also access these websites. It would also be useful to have a list of legitimate resources for men who have actually been victimized.

Men can find groups on the internet that are validating for taking a victim stance: even if men are distancing themselves from peers who support this victim stance or the men’s rights movements, they can still find those groups on the internet. Providers may respond with a statement along the lines of: “You’ve got your own work to do: this article, this guy, etc. is not going to go to jail for you if you don’t finish this class—don’t let these materials distract you from the work that you have to do.”

There seems to be an understanding that there’s a type of woman that will seduce men, have children with them, and then call the police, which other men in groups tend to recognize. There’s also a belief that the world is beginning to conspire more against white men, which is becoming more prevalent among BIP participants. Derek Jensen’s book, *A Language Older than Words*, speaks to this issue and may be helpful for providers. When men take a victim stance and claim that the system is out to get white men, providers may encourage them to go look at who wrote the laws, who are the judges and the lawyers: they’re mostly white men.

It’s important to acknowledge that just because white men have power and privilege, they may still be suffering, and just because they’re suffering doesn’t mean that they don’t still have power and privilege.

There have been several other men’s movements in the past couple of decades that are quite distinct from the men’s rights groups mentioned above. There has been the pro-feminist men’s

movement, which agrees with and supports feminist tenants. It developed in the late 60's/early 70's and has ebbed and flowed in popularity in parallel to the women's movement. It tends to be more rooted in the academic world and a number of its proponents have been academics. The mytho-poetic men's movement became quite popular in the late 80's, sparked in part by Bill Moyers' interview with Robert Bly who wrote the book *Iron John*. This men's movement focused on providing support for men through wisdom circles, drumming circles, and weekend wilderness retreats. This movement was not particularly anti-feminist, but at the same time generally did not talk about male power, privilege or sexism in conventional ways. Like many popular movements, this one had faded significantly by the late 90's. The Promise Keepers developed around the same time. It is a Christian based group that was enormously popular for a time and continues to this day. It encouraged men to step back into their role as head of the household. While it did challenge men to behave in more prosocial ways (e.g., being more involved with the family), it also encourages traditional gender roles.

Who are some of the most well-known figures promoting the concept of gender symmetry in DV? Donald Dutton was originally a well-regarded expert on perpetrators including writing the book *The Batterer*. He tended to focus on a sub-group of abusive men with Borderline Personality Disorder. Later he became increasingly critical of the DV movement. While some of his early criticisms had some merit, he became increasingly critical and hostile towards the traditional DV movement. Ultimately he has strongly embraced the belief that women are as abusive as men and that the needs of battered men are typically not considered.

John Hamel is a California therapist who has worked with abusive men for many years. In the past decade he has become quite busy writing books, holding trainings, and editing journals that generally promote the gender symmetry presumption. Because this information is often housed within a broader empirically supported analysis of domestic violence and batterer intervention, it gives greater credence to the gender symmetry argument. He's quite credible and offers good insights, but he's quite intent that women are as abusive as men. He and Chris have had contact in the past and have co-presented at the San Diego training.

Others who have written journal articles and books supportive of the idea that women are as abusive as men include Daniel Sonken (who wrote *Learning To Live Without Violence*, the first workbook for abusive men), Tanya Nichols, Erin Pizzey (who was an early well known victim advocate who later shifted her stance), and Deborah Capaldi (who is based at the University of Oregon's Oregon Learning Center). There's so much literature about gender symmetry that anyone who wants to take that stance can locate information to back up that argument. For example, Martin Fiebert at Cal State Long Beach has compiled an annotated list of hundreds of studies that find equal levels of DV perpetrated by men and women. Chris is willing to forward one version of this list (which is regularly updated).

A couple of people who have been outspoken on the other side are Walter DeKeseredy, and Molly Dragowitz who offer measured critiques of the gender symmetry argument.

How to reconcile the discrepancies between those studies that find roughly equal levels of DV perpetrated by men and women and those that indicate that typically 85-90% of DV is perpetrated by men against women? The studies that find gender symmetry are usually general population studies. In other words, they survey a general group of people and ask them if they have been abusive towards a romantic partner and if they have been abused by a romantic partner. They often make use of the Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS) developed by Murray Straus and Richard Gelles. While a very popular research tool in determining the presence of domestic violence, it has significant flaws. In particular, it records the abusive behavior without consideration of the impact, intent, or context of the abuse.

It (and other survey tools used in these studies) typically record the abuse without taking into consideration its impact. Other studies have found that the abuse experienced by men tends to have much more limited impact on them—causing fewer injuries and often leading to no fear of the partner. This is consistent with the abuse that many abusive men report experiencing from their partners. It is more typically annoying to them than terrorizing them. The CTS and other tools typically don't ask about the intent of the abuse. Studies have found that more of the abuse done by women is in response to being abused or is more expressive in nature. The abuse done by men is more typically instrumental—as a means to an end and intended to dominate and control. Finally, the CTS and other tools don't consider the larger context of the abuse. A single blow is coded the same regardless of whether it was the first time it occurred or the hundredth time it occurred. As a result isolated acts of abuse or lumped in with far more serious patterns of abuse.

Another complicating factor is that survivors tend to understate the extent of their victimization, whereas perpetrators tend to understate their perpetration and overstate the extent to which they're victims. This can further muddy results.

The studies that typically cite an 85/15 male/female perpetrator split typically target sub-populations who have already been identified as being abused based on crime victimization reports or have otherwise been victimized. They tend to focus on the individuals who have experienced multiple acts of abuse from a romantic partner and have been significantly negatively affected by this abuse. When these parameters are imposed the data tends to reveal fairly consistently an 85/15 split along gender lines.

Michael Johnson's 4 types of abusive patterns further reinforce the above findings. He classifies domestic violence into four categories. Common couples violence (minor abuse, minimally impactful) which is found to be equally perpetrated by men and women and, as the name implies, is the most widespread. Most of what general populations surveys find fits into this category. Intimate terrorism is his description of an on-going pattern of abuse intended to dominate and control. This group is predominantly males. Violent resistance is his description of what others describe as secondary aggression—where a victim of on-going abuse becomes abusive back. This category is predominantly females. Finally, mutual violent control describes relationships

where both are aggressive towards each other and, while having equal levels of males and females is the least common.

Providers' experience with battered men indicates that this is a small population. There seems to be a ratio of about 5:1 battered women to battered men, which is consistent with the 85/15 split. Those groups that have worked with battered men over the years (e.g., Men's Resource Center, Allies in Change, Domestic Violence Resource Center) have never had enough in services at the same time to start a support group for abused men. These abused men have been in both same sex and opposite sex relationships.

Among men who have been battered (i.e., experiencing a pattern of abuse that causes significant distress), the majority were also hostages in some way, which is a dynamic of all abusive relationships. Another common theme is that female batterers are often being abusive to the kids as well, so men stay in the relationship in order to protect the children. Battered men are also often subjected to power differentials where their partner has power over them in some way. Their partner may be more intelligent, may be more likely to get custody, etc. than the man.

Why is it that some abusive men seem to push so strongly for how abusive they believe women can be? One possibility is that, to some extent, anecdotally these men more typically experienced child abuse from their mother and/or were otherwise poorly treated by women in the past. How do we approach these men and get them to do the work that they need to do in order to see their relationships as they are? One tactic is to encourage men not to over-generalize. For example, just because your mother or former partner were that way doesn't mean that all women are that way. Don't challenge their personal experiences, but qualify that this isn't everyone's experience. It may also be worthwhile to take these men out of the group, and discuss the utility of bringing these attitudes into the group. It may also be helpful to discuss it in a group to open the door for other group members to recognize that they're going through the same thing and have also been victimized themselves. The point is that while these men may have experienced their own victimization in the past, that doesn't justify them victimizing others. One provider offers an educational piece on moving from being a victim to becoming a victimizer, which is an easy transition to make.

Statistically, survivors of childhood sexual abuse become perpetrators at the same rate as the general population. People who grew up in homes affected by DV are more likely than the general population to become involved in DV as adults, but still this is only a portion of those who witness DV in their families. The intergenerational transmission of DV seems to be due more to being surrounded by pro-DV values or anti-social values than to witnessing DV in one's home. Living in a DV-affected home or a home with criminally oriented values leads to associations with peers with more criminally-oriented values, and it is these relationships with antisocial peers that are related to later perpetration of DV. It's not just the criminal orientation of the attitudes that surround young men, but the absence of more anti-DV or pro-social values that is also influential.

Custody battles tend to turn up more among more misogynistic men, and are often more about power than about parenting. A lot of these men are not even interested in parenting, but in re-establishing control. Non-abusive men are more likely to seek joint rather than sole custody, because the custody battle isn't as much about power and control. Abusive fathers tend to seek full custody 3-4 times more often than non-abusive men, and tend to get it, because their abused partners tend to look worse in court than women who have not been abused. Abused women may be misperceived as paranoid, when their fear is adaptive and the behaviors that they use to respond to that fear can actually be quite inventive. In some cases it's a yes-and situation: some victims do have mental health problems *and* their partners have been abusive, particularly because people who have mental health issues are targeted for abuse. More typically, victims do not have mental illness before being abused. Abused men look fine psychologically and can talk to a psychologist more smoothly than abused partners who are trauma survivors. For these reasons, abusers may come off as better adjusted than the victims. This is exacerbated by the tendency of perpetrators to understate their perpetration of violence, and victims to overstate their own perpetration of violence. There are custody evaluations that have really surprised providers, largely because the people doing the actual evaluations are psychologists who have not been trained in DV. BIP providers can have a really powerful voice in establishing custody decisions, but providers' reports can be largely dismissed in making those decisions. Providers should avoid making sweeping generalizations about their clients' abusive behavior, but describe specific incidents, which can't be as easily dismissed.

One male secondary aggressor got so fed up with the system (he was the victim but still got in trouble by the system) that he took on a more aggressive stance, blaming the system in his groups. But once a facilitator explained to him that getting so heated about the system is not the way to get his kids back, he dropped it completely and now speaks up when others start railing against the system.

There isn't evidence that there are lots of abusive women out there, but there are some. BIP providers are so stuck in the stance of participants being the abusive ones, that we may overlook those rare cases where partners are legitimately mentally ill or where men may be victims themselves. When participants talk more about the violence that their partners have perpetrated, it's often a sign that they're actually the one's perpetrating abuse. In these situations, the emphasis may be: it's not so much about what she did, it's about your reaction to her. This necessitates looking at the context of the relationship and what the perpetrators have done to prompt their partners to perpetrate violence against them.