

Tri County Meeting Minutes
December 14th, 2010

- I. **Boys Advocacy and Mentoring:** This group does mostly primary prevention, as opposed to tertiary intervention (after the fact), or secondary prevention (which targets those at risk), though because this program works with males, it could also be considered secondary prevention.

A. Introductions

1. A lot of men that Chris works with wonder “why don’t they teach this in school?”—BAM! is what it would look like if some concepts from BIPs were taught in schools.
2. Howard Hiton: works with middle-school aged boys and their families in schools, treatment centers, and private practice, has done research on boys’ educational issues, and works with parents and school professional groups about boys’ educational issues.
3. Stephen Grant: clinical social worker—works with younger children, children of chemically dependent parents in private practice, runs some boys groups, and has worked in the school context. He is currently running a group for African American sophomores at Grant HS, and should be able to serve that whole population each year using a model similar to BAM!

- A. The main objective of BAM! is to get boys to be more emotionally skilled in ways that work with their relational styles, but also the program also involves advocating for boys, specifically in schools, where they’re often seen as problems. Howard and Stephen found that boys were willing to be open and vulnerable one on one with them, but shut it down once they left the groups, due to peer environment that was limiting. All of the authors of BAM! started working independently with peer groups to address this phenomenon, and came together to write the curriculum. As women’s position in society has improved, boys seem to have gotten lost in the fold. BAM’s objective is to teach them to support themselves so that they can support women as well.

- B. There are gendered tendencies, despite some parents’ best efforts to limit adherence to gender norms.

1. Boys are losing contact with themselves, others, and schools: 70% of students feeling alienated in schools are boys, who report feeling alone even if they don’t appear isolated, and boys account for 80% of youth suicide
2. ADD is much more frequent in males—ratios from 4:1 to 9:1, depending on the setting
3. Girls outscore boys in reading and writing, most valedictorians are female
4. Of kids medicated for ADD in America, 90% are boys. For some boys, medication drastically improves their performance, however, boys get extremely over diagnosed and over referred
 - i. 85% of the world’s Ritalin prescribed in the US.

5. In the Portland public schools, boys graduate at much lower rates than girls, and have a much greater presence in special education.
- C. These negative outcomes for boys may be due to institutionalized biases. The Social Skills Rating System, which is used to determine whether a child meets criteria for special education based on the child's, teachers', and parents' perceptions of students, is very lopsided in terms of statistical biases towards boys in terms of "problem" areas. This begs the question of whether girls have more desirable skill-sets.
1. Oppression devalues the skills of the oppressed group, and as women have become generally less oppressed, relational skills are becoming more valued.
 2. When boys are evaluated, based on this test, we're setting them up to be viewed as problems.
 3. We interpret behavior differently for boys and girls—do we need to change boys, or environments, or both?
- E. There are some typically male social styles, in which we should begin to look for strengths (being class clown, and doing so appropriately and sensitively). Similarly, girls may have more empathetic skills, but don't always use them for good. We should look more critically at what we consider social skills.
1. We value different social skills in boys and girls, and see them as more beneficial for girls, but then this switches in adulthood.
- F. Special Education Enrollment: the more objective the diagnosis (the more quantifiable) the much more equitable the gender breakdown, but when we get to diagnoses that are more subjective (ADD, autism, etc.), boys are again much more likely to be diagnosed, which implies a bias against male relational and behavioral styles.
- G. The SEARCH Institute (searchinstitute.org) developed an inventory of assets, both internal and external. Girls outpace boys on all but 2 assets—boys feel safer in schools, and boys are more confident about their futures.
1. Boys and men tend to overestimate their abilities, and girls devalue their achievements—the things that men do are celebrated much more than the things that girls do.
- H. Nature/Nurture Interactions
1. There are biological underpinnings of behavior, though the DV community has a strong bias towards emphasizing nurture. There is a taboo about nature because it could be misused to remove blame.
 - a. The DV community still does talk about nature, but in coded ways.
- I. BAM! tries to use neutral communication patterns in groups, and shares data about boys with schools, to help build more supportive environments.
1. Communication preferences and contact styles: there are some biological tendencies
 - a. Women can better name emotions in faces—boys don't look at faces as much as girls

- b. Newborn boys are more interested in films about cars/mobiles/ moving things than faces
 - c. Babies with less testosterone make more eye contact, and have a larger vocabulary
 - d. Girls with a lot of testosterone show preferences for male toys and improved spacial abilities
 - e. Influences of estrogen on language: verbal fluency, verbal speed, naming things (differences disappear at menopause, reappear with estrogen replacement therapy)
- 2. Boys tend towards motion as opposed to emotion (tendency towards effect rather than affect)
 - a. BAM! tries to get boys to think about the difference between aggression and violence, and asks if there are there positive ways to be aggressive. Aggression may be a pro-social skill characteristic of boys that's often misinterpreted or overlooked.
 - 1. Part of aggression is decision-making
 - b. There is an apparent female predisposition towards empathy, and a male predisposition towards systems (as per Simon Cohen, studying autism at Cambridge)
 - 1. Boys convey a sense of understanding that their preferences are not beneficial.
 - 2. BAM! tries to foster empathy for one's self, which enables boys to seek contact when needed.
 - 3. BAM! tries to create contact-rich environments in accordance with male preferences.
- 3. These predispositions are only exacerbated by the social environments that these dispositions lead them to in the first place.
 - a. BAM! will be doing a day and a half- long training at PSU in Feb. about advocating for boys, more information at bamgroups.com

J.

Group Structure

- 1. BAM! is run mostly with 5th graders, but can be adapted to different age groups. It is a strengths-based, prevention program, which uses males' preferential contact styles, and considers itself somewhat educational. Groups meet in 10-week cycles, about an hour per group.
 - 2. Groups emphasize physical challenges that bring participants up against vulnerable emotions and attempts to induce difficult emotions so that the group can work through healthy means of dealing with these emotions, together.
 - 3. The facilitators utilize strategic storytelling—facilitators are open about parts of their own lives, not about trying to get their own needs met, but to anchor groups to their own experiences
 - 4. A focus of the program is to develop ideas about what it means to be a good, healthy man
- K. Boys tend to be more comfortable when their attention is on something else, eye contact is vulnerable, so boys tend to prefer shoulder to shoulder over face to face

contact. Working with boys requires understanding and respecting these relational preferences, at least at first, and then you can try to emphasize the value of other styles. BAM! facilitators eventually coach and model face to face conversation and, eye contact after they've established safety and support in the group. Boys don't have the same biological ease with language as girls, so safety and support must be established first.

- L. During the final week, the boys are asked to attend with a significant grown-up in their life. The group meets outdoors at night, and one facilitator meets with the adults, asking them to identify something about the boys that they want to make sure they don't lose. This generates conversations that probably wouldn't have occurred otherwise, and facilitators have given the adults some education about how to support boys.
 - a. A study did find significant pre-post BAM! change in attitudes about masculine stereotypes.

Conversation:

1. A lot of men don't want their sons to be like them, and want relationships with their sons that are different from their own relationships with their fathers.
2. BAM! does a little media literacy with the high school aged boys, but not really with younger ones ("Dream Worlds III," a documentary about media portrayals of men, is recommended).
3. Something implicit in BAM! is that there is a male culture—BIPs don't always offer male-informed, culturally appropriate styles for male communication.
 - a. BIP providers believe that men want facts, and use facts to get men to buy-in to the program.
 - b. BIPs try to help men become more relational and empathic—it's disconnection from others, from relationships that create violence.
 - i. Implicit in masculinity is the idea that relationships are dangerous, which gives rise to power and control dynamics. BIPs try to help men see relationships as collaborative instead of combative.
 - ii. Abusers are "male asthmatics"—we're all exposed to cultural norms of masculinity, abusers are especially reactive to them.
 - iii. When batterers are asked to identify males that they respect, they usually identify healthy men, and when they are asked to list qualities of good partners and fathers, they come up with very pro-social lists, so they know cognitively what they should be doing.
 - iv. Men in groups never look at each other when they check in, apparently trying to avoid connection—should we accept that in BIP groups, or try to change that?
 1. In groups that are older, more integrated, participants tend to make more eye contact (women do that, too, in groups for survivors).
 2. Eye contact is usually accompanied by getting deeper in conversation.

4. What does BAM! do around sexuality?
 - a. The program doesn't deal with it specifically as a component of the curriculum, but would add it to curricula for high school boys.
 - b. For boys, the main source of information around sexuality tends to be other boys, media.
 - c. It is important to stress the idea that intimacy does not equal sexuality—that you can have intimate relationships with people you are not sexually involved with. It might be worthwhile to add something about modeling/what these intimate, nonsexual relationships would look like.
 - d. Howard will be doing a workshop in January for new fathers, through Providence hospital, providing information to help parents guide their children.