

Tri-County Batterer Intervention Provider Network meeting minutes--11/20/2007

Present: Chris Huffine (Allies in Change Counseling Center), Sara Windsheimer (Choices), Lynda Bridges (Bridges to Safety), Shaun Kouradson (ARMS), Brad Peterson (A New Life Christian Counseling), Regina Rosann (ARMS), Diana Groener (Allies), Sarah McDowell (Raphael House), Paul Munson (Choices), Tim Logan (SoValTi), Lorena Connelly (Los Niños Cuentan), Andrea Poole (Manley Interventions), Paula Manley (Manley Interventions), Jackie Pancoast (ChangePoint), Julie Kingsland (Men's Resource Center/Women's Counseling Center), Phil Broyles, Cassandra Suess (Men's Resource Center/Women's Counseling Center)

Minutes by Paula Manley and Chris Huffine

TOPIC -Female Facilitator issues

In a men's group, there is one woman in the room. What is it like to be the only woman in the room? What are women's experiences in working with the co-facilitator? What are ways that male facilitators may behave that can cause issues?

When a woman makes a comment, followed by a male facilitator, the group will tend to focus on the comments made by the male facilitator. The value of what is said seems to be dependent on the gender of who says it.

Men may comment "thanks" to the male facilitator, even when a female made the comment.

Female may ask a question and the client may respond to the male.

Some women have found that the male co-facilitator will come in with a stronger opinion/perspective and then to assert it rather than adjusting it to accommodate their co-facilitator's view.

Clients may wait for the male to certify the answer. One co-facilitator tracked how many times the female was interrupted, how many times the male was interrupted, and each other. The male The co-facilitator was interrupted far less.

How can we address when this happens? The female can address. The male can watch himself to make sure he doesn't just echo. Can also pause before saying anything. At the same time, we may want to repeat a certain amount of the time, because the information is important. On the other hand, what if the man is the one who is being focused on? In many ways, the man can boost the co-facilitator's point, "When (F) said, ..."

To change the way of interacting, we need to make it a positive experience to reach across the barrier. So when confronting, we need to remember and communicate why we are doing co-

facilitation. One member suggested the men don't necessarily see having a woman facilitator as a positive experience. The hostilities tend to be directed at the female.

(The individual personalities tend to have an effect.) Some may depend on which co-facilitator has been around longer.

One female co-facilitator found it helpful when in a group with a male co-facilitator, who pointed out some of the behavior she hadn't noticed.

Another male co-facilitator has experienced no hostility toward the female co-facilitator, but perhaps patronization.

Some of this may be a way of disqualifying the information given. Needs to be addressed in some way. Sometimes something said creates tension for the moment. The woman can put the focus on positively challenging, and addressing what's going on. Showing that it's up to them if they take the info.

There is some patronizing, especially at first, but if the woman builds the relationship with them, there is less of that.

Part of the challenge is to sort out our own reaction from what is going on with them. Perhaps we need to continue to address this. One male co-facilitator left the lead to the female, and just sat in the corner. He would redirect when clients would turn to him.

You can't come in to be a rescuer, however.

Defending. There is a challenge between a male defending the woman, not colluding, but not doing the sexist chivalry line. Men tend to jump in and rescue. Taking a moment's hesitation can help this.

Another way of confronting is to be open to asking questions and listening more. That can sometimes be as helpful or more helpful than immediately jumping in and confronting behavior.

It is important for the male to put his full attention on his co-facilitator when she starts to speak. They are modeling the attention process, paying attention to what she has to say. Treating her as a peer, respect. Perhaps asking her opinion, her take on whether she saw something.

Playing as a tag-team approach, continuing a process, responding to each other's comments and going from there. Need to have the male co-facilitator show he has value in the room.

There are always gender dynamics in the room, whether or not it is noticed. One way is to look at the amount of time each person is talking. Often people fall into roles unconsciously. If it's not

something that can be addressed in the moment, afterwards can discuss who is perhaps the “expert” in the topic at hand.

Another view was that equality does not mean we talk the same amount of the time. You pay attention to the “wise person who only has a few words to say.” If the male pushes her to talk, that is also oppressive.

Talk time is one aspect. But also need to be conscientious as to gender dynamics, and subtly look at how to step back, step forward, switch seating positions etc. Some behaviors to examine might include: attentiveness to the other; talk time; seating positions; who starts; who collects the money; who takes attendance; who receives paperwork/homework.

Have the discussion before you start the group. Keep the balance between facilitators and constantly debrief after each group, to decide what works/doesn't work. We can modify the group's behavior by modifying our own. We can talk about it but must incorporate it into the process of our groups. We don't have to always deal with something on the spot. We can deal with some issues after the fact. co-facilitator's can work it through together.

Be able to disagree with each other in group together, but model how to disagree respectfully.

In a perfect world, men would come into a group with established co-facilitators. Pragmatically, a lot of the relationship development occurs during the group. Then there are shifts. Such shifts can take away from the relationship a facilitator has with the clients.

How do you deal with the issue of being the spokesperson for women everywhere? Anytime there are gender issues, the group will look at the woman. Is it OK for the male facilitator to ask for the female perspective? When is it OK, not OK? Maybe, “What are your thoughts on this?” But it's important to be clear that the female co-facilitator does not represent all women in society. This tends to be a constant conversation. “This is my experience... Some women have told me...” qualifying and reminding that no one woman can represent all other women. Male co-facilitator can ask, “What is your personal view?” vs. “What is your view as a woman?” One male co-facilitator said he wants to have as much legitimacy as a female co-facilitator- in the sense that it is their experience as much as the woman's to challenge the “male view” in the power position. At the same time he does not want to become patronizing. It's a difficult balance.

Another way to get men to think more about the woman's perspective/experience is to encourage them to think about other women in their lives besides their partner. You can look up others' experiences. You can have them look at their mother's, sister's, daughter's potential feelings. Most of the men are conditioned only to limit themselves to thinking about relationships with partners in this.

One issue that can make a woman co-facilitator feel pressed on is how they feel about sexual

harassment. Such as experience with cat-calls & how they feel about it, etc. That may push to self-disclose. Is that necessary? It's OK but not necessary.

In many ways, it's important to present yourself not as a victim, as a female co-facilitator. It is better to separate ourselves from the experiences we have, rather than labeling oneself as weak.

It is an important factor to have a relationship with the co-facilitator where there is no pressure to share an experience, to accept each other's boundaries. We want men to self-disclose. One female co-facilitator says she needs to be careful as to her own boundaries, but that sometimes it's appropriate to not want to go as deep. For example, when discussing "Women like make-up sex." Can use the voice of women in a shelter, who had said they considered it rape.

What about when lifestyles are different, and the male and female co-facilitator's seem to fit into the personal stereotypes of male and female? Need to identify the issues, and to meet before and meet after. The co-facilitators model a cohesion to the group.

When a male facilitator perceives some possibly sexist behavior he can also check-in with his co-facilitator about this. This could be done in front of the group or on the side, depending on the situation.

One person wondered how much attention is paid to how co-facilitators work together. Perhaps more information is given subconsciously. They need to be kind, considerate to each other. It's all modeling. "More is caught than taught."

Most of the guys don't want to be there. But they may learn from osmosis. So it may happen unconsciously or over time.

The fact that we show unconditional, positive regard, that we show relationships, is important. This can help even clients who have major issues with females. To address issues you have to confront them. This can best be done when it's in the context of a positive relationship.

Two qualities that can be challenges to modeling an egalitarian relationship are when the man is more experienced as a co-facilitator, and/or when the man has been with the group for a longer time. How can we diminish the effect? Trade off the lead role. On the other hand, there is some concern if a new facilitator has to take over the lead very soon. The danger is that she won't have the chance to observe the group culture, it might make her appear less competent. One person commented it's not necessary to disclose the woman's experience to the group. But even so, the group will be able to see experiential differences. Some agencies try to let a new facilitator observe a group for a while before they become co-facilitators. One woman co-facilitated with several men before she got her own group.

Every counselor has a different style of group. .

There is some molding that goes on in the group. But part of this is that new co-facilitator's often have a low level of experience. When someone is green, that person tends to do a lot of adapting to their partner's style. There is an impression with some of the females that they (females) tend to adapt more to the male co-facilitator than does the male co-facilitator, regardless of levels of experience. One woman started molding her style to fit with the partner. She is not sure that male co-facilitator's do the same with their female co-facilitator's

Women who are more experienced have more of an immediate influence. If not more experienced, then it is typical for the co-facilitator, regardless of gender to take more of an observer role. One female co-facilitator commented that regardless of the level of experience of the female, the male co-facilitator does not tend to adapt.

There are also more dynamics to consider between co-facilitators than their gender. Group dynamics may be different depending on which group.

What about age? **With younger females:** With younger female facilitators there is the potential of group members viewing them as a dating possibility. Men are more likely to sexualize a younger woman, take offense at what she says and to be more aggressive. **With older females:** There does tend to be a stereotype in these men to respect older women, even in Anglo society. Some of the guys will give more respect due to age. Groups may at first tend to treat a male as a "young kid". Clients may change to collusion even when the older female leaves the room. When the older female is gone, they would talk a different way. They would not do this with the female when the male was gone.

A common gender difference is that group members may modify their language (e.g., less swearing, coarse language) to accommodate the female co-facilitator.

There is always some of an adjustment process when you go into a new group, regardless of age, gender. You have to establish issues, such as you are not someone I'm going to date, I'm not your mom, etc.

When someone is new or inexperienced, one way to show respect is to not put them on the spot - to just let them sit for a while. The down side of this, is that it may feel into typical gender roles. It will likely take several months to get into "equal" co-facilitation roles.

One of the things you get with privilege is you don't have to worry about that dynamic. If you are white and you don't get a job, you don't assume it's because of race. If you are black, you may wonder. If a man is being a jerk in group to a male co-facilitator, you don't think it's because you are a man. But if he's being a jerk with a female co-facilitator, she has to question whether he's reacting because she's a woman.

Culturally specific issues. What about the concept that people of a culture may respond best to people of their own culture? How does that apply to women helping run a men's group? Might

it not be the case that a man may be more comfortable with another man? Some men have asked a woman how she can teach him how to be a better man. Is it OK for men to run women's groups? Does this apply to women helping run men's groups? Are there issues where it might not be appropriate for a woman to address in a man's group? The purpose of the BIP vs. a victim's group is very different. A man's group is to confront and break down the false beliefs in the group. Sometimes the group will listen differently to a male, and perhaps listen where he won't listen to a woman. Also there's a difference between someone of the dominant culture working with a group rather than someone from a subordinated culture working with a group.

Another female working with victims, they (female victims) did not come back when they were attended to by a male receptionist.

The essential element seems to be the relationship developed with the group. Whoever is doing the work needs to have the knowledge of all these different dynamics that are taking place, and addressing them.

We are talking about the idea of co-facilitation, but also looking at reality not always being the ideal. It has to deal with how you present - how you "show up." you need to deal with your own issues, and take care of yourself.