Tri-County Batterer Intervention Provider Network Meeting Minutes November 14, **2017**

Present: (attendance for this meeting has been lost)

Minutes by Kate Sackett, edited by Chris Huffine

Discussion Topic: Sexual orientation, sexual identification, and sexual lifestyle

This is the summary of a presentation by Matt Johnston, with some additional input by those in attendance.

The Engaging Men conference last month with the YWCA brought up many dimensions to gender that some attendees did not know previously. The discussion today started with a list of terms and definitions and covered any that were not recognized by members here. The terms in Matt's packet were from Allies in Change with information from their training and additional material from training from Central City Concern and the Multnomah County FVCC.

Terms relating to the gender binary were new to some people as well as the difference between transgender and transgendered (related to identity versus something that was done to them). Nonbinary means not identifying as male or female and also not viewing gender only as a spectrum from male to female (identity can exist not in relation to those "endpoints" at all). Gender socialization encourages us to put everyone into categories and feel challenged (or even frustrated or angry) when someone presents themselves in a way that is not easily understood within dominant gender categories.

Pronouns like they/them are sometimes used by some nonbinary people. Calling this use a "preferred" pronoun is less common now, as it implies that it is merely a preference and not something necessary. Instead, simply ask about gender pronouns instead (e.g., "What pronouns do you use?"). Central City Concern now includes this kind of question about pronouns in their intake assessment. "Z" and "zer" are other pronouns some people use. Using "they, them, their" pronouns is a way to respect people's identities until you know how a particular person identifies, rather than using pronouns that assume something about their gender. Some Spanish-speaking people use an ampersand ("&") and question mark ("?") to address the very gendered language and incorporate this kind of respect for people's gender identities.

The permutations of sexuality handout breaks this concept down into several layers. People can have different orientations, including heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, transamorous, and philias. They can also have differing levels of sexual frequency: allosexual (what we think of as a "normal" sex drive, in the middle), hypersexual, asexuality (lack of sexual desire, not a choice), greysexuality (infrequent desire, can be socially induced), pansexuality/omnisexuality (wants sex regardless of partner's identity), demisexuality (emotional connection, relationship, with person

before sex), and sapeosexuality (attracted to someone's mental being). Another dimension of sexuality is romantic/emotional attachment, including heteroromantic (romantic connection with someone of the opposite sex), homoromantic, biromantic, queerromantic (folks in the LGBTQ+ community), aromantic, and greyromantic (infrequent). Someone's sexual orientation and romantic attachment do not depend on one another (e.g., can be pansexual and heteroromantic).

How does all of this affect BIP work? In the dynamics regarding where domestic violence comes from, there is a big push for a gender-centered model of men perpetrating violence against women. In expanding these gender and other definitions, people can really push back against that view. Taking a social lens helps incorporate this by knowing that people's gender identities are influenced by socialization, so it is easy to see how these different definitions from society can apply to yourself. People who choose traditional masculine gender social norms commit a lot of the violence that we see in BIPs, so that can be incorporated even knowing that these identities are much more complex and nuanced. For example, people have a hard time fitting same-sex violence (e.g., a woman abusing another woman) into gender-based violence, but in these cases the perpetrator is typically taking on traditional male values and beliefs that drives the violence. In other words, violence within same-sex couples can be understood not how they present themselves, but in how their values and mindset influences their behavior.

Another way this shows up is in how someone identifies within BIP groups. Someone in one provider's group right now fits the definition of "Questioning," but the facilitator has learned to follow him and let him take the lead because his identity has changed several times before. The power and control piece in gender socialization is also relevant in how people think they get power. Sexual relationship is a huge part of power play (objectification, beliefs about access, entitlement, do not want to talk about it), whereas women in the BIP groups want to talk about it a lot. Being comfortable with language and terms helps facilitators sit with information and not react to stereotypes, encouraging conversation that can open up conversation between other group members.

This also can apply to discussions about emotion as it relates to possession, power, and discomfort and emotion being there without labeling or naming it. One provider has had multiple clients who were part of throuple relationships (with three partners), where a third member could open up dialogue about the violence in the relationship and also explore feelings of jealousy and possession when someone has kids with someone else. When violence comes after a partner talks to another man, bringing in the emotional piece can help talk about why having a friend of the opposite sex feels threatening and how feelings of possession or entitlement influence that.

Regarding sexuality, whether someone comes out in a BIP group has to be the client's choice. Providers have had some clients who had same-sex relationships who never came out, and instead focused on their children during group discussion. Another client came out in the first group session in response to the check-in question. It seems common for gay clients to disclose

to the facilitator individually, but not come out to the group. One facilitator had a good experience when a client came out as gay to the group, although the facilitator was nervous about how the other members (mostly blue collar, very black-and-white thinkers) would respond. It went really well though and opened up conversation about family members who were gay. Members in the group keep checking in on him and it was a good opportunity to talk about the person's violent behavior in relation to that aspect of their identity.

The words used in group are important, such as when talking about privilege and entitlement. We need to think about being inclusive in language because some examples might not apply to all members. We need to be open and continue to say "if you hear something, let me know." Using "person" (gender neutral) instead of woman or man (gendered language) all the time can help that. Another practice can be starting meetings by declaring gender pronouns when going around the room. This is common in advocacy work and presentations, but less common in BIP work. It seems like there would be a lot of push-back to do that in parole/probation though as the government seems slow to respond to that kind of thing. However, Clackamas County is starting to encourage people to put that in their email signature – they're talking about these kinds of things.

One provider wondered how often people in BIP groups identify as nonbinary or sexual identities other than heterosexual, homosexual, and bisexual. There are no groups for these diverse identities specifically, although both the Men's Resource Center and a few other agencies tried to do this over the years, but were never able to sustain them. The difference between who is on probation and who is referred to BIPs also influences the demand for groups, because some of these individuals may not be on probation. It seems like resources are being used to send them to individual counseling when there is not a specific group for them instead.

This might be a self-fulfilling prophecy: if we don't see people, we don't tailor our programs for these needs, and programs might get a reputation of not being welcoming or not having a comfortable environment for these people. Law enforcement is getting a lot of training on gender bias to help them make decisions about arrest if they are having trouble quickly understanding how to respond to a domestic violence call. That might help them if folks do not fit the typical presentation of domestic violence too. When an agency offers a population-specific or other tailored group, it takes time to start the group and there is a lag between developing the group and getting referrals which makes it difficult to devote a time slot and hold that door open when referrals do not come in. Building it for a year and getting only two or three referrals in that time is a huge challenge for making a group happen.

One option could be having a "floating" group offered at resource centers for LGBTQ where a facilitator could go to where folks are used to going for resources and support in order to create access to DV programming as well (e.g., center in Beaverton or Forest Grove). This could be more feasible as a venue than trying to start a program and wait for people to come to the DV

location. NW Network created resources on doing this kind of programming and may have some on their website or available if you contact them. Some of their work covers understanding the context, impact, and intent of all the different behaviors and they parsed out different questions to ask when someone sees the behavior ("What does it mean?") like if someone slaps someone else ("Was this someone who is abusive? retaliatory? a victim?"). There are also questions to ask regarding identity privilege ("How is that privilege accessed? Has someone moved to an area where they have less privilege?"). Other cities with more diversity might be further along than Portland on this in some ways too.

The romantic part of relationships can lead to jealousy dynamics among people in groups too. A man having emotional relationships with women who are not his partner can cause friction with his partner. Being aware that different people have different needs can be helpful and having partners identify their needs can be helpful. Talking about what people can provide in emotional and other relationships is also important. For example, if you're providing emotional support to a very needy friend and then not have any support left over for your romantic partner, that can cause problems.

Facebook relationships can also relate to that (e.g., reconnecting on Facebook with old friends/ former partners) and fantasies can play into that too, especially as adults have limited ways of meeting people and forming relationships. Spending time on the computer and not investing in the physically present relationship with the person they live with can lead to problems. The fantasy of a relationship with the other person online can lead to problems with an in-person partner. Offenders can also groom through social media and electronics (e.g., juvenile sex offenders with limited social skills) as their lack of social skills and wanting connection means it is easier to provide online than to provide support or have connection in person.

Someone working in probation said it would be very helpful to know whether the people we're discussing here (with diverse gender identities, sexualities, etc.) are hidden in the work we do or are actually not as present. If they are there and we are not recognizing them, we need to "un-hide" them or do some kind of outreach to communicate that we are a safe place to come for help in victim outreach. We first need to make sure it genuinely *is* a safe place for them to come, because that is difficult to create and can be harmful if it is truly not a safe space. Again, this creates a self-fulfilling prophecy if we are not making it very clear and visible that these are safe places (putting it on websites, on the walls).

There are also equality and equity issues to consider here. What would it look like to have a group that is all-inclusive, where everyone can talk about their context, their relationship, and the abuse that's taken place while being accountable and being safe? What does this look like especially when the larger context wants to separate everyone? It does not work for the dominant/entitled group to decide "we're all equal" because that may not be the experience for everyone. This requires continued work, with continuing challenges. We need to respond in a

respectful way to what people say in groups and challenge things that are said that are not appropriate or safe. It can be hard to decide when to challenge in BIP work though because interrupting everything that was offensive or oppressive would never build relationships with clients.

When a facilitator knows that someone in a BIP group identifies as gay, some actually have more questions about how/if/when to challenge things that are said in group that are homophobic, whereas they have no hesitation in a group when they don't know if anyone present is homosexual. They don't want them to feel uncomfortable, but how does that relate to being respectful of people who aren't in the room? It is a balance between a sense of safety with being respectful and holding people accountable while trying to be considerate of people in the room. Some options are to check in with the person non-verbally to see if they are ready to go there in the session with everyone. If they are not, then it is appropriate to not go there. If they are or if no one is in the room to check in about this, then the facilitator can pose a question like "How do you think it would feel if someone in the room here today identified as gay hearing you say that?" This also makes the facilitator see that they are not the expert in the room and encourages them to go off of what the person with the identity is comfortable with and see what they want to do or not want to do.

There are also larger structural issues that influence how/if/why people are showing up in BIPs and advocacy systems. BIPs are set up primarily to recognize female-presenting people as victims and male-presenting people as perpetrators. People who do not fit these expectations may be less likely to call the police, so many systems that are not built for them that are influencing their path and create barriers for people to get into a program. For example, the decision to determine the primary aggressor in a situation is something that police seem to be struggling with. Even probation sometimes needs to determine whether a woman on their caseload was the victim who did something illegal or if they need a primary aggressor program. Police also sometimes miss the domestic violence piece completely in same-sex couples if they do not identify the couple as romantic (e.g., they might think that it was two roommates fighting). If someone does make it to the intake process, BIPs might be missing these folks if they are not asking the right questions or not sending the right signals that they are trustworthy. There are also responses within marginalized communities to do healthy relationship groups or preventative actions that do not rely on police or secondary/tertiary interventions like BIPs.