Tri-County Batterer Intervention Provider Network Meeting Minutes April 10, 2012

Attendance: Chris Huffine (Allies in Change), Linda Castaneda (Manley Interventions), Maggie Kirlin (Allies in Change), Sarah Voruz (Allies in Change), Jennifer Warren (Seeds of Change), Johnnie Burt (ARMS), Regina Rosan (ARMS), Tim Logan (SoValTi), Samantha Naliboff (VOA Home Free), Jacquie Pancoast (Change Point), Wendy Viola (PSU), Tammie Jones (OJD-DV Case Manager), Ryan Alonzo (Bridges to Safety/ Choices), Amanda Briley (Bridges to Safety), Suzi Evans (Choices), Katherine Stansbury (ChangePoint/Turning Points), Jenifer Hopkinson (Clackamas Women's Services), Olga Parker (Modus Vivendi), Joan Scott (SoValTi/Allies)

Minutes by Wendy Viola, edited by Chris Huffine

Topic: Working with men from different cultures

When we refer to culture, we are most broadly referring to any group of individuals who have their own set of rules, values, customs, and/or guidelines about how to live your life. Some domains this would include are religion, ethnicity, gangs, the prison context, and family, to name just a few. Class is a culture which is often over-looked. Other examples of cultural domains include sexual orientation, age, being American-born vs. born oversees, being able-bodied vs. having physical disability, urban/suburban/rural background, and socio-political/lifestyle (i.e. veganism). Attitudes, values, and beliefs are considered components of culture. Defining cultures can be challenging because there are many subgroups within cultures. Also within most cultures there can be a divide between laws/rules and common practice.

Domestic violence in general seems to manifest itself the same way across cultures. The power and control orientation is the same across cultures, even as the men may express it via different culturally specific behaviors.

A problem in discussing cultural competency is that it tends to be reductionist. It reinforces the idea that people have only one culture (i.e., the one being attended to), when in truth, we exist at the intersection of multiple cultural identities. For example, the same racial or ethnic group may have very different experiences based on geography, education, class, etc. An important consideration is how people culturally identify themselves. Placing clients in cultural groups should involve engaging the clients themselves in determining which groups to send them to, instead of allowing agency staff to decide independently which cultural groups men should attend.

Culture differences tend to be an uncomfortable issue to discuss, across settings. What tends to make it uncomfortable is the implication of a system of oppression and who we define as "other." Whenever we have a conversation about culture, we must

acknowledge institutionalized systems of oppression such as racism, classism, sexism, etc. Typically, people who have the most privilege get very uncomfortable with conversations about privilege and oppression, though change rarely comes from feeling comfortable. Context and familiarity with others in a given setting can make a difference. Personal relationships can soften the discomfort of cultural differences.

In order to be able to discuss and acknowledge cultural differences, we have to be aware of our own reflexes and feelings of vulnerability in those areas. It is easy to become defensive when those conversations come up and until this defensiveness is softened, open conversation about culture is impossible. Sometimes when men walk into our groups, we may interpret their defensiveness as a lack of accountability, when it may be partly due to cultural issues. We should consider how we contribute to this defensiveness through our implied cultural identifications and assumptions. One way to diffuse defensiveness and tension is to let the men vent and talk about their issues and concerns, instead of inferring or assuming about what may be bothering them.

There doesn't seem to be a perfect way or the perfect spot to address issues of privilege and oppression in curricula. Much of the BIP curriculum can be made apolitical, but when we start talking about privilege and oppression, it tends to evoke traditionally liberal values, which can make more conservative individuals uncomfortable (as well as people who identify as liberal, but still participate in perpetrating abuse). Because this issue can be so difficult, the best time to address it may be when the group is at its best performing and most accountable point.

Privilege may be considered the receiving of unearned benefits, just from being a member of a specific group. In addition, people with privilege often are not aware of the privilege they have—it is taken for granted. It is easier to see privilege when you don't have it than when you do. One exercise that helps illustrate this is the more powerful/less powerful exercise described in the book Men's Work by Paul Kivel. First, the group generates a list of more powerful and less powerful groups with power being defined as who has more political and/or economic power in this country (e.g, men over women, whites over people of color, Christians over non-Christians, supervisors over employees, adults over children, etc). In looking at the lists it can be observed that no person is always on the more powerful or less powerful side. Providers can ask men to identify with one less powerful group they either are or were a member of. They are then asked how they felt treated by the more powerful group, particularly in negative ways (e.g., ignored, excluded, exploited). Finally they are asked what they wanted from the more powerful group (e.g., respected, acknowledged, consulted). They are challenged to practice the qualities they are wanting from the more powerful side when they, themselves, are on the more powerful side. Being on the more powerful side also includes privilege (e.g., white privilege, male privilege, adult privilege, etc.). Privilege is context-dependent. You can be the privileged group in society as a whole, but in certain contexts you can be in the minority or in the less privileged group. When you're in the

less dominant group, you have to do a lot more monitoring and be much more aware of your surroundings. There are layers of privilege within groups that have similar levels of privilege within broader society.

If we are aware of our own privilege relative to our clients we may be self-conscious about this. However, this difference does not have to be a barrier. Our perspectives may still be helpful, specifically because they do come from a different culture. It can be particularly helpful to hear the same issues addressed by people who are different from ourselves.

We work with people who are especially concerned with maintaining power and control, so they may be especially resistant to a more equitable distribution of privilege, particularly if it means that they have to give up any of their own privilege. It can be especially useful for providers to try to remember a time when we didn't understand these issues to empathize with clients who may be defensive about their privilege. Additionally, we cannot expect members of less privileged groups to immediately let go of any feelings of anger or resentment towards more privileged groups just because differences in privilege have been acknowledged. Making a connection and growing together at the personal level is crucial.

Prejudice and bigotry are the phenomenon of seeing a label instead of a person. A more common form of bigotry than being explicitly racist, sexist or homophobic is being friendly and warm, but in a way that indicates that we see a label before the person. People tend to spend less time looking at faces of people from other races because we have less to process—we don't spend as much time acknowledging the person because we rely on their label instead. This may be a function of our tendency to create heuristics and cognitive shortcuts, or due to our preference for feelings of safety. We can spend more time thinking about things that we consider safe and less time thinking about the things that threaten us.

How do cultural biases come into play in assessing risk? The standards for risk assessment are inherently culturally biased because they are typically defined in part on who is getting arrested, which is culturally biased. That doesn't mean they have no value, but keep in mind that they may tend to overstate risk level with members of more oppressed groups and understate risk of members of more dominant groups. Members of privileged groups can exert themselves using the means they have available, but for members of less privileged groups, resources for exerting oneself are more limited, so it tends to manifest in acting out. This issue merits further discussion on its own and it was suggested that we discuss this further at a future meeting.

It would also be useful to develop a tool to assess agencies' cultural awareness, and to allow clients to assess the agency's cultural competence and sensitivity. Cultures Connecting (contact Caprice Hollins & Ilsa Govan, 206-568-8556) is an agency in Seattle

that works exclusively on facilitating conversations around issues of culture. They developed a tool for students to critique their schools' cultural competence, and might be helpful to agencies as well.

Are there ways to do screenings during hiring to assess facilitators' cultural biases? Cultures Connecting may be very useful. It can also be very helpful to participate in core trainings and trainings for working with specific groups outside of the DV context. It may be informative to listen to how facilitators talk about clients. A general sense of openness and compassion may be indicative of an ability to work well with different cultural groups. It's important to ask clients whether they felt respected by the staff. It can be difficult to balance showing respect for clients in this way and simultaneously holding them accountable. The goal is for clients feel respected, but not colluded with.

How do we address issues of culture when we're working with multicultural groups, so that everyone has the same opportunity to benefit from the program? Metaphors and examples are culturally bound and are more relevant for some groups than for others. A benefit of having culturally specific groups may be the ability to use common language and common examples and metaphors. If groups are multi-cultural, then we should be aware of using a range of examples and metaphors that are relevant for different groups.

How do we respect clients' cultural differences, while still holding them accountable for behavior which they claim to be culturally determined? Cultural values are consensual: identification with a culture implies the acceptance of that culture's values. When there are values or practices that half of the culture disagrees with, those are not consensual practices or values within that culture. By asking group members whether objectionable behaviors are consensual within their culture, we can address whether they are truly aspects of their cultural background. This is also a form of modeling what the clients should be doing—probing into whether their practices are really consensual. Another way of thinking about this is whether the partner truly agrees with the purportedly culturally appropriate behavior. As long as there is true non-coerced informed consent then it is not technically abusive. But that is a key qualifier that is typically not the case when men are claiming what we see as being abusive behavior is appropriate within their culture.

Cultural humility, a concept developed in the medical field, is another approach to cultural differences. Cultural humility is an alternative to being culturally competent, because we can't ever hope to be competent in every culture we encounter. Instead of trying to become thoroughly knowledgeable and competent in every culture, the culture in which we most need to become competent is our own-- we must be experts in our own cultural values. Humility involves avoiding the imposition of these cultural values on anyone else, or assuming that others hold these same values. It's an ongoing, dynamic process of cultural exchange and dialogue, which involves recognizing all of our presumptions about other people, and unlearning them. Cultural humility involves being

a part of our own culture and interacting with other cultures. It allows engagement with cultural differences and the points where cultures and values diverge by enabling respectful and meaningful dialogue. If we know ourselves, we can be more confident in what we don't know, and therefore ask the right questions and seek help in filling these gaps in knowledge. This stands in contrast to cultural relativism, which generates pressure to accept the norms of other cultures, even when they don't sit well with us. The importance of cultural humility is exemplified in *Finding Normal,* a film about the sub-culture of the alcohol treatment world, emphasizing the importance of listening to what others' "normal" looks like, and doing so in an open and non-judgmental Rogerian style.

Discussions also need to occur around sub-cultural trends, particularly around non-traditional relationships, for example, one-night stands becoming ongoing relationships. To tap into this subculture, it can be useful to ask "what do you value in someone of the opposite sex."

Often, clients are not ok with being in BIPs, and have just been given new labels which they're new to embodying and understanding (e.g., "batterer", "client"). Providers are often ok with the clients because we work with clients all the time, but because they've just undergone so many changes, clients are frightened by the situation and wary of providers. It can be frustrating when we feel that we're ok with clients, but they're not ok with us. We tend to identify clients as resistant if they're not thrilled to be at BIPs at the very beginning—we have to acknowledge that they're often scared and that may be in part why they appear resistant. But we can't assume that they're all afraid, so we should ask clients what they're feeling, and being open and curious about their experiences. It comes down to modeling the program—we're not going to get clients to address their power and control issues if we use power and control with them. Whether or not they stay in the program, we need to approach clients as though they have a choice about whether or not they need to be there. Most of this is habilitation for people who haven't been habilitated to a way of thinking that values equal treatment and respect for women. We have to consider the culture from which they're coming and whether treatment and respect are valued at all, or, conversely, so highly valued that clients will punish themselves for having perpetrated abuse.

It can be important to remember that all of these clients are men, and regardless of where they grew up, they probably had some privilege and power because they're men, which is why male privilege comes up so often in the curriculum. At the same time, a lot of the clients have had struggles and are disempowered in other ways, though their male privilege is close to universal. Abusers are also aware of the other ways in which they have power and privilege because they use this other power and these other privileges against their victims (i.e. exploiting their partners' inability to read English or their partners' lack of income).

All of the clients know how to be polite and respectful and use their belief systems to justify when they do and do not act respectfully, which is a function of their values. Building these discrepancies between contexts in which respect is expected (and in which they choose to display respect) can be very powerful.