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

Present: **(attendance sheet for this month's meeting was misplaced) Partial list of who attended:** Chris Huffine (Allies in Change), Kate Sackett (Portland State University), Matt Johnston (Domestic Violence Safe Dialogue), Jacquie Pancoast (Eastside Concern), Jason Kyler-Yano (Portland State University), Michael Davis (Eastside Concern), Amy Simpson (Eastside Concern), Juliet Tyler (Bridges 2 Safety), Dara Snyder (YWCA), Sarah Van Dyke (Clackamas County), Adele Atwood (Pathfinders), Tammie Jones (Multnomah County Court)

Minutes by Kate Sackett, edited by Chris Huffine

Discussion Topic: Common qualities of abusive men

Editor's note: Both Kate and Chris have done a heavier edit of the original meeting discussion than is typical to provide more of a summary of the key points. This includes grouping together comments made at different times and further refining some of the language/points made during the discussion.

Historically, the identification of DV perpetrators/abusive partners/batterers has been reduced to their abusive behavior alone. They were/are defined by their abusive behavior. However, more recently some providers view the abusive behavior as only a symptom of the real problem: the way they think and live in the real world—their worldview/belief system. This is similar to the way in which the abuse of substances is seen as a symptom of addiction, not the cause and that sobriety/remaining drug free involves an on-going way of living that includes, but is not limited to, remaining substance free.

One illustration of how the substance abuse field is focusing on qualities other than actual substance abuse is the SASSI (Substance Abuse Subtle Screening Inventory). This instrument was developed in the substance abuse field in part to address the challenge that people with substance abuse issues are often dishonest about their actual level of substance abuse. The SASSI was developed as a work-around of this issue. It was developed based on identifying common personality differences between a known population of substance abusers and a known population of non-substance abusers. They identified which items were more endorsed than the other between the two groups. The low face validity of the items (how easily you can tell what the question refers to) makes it harder to lie when responding. The front half of the SASSI does not ask directly about substance abuse issues, so it is difficult to fake not having a substance abuse issue—it's not clear what the "right" responses are.

The focus of this discussion is, likewise, to identify common qualities we see among abusive partners relative to the general public.

DISCLAIMER: The discussion focused on generating qualities or indicators besides abusive behavior that define/tell a provider that they are dealing with someone who is abusive. It was acknowledged that this list is not definitive. It is speculative and there might be disagreement about any given quality listed.

Quality of beliefs/cognitive thinking

- Very concrete, rigid social beliefs about men and women, tends to be solidly in the "act like a man" box. High priority is placed on being a financial provider as a man versus a nurturing, emotionally supportive provider.
- Views the world from a "Power Over" perspective as outlined by Patricia Evans in her books (e.g., one up/one down, win/lose). Very black and white, either/or thinking. See any attempt of their partner to have equal status or their own voice as that person's effort to have control, which is interpreted as a threat. See all the women in their life as controlling and bossy (e.g., handling money is seen as wanting control rather than wanting to have input in the decision).
- Inability to picture a win-win. If considering passive, aggressive, and assertive relationship styles, they comment that "There is no third option", meaning they are either "one down" or "one up." This even gets to the point where they are angry at preventing being in a "one down" state, viewing assertive styles as a matter of life and death or as a threat to their bodily integrity (e.g., with genital metaphors) to emasculate or feminize them. They believe that if they're not aggressive, they're not men.
- Pervasive fear-based belief system underneath anger reactions. Volatile reactions to situations come from a belief system that they're not in touch with, and no awareness of how to get involved with the fear beneath the anger. They are controlled by the anger reaction. Most of the men do not acknowledge their fear, but that is what the violence is about. They are afraid they will be victimized, dominated, taken advantage of, which are fears embedded in masculinity and drive a lot of their behavior. "If I'm safe, I don't have to armor up and make myself big. I do that when I don't feel safe but I would never admit the fear that drives this."
    - This shows up in their language as well with "I feel" statements and violent language. – existing list had a lot of "ed" words – I feel betrayed, attacked, disrespected, rejected, used – those are all things that they think their partner is doing to them, not feeling words – so reframe it to how do you feel when you think you're being used; the root of that is all fear; have to tell them they will not be emasculated if they admit to fear
- Having more of a "me" orientation than an "other" orientation. They're more concerned about what's happened to them, what's going on with them, and how they were treated, rather than thinking about other people and their needs and wants. They are more self-centered and narcissistic. Terrance Real calls this "grandiosity" or "narcissism," referring to them being in their bubble and not very aware of those around them. Allies in Change calls this "egotism." It is very common for these men to have a sense of entitlement and

attitude that he is the center of things. Women are more often aware of this energy than men are of themselves or those around them (e.g., “man-spreading” of men who have an open posture and take up more physical and audio space, while women in general tend to take up less space).

    - Positive alternative is being “relational:” being mindful and aware of others. This is strongly embedded in traditional femininity and a huge piece of what drives feminine behaviors (see the “Act Like a Lady” box). This is often very absent for males. BIPs try to get men to be more relational, which starts by getting them out of their bubble and being aware that there are other people around them.
    - Entitlement example: a couple was referred to counseling at Allies in Change by the female partner's therapist who suspected the male partner was emotionally abusive. The male partner is a retired attorney who acknowledges some of the abusive behavior but is still pre-contemplative so too soon to suggest going to a BIP group. He tends to speak over her, he's quick to define the situation (“this is the way it is”) versus qualifying from his perspective, and will express affection in an unsettling way to observe by forcefully patting her on the leg, giving the impression of ownership. He's already making strong statements about her adult daughter (who is very protective of her mother), speaking as if they've been together 10 to 20 years when in reality they have only been together for 9 months. He also said he was really afraid he was going to get “ambushed” coming into the session (using a violent metaphor and quick to see others as being against him).
- Expectation/wariness of attack of being against them: This is common couple sessions where one partner has a pattern of abusive behaviors. Men come in very wary that they're going to get “ambushed”, “targeted”, or “picked on” in the session (although they won't come in alone or to a men's group so this can be the only way to get them in as a partner couple).
    - Non-abusive men do not feel the same kind of expectation of being set up, ambushed, or targeted in the same context. Rather, they acknowledge that they aren't perfect and are less guarded during sessions.
- Quick to act on their first thought. Journal activities showing negative self-talk and what they would do differently demonstrate they have no trouble thinking about what they would do differently, but they often stick with their first thought. Want to cultivate more thoughtfulness and deliberate action rather than going with their first impulse. Their thought process shows they have potential to get the right answer, but they don't wait to get to that point to act. Providers need to get them to slow things down to do what's harder (e.g., “You can do what's easy or you can do what's right”) because they need to get past their first thought (often pro-abuse belief) to their second or third thought and act then. One approach to handling this in a group is talking “first thought wrong, next right thing” (from Mark Lundholm's standup work). The first thought is often going to be a pro-abuse belief, this doesn't go away and that's still going to happen but they have to let that go to get to the next right thing.

- Excusing or rationalizing abuse. An important part of real success is shifting the men to see that “it's not what you do, it's what you do next.” Men typically excuse and rationalize their actions, blaming their partner, which does more abuse and harm in the situation after the initial act of abuse. Making real change after a moment of being abusive involves being accountable, doing repair, doing correction, and/or interrupting it. What they do next is where their partners do or do not see change. This can be a message of hope for the men because it signals that it's okay to make mistakes but they need to work on what they do after the mistake.
- Taking things personally and making assumptions. They often assume things to be a threat. They can also assume malice about the other person, which can be named specifically in the group. This also relates to another common quality of self-focus and self-absorption. They take things personally by assuming they are the center of all things (e.g., if a kid is not doing homework it's to piss them off, rather than recognizing the kid's own thoughts they are quick to personalize from egotism). They need to know “it's not always about you.”
    - The Four Agreements of Don Miguel Ruiz can be a helpful way to address this. The first two agreements are about assumptions, one of which is “don't take it personally.” This means that what someone does is about what's going on with them, not you. Other agreements include being impeccable with your word (or “be without sin” because what you say about someone is not about them, it's about you), and always do your best (based on what you have learned, daily inventory, journal writing). These are hopeful agreements because they signal that even though we're not perfect (e.g., we have days where we are not impeccable), it's about what you learn and how to practice mindfully responding.
- External locus of control. Power is outside, external to them, so in order for them to be happy, someone else (i.e., their partner) has to do A, B, and C for that to go correctly. They therefore need to control their partners to get them to do that. This relates to having very rigid beliefs, with little or no awareness of their own rigidity (e.g., the difference between being aware of and managing anxiety such as in OCD and imposing rules or expectations on the family and partner without owning their rigidity). They can do this with addiction issues, depression, etc. in a lack of owning and understanding that it's not their partner's responsibility (e.g., “if you respected me you wouldn't drink around me”).
- One down position. This relates to having a lose/win attitude, with the idea of doing whatever their partner wants just to get her off his back so they submit and give in a lot. This is a functional strategy of treating a mugger, but not a partnership. One sign of this can be if someone “gets it” during a session but at home is still very abusive, this can mean that he's not really getting it, but he's uncritically accepting what's being said in the session and not wrestling with the topic and just immediately agreeing and accepting and moving on. This also relates to having a passive aggressive stance (e.g., “from now on, it's just whatever she wants”) which can be questioned by asking where is that going to go? It will lead to resentment and building frustrations that sets the abusive partner up to

be victimized. These men tend to be more passive and passive aggressive, and their partners can get very frustrated, upset, and seem angry/aggressive because of this frustration. These men are not providing strong leadership, do a lot of deferring, a lot of ambiguous communication, very little ownership, and a lot of blaming, where their partner needs to do everything and simultaneously a lot of what she does is wrong.

- Abundance versus scarcity mentality and defensiveness are also common (being quick to defend against her attack).

Quality of communication

- Poor communicators. They don't know how to express themselves, their needs or wants very well. This relates to not being relational, because they don't need to communicate if they are all alone and they don't understand that there is someone else (e.g., their partner, their family members) who needs to understand them. Being a good wordsmith is different than being a good communicator.
- Style of complaining. The tone they use is like they are building a case or litigating in court. This is another example of their win/lose thinking (as in a court case or military campaign). Guys in a group don't need to be prompted to complain, as it is a rut or gutter that they often bowl into. Their energy does not dissipate while complaining, but goes up and up and then has to be redirected by focusing on themselves and staying on their side of the fence. They do not complain about just one thing, but repeatedly and using lots of nouns (e.g., she's bipolar) and stating intangibles (e.g., “she thinks that I should do this, she thinks it's all about her”) using verbs that are not observable things but what they insert into her thoughts. They have lots of negative speculations, constant speculation but perceiving their speculation as their reality. This relates to their assumptions also because they presume that their partner is doing things in a combative way and in a “power over” way (e.g., “she knows how to push my buttons”) and assume that is her agenda and the kid's agenda.

This style of complaining is different from what is heard more often from non-abusive partners if they are asked to complain about their partners. There is usually a long pause for them because people that are not abusive have to think about it and are reluctant to do so in public. When they do complain, their energy goes up and then it resolves. Their language uses a lot of verbs and nouns will be operationalized (e.g., “this person is a night owl, she stays up late and it wakes me up sometimes, and so it gets really frustrating so we have to talk about that”).

- Absence of humility/qualifying communication. This is a subtle tell, referring to behaviors like making statements that “this is the way things are, let me tell you the way things are " in a “thus saith the Lord” manner because they speak so authoritatively. This is in contrast to saying “in my experience”, “this is my opinion, my take on it” by using qualifying language and showing humility that theirs is no more legitimate than anyone else's perspective. Many of the men will have humility with their boss (who has power over them), but lack humility in their homes because they are “king of the castle.”

Intentionality of communication. Similar to their style of complaining, men are more often intentional than informational in their communication, especially when there is a difference in perspective (you're saying A, I'm saying B). Communicating intentionally involves making a case, using rhetorical questions to prove their point. Men are very intentional with their partner and in the BIP group. The pro-social alternative is to be informational. Being informational means being genuinely curious about someone else's perspective (e.g., "I want to understand B more, how can these both exist"). This involves asking genuine questions. Collaborative people tend to be more informational ("help me understand, what do you mean by that, I'm not following, I want to make sense of it") rather than showing someone why their perspective is wrong. This communication style is also very hard to fake.

Quality of personal histories

Early trauma. This can involve early childhood trauma, abuse, abandonment issues, or PTSD from living in violent neighborhoods. Trauma-informed treatment with these guys as crucial. This personal history sets them up to have fight, flight, freeze syndrome all the time. While not all abusive men have trauma histories, many do, particularly those with more severe levels of abuse/higher risk. It could be that some programs see the trauma more than others (e.g., co-occurrence with substance use disorder) but volunteer guys might not be. There is good empirical support that some of these people are trauma survivors and some are not. The more severe the perpetration, the more likely they are to be trauma survivors. Non-trauma survivors tend to be family-only perpetrators and the most likely group to go underground with their bad behaviors. The more extreme offenders who are getting arrested and sending their partners to shelter are almost always trauma survivors.

Quality of relationships

- Social isolation. Abusive partners are more socially isolated than non-abusive partners, with more limited social networks. Wendy Viola did a presentation on this topic to this group a few years ago. A common tactic of abusive partners known to advocates is isolating their victims to control them and also because they themselves are more socially isolated so their general norm is to be isolated and impose that on a partner. This ties into their fear and mistrust and need for more social support from the partner. In DV self-assessments where they have to list relationships over many years, it becomes apparent that there is no time in between going from the home environment and good or bad relationships with parents to getting into relationships and also that they have no larger social circle. They go from partner to partner and have a safe zone there, but don't have significant relationships outside their partner even if they hang out with guys at work.

Lack of respect. This is a foundation of abuse. They see their partner as a "vending machine," where they give inputs (e.g., paying bills, doing things she wants) because they want something back. They try to put in "correct change" to get the right output, often for sex. An example of this is when guys have said they aren't happy anymore in a relationship and want to end it but they don't want to be the one to say it. This shows a lack of personal respect for the other person,

because it becomes about them: “I want out but I don't want to hurt the other person” so they do hurtful things with the hope the other person will say “I'm done.” This is also heard in explanations like “I tried to break up, I tried to leave, she kept calling me, she kept coming back, she didn't want to end it.” The lack of respect is why it went that way. This also relates to fear as it is here the fear of “being the bad guy”, by being the one to leave her and the relationship.

- Focus on what their partner does for them. When asked what it is that they admire about their partner or are attracted to in her, often they will discuss how she looks and then immediately circle around to what she does for them and how she makes them feel. This relates to always being self-centered in their perceptions.
- Not accepting influence from partners. Gottman's research on this in heterosexual couples found that men accepting the influence of their partners is a sign of relationship health, while women accepting influence does not predict anything because in both bad and good relationships, women often accept influence. Reframing for men that doing this does not mean becoming her “zombie” or “slave” but being open to considering what she has to say, what she is thinking and feeling, and taking it into consideration. Not accepting their partner's influence leads to unilateral decisions without considering her wants, needs, opinions, or feelings. This behavior can be masked by men if they frame it as being “logical” or “doing what's reasonable.”
- Limited empathy and compassion for their partner (e.g., objectifying her).

Quality of language

- Violent metaphors. They are quick to use violent metaphors, combative metaphors, and imagery (e.g., “firefight, she shot me down, you guys are tearing me up here”). This is harder to fake (if they are trying to present as not being abusive), as language can reflect their worldview. The metaphors and language they use defines how they see and receive the world.
- Objectification of others. This is especially relevant when objectifying women and shows a lack of sexual respect (e.g., “tap that, nail that, hammer that, lay that”). Objectification is very important to be able to commit violence, known from war and the need to objectify the enemy to get soldiers to be willing to do violence. They need to depersonalize (not mother, father, son, daughter) so that they aren't doing violence to a human being. Compassion is what leads to de-objectifying.
- Euphemistic minimizing language. Rather than acknowledging and stating their behavior, men can use phrases that are blanket statements that minimize behavior. For example, someone saying they “got angry” can describe their behavior, rather than their feelings (whereas anger refers to feelings in non-abusive men). “Getting angry” is their defensive way of saying they did something (e.g., threw something, acted out, kicked something, hit her). Anger becomes a verb signaling action and a minimization code word to blanket-cover any dominant behavior in anger. Similarly, “I tried to leave” can cover and minimize their behavior (e.g., pushing their partner, calling her names, destroying

property on the way out, not coming back for several days, and not revisiting it when they come back).

Quality of connection to self

- Out of tune with their bodies. Men often skip through their emotions to get to anger, violence, and dominance. A mindfulness practice at the start of a group can help men be more in tune with their bodies. It can be very beneficial to take time to center, focus, be conscious of bodies and breathing, identify emotions, and bring that into their awareness. After a couple of months in updates, they can talk about having a situation and paying attention to how they're feeling and breathing and go in a different direction.
- Similar to the win/lose mentality, the social construction of masculinity is connected to a Roman military model that leaves men with a loss of their right to feel emotion. This military model then is brought into intimate relationships (from an OBP interview with a Native American man talking about how belief systems went from Rome to Europe to the Americas).

Mindfulness is not about not feeling, it's about being more aware. The idea is not to calm down or not feel anything, but being more aware of emotions and not being overwhelmed if they are feeling distressed. This is very contradictory to American values of being disconnected and avoidance.

- Disconnection from self, other, and relationship. Men's disconnection from themselves means they cannot have compassion for themselves, which compromises their ability to connect to anyone else and not be aware or acknowledge others' thoughts, emotions, or needs (e.g., fatigue). This is used in Allies in Change's model. Connection with self is not the same as self-indulgence, which is not necessarily good self-care. Connection comes from a compassionate stance, not being more selfish, numbing out, or disconnecting which some men claim they do as self-care.

Quality of feelings

- Anger masking other feelings. Anger is usually another feeling plus blame (e.g., a man being worried about his teenage daughter versus being mad at her for scaring him, or being embarrassed that his wife jokes and puts him in an awkward spot versus or being angry at her for putting him in that spot). Anger is a protective masculine feeling because it keeps people at bay. It is a result of that external focus mentioned earlier.
- Blaming others. Rather than acknowledging feelings, men can use “-ed” words that are blaming words (e.g., “you rejected me” or “you offended me” rather than “I feel sad”). The outward focus and external locus of control also relates to this tendency to blame. Taking a “victim stance” also implies blaming their partner, as most actual victims/ survivors/abused partners, somewhat ironically, do *not* take a victim stance. Abusive people take this stance because they're in the “one down” spot. Hearing someone say “I'm the victim here, woe is me” is likely an actual perpetrator which is sometimes how perpetrators end up in victim services. Historically, shelters have been very wary of men

and assume he is probably not a victim, though this is not always true, especially in same-sex violence. Programs can help determine who is perpetrating the abuse by saying that it works with abusive partners and also with victims so that when people present for services, they can determine who is abusive and who is not.

Contempt. Men in a group will show strong contempt, negative opinions about their partner, and then be surprised when asked if they are getting divorced. This also relates to feeling victimized ("I've been with her for 12 horrible years, she's been abusive towards me, I am the victim") while still never imagining leaving ("I need her, she needs me"). Contempt is a huge sign of abuse and is very hard to obscure, sometimes leaking out even when they are not intending to show it. Examples of contempt include head shaking when talking about the partner, a stance of pejorative judgment, and a sense of inferiority. Contempt is one of John Gottman's "Four Horsemen" of unhealthy relationships. While contempt is often a big tell of abusers, not all abusive partners have contempt. Its absence does not mean you aren't dealing with an abusive partner, but its presence means you almost always are. Survivors rarely feel contempt, and more often have hurt, sad, or angry feelings. This can be a useful way of identifying family-only abusive men who have not been arrested, even if they are lying about their abuse or minimizing it. You can tell that they are being abusive if they have that contempt for their partner. This can be an angel to help them engage in programming by repeatedly labeling this toxic stance to help them recognize it and get them to see it eventually. This can also be seen in people who have kids together if a partner is trying to convince you that they're the better parent in the relationship, better for the child, and try to gain validation for their parenting. They attempt to validate themselves and vilify the other parent as the worst parent in a polarized competition to see who is the better parent. An example of hearing contempt is "she's completely thoughtless, she's irresponsible, she doesn't give a damn about the kids" and hearing energy building as this is described (e.g., "let me tell you what she did the other night!"). The opposite of that is hearing "well you know, she's not as conscientious as I'd like her to be, I worry about the level of supervision she provides to the kids, I don't always agree with her choice in movies..."

Quality of partner reactions

- Partner tracking/anticipating abusive behavior. You can find patterns in other ways by asking about the partner's reaction (e.g., does your partner follow you from room to room during an argument?) with endorsement signaling that she knows his patterns very well and is trained to respond to them.

Discussion summary and caveats:

- These common qualities all tie together: fear, external focus, trauma histories, etc. all tie in together.
- This work is not about invention, but discovery. The discussion is not inventing something unique here, but discovering things that exist. Lots of head nodding and consensus during the discussion reinforces that these things live in these men, and here we are trying to put language to it but these are real behaviors and qualities.

- Some providers have different perspectives and see different segments of the population of all abusive partners. For example, some are working entirely with populations that are co-diagnosed with substance use disorder.
- Someone with personal history in previous abusive relationships reflected that one of them fits a lot of the common qualities that were discussed while the other did not.
- Different patterns of abusive behavior exist and even with those patterns there can be outliers. Not all abusive partners are the same, there can be some differences. Some abusive partners only show this behavior to their partners and are not this way at all with anyone else in their life (e.g., coworkers, kids, neighbors). The common qualities discussed today could only apply to certain sub-populations of abusive men.
- The goal today was to talk about abusive partners who have ongoing abusive behavior with a pattern of abusive beliefs and behaviors. There are also people who have done acts of abusive behavior, but don't have a significant pattern of abusive behavior (in the same way someone can have a night of abusing alcohol on one occasion, but not be addicted to alcohol). In these cases, the abuse is more situational, contextual, and not driven by a pro-abuse belief system. Secondary aggressors also do not have a pro-abuse belief system, so it is important to understand the context in which abusive behavior happens. For example, if two kids are fighting on the playground, you need to ask what is driving each kid's abusive behavior and to what extent does it form a larger pattern. One kid may have pro-abuse beliefs and fight a lot with other kids, while the other does not have that belief system, does not fight with other kids, was picked on by this kid and is fighting in this situation. Asking how the partner feels can signal who needs an abuse intervention program (e.g., were you on eggshells, did you feel like you had no power) and also asking what the person does after and whether they are being accountable.

In closing, the next step might be to form a working partnership with a researcher who might use the above qualities as a starting point to actually develop an empirically supported tool that differentiates between abusive and non-abusive partners, like the SASSI does for substance abuse.