

## Tri County Batterer Intervention Provider Network Meeting Minutes October 8, 2013

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### Topic: Cultural Competence, Cultural Sensitivity, and Cultural Humility

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This discussion focused on a PowerPoint presentation by Chris Huffine, although there was active involvement by those in attendance which has been incorporated into the minutes below.

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Issues of culture can be very provocative. Our low turnout today may be partly because usual attendees think that it will be redundant or a difficult/uncomfortable topic to discuss.

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#### Culture

Some people equate culture with race or ethnicity, but culture obviously covers a variety of other demographics. When we talk about culture, we may be referring to religious groups (though people less often consider religion a cultural group); visible race/ethnicity; military sub-culture; homeless (and within homelessness, we may think of distinct cultures among the visible and invisible homeless); urban vs. suburban vs. rural (regionalism/geography); class/socio-economic status; organizational culture; trades; criminal culture; gender; sexual orientation; age; country of birth; being able bodied; being deaf.

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It's important to consider not only which cultures people identify with, but also how closely they identify with those cultures. We often don't know how the overlapping cultures that individuals come from interact, or which pieces of cultural backgrounds individuals identify with most strongly. Everyone we interact with is both similar and different from us in some of their cultural identifications, but we never know how.

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#### Prejudice and bigotry

Both prejudice and bigotry have negative implications. They are both related to attitudes, based in distorted thoughts, beliefs and judgments, and are related to stereotypes. Prejudice that has a positive valence can still be offensive. Bigotry may be more overt than prejudice, which is more covert.

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Micro-aggressions are much more common and pervasive ways of making bigotry and prejudices known than more overt behaviors. Micro-aggressions are the subtle behaviors that indicate prejudice and bigotry, and are right at the threshold of perceptible. They are crazy-making because you don't know for sure if others are expressing prejudice or bigotry, or just being jerks. Members of dominant group can assign blame for inappropriate behaviors to individual attributes of the person who engages in those behaviors. For members of subordinated groups inappropriate behavior is much more likely to be interpreted as resulting from group membership, whether or not that is the case. The impact of micro-aggressions may decrease, as the concept becomes better known.

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#### More Powerful/Less Powerful exercise

The group completed the more powerful/less powerful exercise (from Paul Kivel's *Men's Work*): focusing on the US, and defining power in terms of economic and political power, we identified the following more and less powerful groups.

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More Powerful	Less Powerful
Men	Women
Rich	Working Class
White (European American)	People of color

White (European American)	People of color
Supervisor	Supervisee
Able-bodied	Alternatively abled
Heterosexual	LGBTQQI
Cissexual	Transgendered people
Law enforcement, probation	Citizens
US citizens	Undocumented
Formally educated	Formally undereducated
Acculturated	Unacculturated
Adults	Children
Adults	Senior Citizens
Urban	Rural
Group facilitator	Group Member
Christian	Non-Christian

There was some more extended discussion about the issue of whether Christians are more powerful than non-Christians. One point made is that there are a lot of false assumptions and misperceptions made when a person is self-described as Christian. While there are a wide variety of experiences associated with being Christian, for the most part, our American culture is largely Christian. When there starts to be more equality among groups, the previously dominant group can take offense at the changes (e.g., when the Ten Commandments were removed from the Texas capital, some Christian Texans experienced it as an affront to them).

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Attendees were asked to identify a group on the less powerful side of the ledger they are either currently a member of or have been in the past. They were asked to talk about some of their negative experiences with the more powerful group. When you're in a less powerful group, the more dominant group has been experienced as condescending, hypocritical, physically assaultive, stereotyping, controlling, limiting, depriving, and powerful. Members of the less powerful group may feel invisible, oppressed, ignored, left out, exploited, feared, fearful, distrusted, misunderstood, vulnerable, used, vilified, obnoxious, scapegoat-ed, stupid, discriminated against, confused, etc.

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They were asked, again, thinking about being part of the less powerful group, what they wanted from the more powerful group. As members of less powerful groups, we would want the more powerful groups to make us feel respected, heard, understood, acknowledged, accepted, included, safe, informed, and consulted, and we would want members of the more powerful group to be aware of their entitlement. The final point was that when we are in more powerful positions, and therefore have a degree of privilege, we should seek to behave in those positive ways just listed.

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### Privilege and oppression

One automatic benefit of being a member of the more powerful group is privilege—additional unearned benefits simply by being part of that group (e.g., male privilege, white privilege, adult privilege, class privilege, etc.). Privilege is automatic, it can't be rejected or cast off. Another "benefit" of privilege is that most privileged people take their privilege for granted and don't understand that those in the less powerful group don't get the same benefits. Members of less powerful groups can gain more privilege by organizing (e.g., the Civil Rights Movement, the Women's Movement, labor unions, etc.). This has been a common way oppressed groups have gained greater power and moved closer to equal treatment. The united perspectives of many people are more influential than one voice. You can also increase your power by increasing your economic power, however, for most groups, the gaining of social power requires coming together in a social movement.

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We need to consider how much every single less powerful group experiences oppression, because every such group does. However, the specifics and impact of these different forms of oppression vary a great deal. For example, the unique experiences of oppression that different ethnic groups have encountered leave different legacies. Racism has had different effects on different groups in different ways and how that oppression has specifically manifested also differs a great deal. Oppressions are all very different, and it's counterproductive to rank-order them. In understanding someone's culture, you have to understand their cultural history of oppression, and we can't dismiss the role that oppression has played for them.

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### Cultural competence and cultural sensitivity

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Labeling the ways that we approach culture may be the most provocative aspect of this topic: using the phrase "competence" implies incompetence. People tend to be most knowledgeable about dominant cultures, and don't have nearly as much information about subordinated cultures. By learning more about subordinated cultures, we lose some of our assumptions or misperceptions. The intent of these presentations is to enhance knowledge, which has a different implication than competence/incompetence.

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Cultural competence requires being an expert on the specific culture, even if you're not actually of that culture (although it is even better to be of that particular culture). Presumably by being more knowledgeable about that culture you can work with them in a more thoughtful and considerate manner. Members of that culture may feel more comfortable and welcome. For example, SoValTi is culturally competent with regard to, and specializes in, working with African American men. ARMS offers culturally specific intervention for Christian men. Being culturally competent also means one will be more familiar with culturally specific forms of abuse and control and are less likely to be "fooled" by men perpetuating cultural myths that justify their abuse (e.g., "this is the way we behave my culture").

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While helpful, cultural competence can only take us so far. For one, it's impossible to be culturally competent and knowledgeable about every single culture and sub-culture. Even when offering a culturally specific program, the people within that program may still be quite different from each other in a variety of other ways.

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Cultural sensitivity involves acknowledging that there are cultural differences and being vigilant and attentive towards these cultural differences without knowing everything there is to know about a particular culture. This is a more realistic goal and is required of all of us. It means being open to how men's cultural backgrounds may be different than your own and being sensitive to that.

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Regarding both cultural competence and cultural sensitivity, it's important to acknowledge that each person is a unique intersection of a variety of different cultures, and you can't know which aspects of each culture individuals identify with the most strongly. For example, there are positive and negative experiences associated with acculturation, and individuals' contexts have a lot of impact on their trajectory with acculturation.

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Men may self-select into programs in the community based on the strength of their cultural identification (for example, Christian men who indicate that they would feel much more comfortable at ARMS may have a stronger identification with Christian culture than Christian men who wouldn't necessarily feel any more comfortable at ARMS). Just because someone identifies with a particular cultural group does not mean that they *don't* identify with other groups. Additionally, cultural identity develops and changes over time—people go through phases of not wanting to identify with a particular cultural group, while they still display the values and behaviors of the cultural group in which they were raised. When you make assumptions about people without checking out who they are and their cultural identifications, you can come to incorrect conclusions about them and the services that they could use.

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### Cultural Humility

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While the phrase cultural humility is fairly obscure, the underlying concepts are becoming

increasingly popular and common within trainings on cultural issues. Cultural humility is defined as the practice of not imposing your own cultural assumptions about anything on anyone else. It's based in the fact that we can't possibly know everything about every other culture. So instead of trying to be an expert in other cultures, we seek to instead be an expert in our own culture. The humility piece means to then be careful not to presume that your cultural values and perspectives are shared by anyone else (even though they, of course, will be shared by many).

Being introspective and insightful about our own culture enables us to avoid making cultural assumptions or impositions about anyone else rather than making the egotistical presumption, especially common among culturally dominant groups, that our perspectives and priorities are shared by all. Accordingly, cultural humility involves a lifelong commitment to self-evaluation and critique. It is an ongoing process of staying open and focusing on the process. It's important to focus on both (1) the specifics of individuals as opposed to their cultural groups, and (2) your own cultural background and assumptions. Cultural humility involves a focus on interacting and dialoguing with others openly. It requires us to consider cultural differences and similarities with everyone with whom we interact not just those who are "obviously" different.

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There has been some empirical research done in the therapy field that offers support for a stance of cultural humility. Qualities of therapists that are associated with both cultural humility and client satisfaction include respect, openness to exploring, not presuming more knowledge, and trying to see things from the clients' perspectives. Practicing cultural humility (and being a good therapist) requires being able to admit the limitations of what you know and asking questions. Having humility improves the quality of your work by allowing you to see your clients instead of your assumptions about them.

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Regarding cultural competence, it can take forever to learn another culture. There are some central tendencies that can be helpful to understand, but it is presumptuous to apply these all members of a cultural group. Having cultural competence of any kind may or may not be related to having an aspect of cultural humility. There are people who report being culturally competent, but don't have any cultural humility. There's a difference between real world competence, which does require humility, and self-described competence, which often doesn't involve humility. The more humility you have, the more members of other cultures will open and share with you. But it can take a while to convince others that you are actually open.

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What are the behaviors associated with cultural humility? More important than specific mannerisms that indicate cultural humility is doing your own thing, with the awareness that it has an impact on other people. If you are a member of a dominant group, you have to own it.

Cultural humility requires being open, being curious, making no presumptions, apologizing for making any assumptions, and being aware that your way of doing things is just one way of doing things, all of which will be perceptible by others. Cultural sensitivity and cultural humility both involve recognizing individuals as such, as opposed to merely as members of cultural groups.

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For those interested, attached are two journal articles that provide more information about cultural humility.

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