

Tri-County Batterer Intervention Provider Network Meeting 3/9/2010

Attendance: Chris Huffine (Allies in Change Counseling Center), Cassandra Suess, Shaun Larson (ARMS), Leonard Larson (ARMS), Susan Ranger (Washington County Parole and Probation), Emily Szeliga (Allies in Change), Jacquie Pancoast (ChangePoint), Paula Manley (Manley Interventions), Regina Rosann (ARMS), Elka Grisham (Allies in Change), Sara Windsheimer (Choices DVIP), Samantha Naliboff (Volunteers of America Home Free), Guruseva Mason (Choices), Michael Crowe (Washington County Probation), Marta Bringas (Mental Health Family Counseling Services), Chad McGhee (Allies in Change), Ashley Boal (Portland State University), Jennifer Warren (Men's Resource Center/Women's Counseling Center), Dean Camarda (MRC/Allies in Change), Yulia Brockdorf (Nutrition for Success), Steve Stewart (Allies in Change)

Minutes by Ashley Boal, edited by Chris Huffine

TOPIC: Pornography use among abusive men

Jennifer Warren offered a presentation/comments on this topic, much of which is summarized below. There was relatively limited discussion/participation by other members present until near the end.

Portland has huge accessibility to the sex industry (e.g., strip clubs, adult bookstores, adult video stores, lingerie modeling, etc). Many of the abusive men we work with make some use of the sex industry, including, but not limited to pornography. What role does this play in their abusive behavior? How should this be addressed in our groups?

A personal story/discussion was shared about Playboy as a gateway to more explicit material and how it can impact people, especially at an early age. We should be thinking about the big picture and how the ideas portrayed in this material affect society at a higher level. For example, the expectation for girls to be sexual which this increases with exposure to pornography.

Pornography has become so normalized that we don't recognize when it is a problem. A bibliography was passed around with resources about pornography and the sex industry. The average age that a girl gets into the commercialized sex industry is 13.

Excerpts were shown from the video "The Price of Pleasure: Pornography, Sexuality, and Relationships". Topics included the ease of accessing pornography on the internet; how do these images shape our gender identities and our relationships; and how did this industry become mainstream?

How does this relate to our work with abusive men? This is a portrayal of the patriarchal system of power in our society. One study that systematically looked at the content of most popular porn in the US found that verbal and physical aggressive violence is in 88.9% of the films, 82.2% had physical aggression but not verbal aggression and 48% had verbal not physical aggression. Knowing this we need to address it in groups. We have an opportunity to teach those in our groups how dangerous it is to practice something privately and expect not to have

those feelings later. Not healthy for the family for it to be normalized, we have to reduce these normalizations just like we need to break down the normalization of male privilege.

It can be difficult to engage men in talking about sexual abuse which they tend to associate with being rapists and bad guys. However, sexual abuse covers many other areas and domains. For example, women have discussed giving in to sexual wishes because they know the abuse would be worse if they didn't go along with it. Sexual abuse and educating abusive men about this topic has previously been discussed and addressed in Tri-County Batterer Intervention Provider Network meetings on 9/19/2006, 3/1/2005, and 6/4/2002.

Women in DV victim groups often feel that pornography is normal also, so it isn't just working with men. Also, women may use sexuality as a tool. For example, some women describe feeling empowered stripping but when exploring this further it may not be the case. Part of the cycle of violence. One book that addresses this topic: Getting off: Pornography and the end of masculinity by Robert Jensen.

Do these topics come up in the groups? What are the stances that people take? What is healthy sexuality: choice from both partners, genuine sexual agreements. Hard to bring up in groups because it is cloudy deciding what is pornography and what is not pornography? From a non-provider perspective it seems like we should be taking a strong stance on issues like this.

Talking about these issues is like peeling an onion. We have to talk about context and how US culture influences sex. The patriarchal impact that the US cultures has may not be present in other cultures. Going this route works better than asking directly about sexual abuse because they don't see their behavior as abusive if it isn't explicitly raping their partner. We need to encourage them to talk. This means we need to be comfortable talking about these issues. Providers may be afraid to talk about it because they may feel they are coming off as prudish or hypocritical but it is important to get conversations going.

How do we directly apply this to working with men? Part of the discomfort is that there aren't clear ideas about what is or is not pornography or objectification. Additionally there is a great deal of shame around sex already. It is like other emotions, it's okay to feel sexual things; it's what you do about it.

A hand-out was distributed by Jennifer. On the handout: erotica vs. pornography- goal of both is to give sexual satisfaction, lines are blurry but one is more focused on the story while the other only has sex and no story. What is an object? You are an object when you are no longer a human being. A victim's perspective would be helpful to understand the impact of pornography. We aren't the sex police but we need to be aware and educated about what is going on and teach that there has to be true mutual agreements between partners and these agreements need to be made in a safe place. May be helpful to share stories of people that have been affected in different ways to make it a more human and relatable area for discussion.

Relates to male entitlement: if I have desire I have the right to carry it out. It is part of a pattern of controlling behavior to notice where a person is vulnerable and exploit that vulnerability. Society has set things up so that women are more vulnerable about some things like appearance and sexuality. Men can choose that as an area to target comments. We can talk about both of these things in groups. Vulnerability of women to want to be loved- what will she be willing to do to get this? Men may be picking up on this and exploiting it

This is clearly part of the problem rather than part of the solution. This means we should be talking about it in some capacity. There are ways to incorporate these discussions in a broader way in addition to the specific area of sexual abuse. For example the idea that the woman needs to keep appearance in line with the man's wishes. Also important to recognize that porn is getting more and more violent. We need to be aware of this because it is feeding our culture and we have to look at what it means. These issues affect both men and women. Tie to intimacy-intimacy in multiple ways emotional, physical, if you are looking at her as a service provider what does that do to intimacy? Tie it in throughout groups. It is about resocializing men-teaching them to go against what is seen as "normal" in society.