

**Involving men in ending violence against women**

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*“When women and men understand that working to eradicate patriarchal domination is a struggle rooted in the longing to make a world where everyone can live fully and freely, then we know our work is a gesture of love. Let us draw upon that love to heighten our awareness, deepen our compassion, intensify our courage, and strengthen our commitment.” bell hooks*

*We must work concurrently with men who have used violence against their partners and children, with men who have stopped their violence and want to continue their journey towards non-violence, and with men who have never used violence and want to join the work of eradicating domestic violence from our communities.” Julie Perilla*

Battered women have complex feelings towards the men who injure them. Betrayal, anger and disempowerment often sit uncomfortably beside loyalty and love, resulting in an internal conflict between the need to escape destructive violence and a longing to salvage the relationship. For women from marginalized communities, this tension is heightened by need to be safe while maintaining cultural affiliations.

When men and women work together to hold men accountable for their violence and model peaceful and equitable relationships, the possibility of transformation emerges. When men and women work together to link prevention and intervention (responses to batterers who are caught), holding offenders are accountable at both the criminal justice and community levels, women are safer. When gender violence is located within an understanding of multiple oppressions, a deepening inclusion holds both men and women.

This article explores gender alliances and male involvement in activities to end violence against women, setting the British Columbia experience within a larger movement. Projects and initiatives elsewhere widen the lens of what is possible in our own communities and locate our work within a global context, while examples from our historical and current practices relative to men’s involvement and battering intervention systems, brings an appreciation both for what has been accomplished and for new possibilities.

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During the annual 'parade of brides' in New York City, Latina women dressed in bridal gowns and Latino men dressed in mourning black, along with hundreds of supporters, walk through low-income neighbourhoods to commemorate Gladys Ricart, a Dominican immigrant murdered in 1999 by an ex-boyfriend while wearing her wedding gown.

"You can't have girls in gowns and not have people turn around." said Adelita Medina, executive director of Alianza (National Latino Alliance for the Elimination of Domestic Violence) (Bhatia). Alianza is equally pleased that the men turn heads, demonstrating the effectiveness of their creative community partnerships with men.

Originally working only with women victims, Alianza became increasingly uncomfortable with the divide between their work and the family values of their Latina/o community, and began to build alliances and organizational structures that prioritized women's voices while including men.

In Rwanda, the Rwanda Men's Resource Centre initiated a men's petition against gender based violence during the recent post-election violence in Kenya, raising awareness both of women's suffering and the importance of African men speaking out (Men's Resource International). On the Thai-Burma border where there is a high incidence of domestic violence and sexual assault in refugee camps, intervention programs have concluded that solutions require participation of all members of the community, both male and female (Alvarado & Paul).

Women for Women International, an NGO supporting war raped women in the Democratic Republic of Congo, came head to head with entrenched violence towards women within the family and, at the request of Congolese women, initiated a Men's Leadership Project which has successfully trained men to advocate for women's rights. A former combatant who participated in war rape now believes that his raped family members are victims who did not desire or deserve what happened to them, and that it was "wrong for the community to continue to stigmatize and marginalize them." A traditional court became involved in sentencing a man for domestic violence. A 'whole community' now accompanies a rape victim to court (Women for Women International).

These examples show the diverse roles men can play in creating violence free families and communities when they take responsibility for the fact that the majority of violence is perpetrated by men, demonstrate “resistance to violent masculinities” (Flood), and model alternatives. Central to each vision is the notion that solutions must be inclusive, culturally appropriate and based in social activism.

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By 1982, ten years had passed since the opening of the first sexual assault centers and transition houses in British Columbia. The BC/Yukon Society of Transition Houses was well established, and criminal justice system responses were slowly beginning to improve. That year, despite MP Margaret Mitchell being laughed at in the House of Commons for raising the issue of battered women, women’s advocacy pushed the RCMP to develop a national charging policy for relationship violence (Leavitt).

1982 was also of deep significance to First Nations women: the enshrining of Aboriginal and treaty rights in the new Canadian constitution, and Aboriginal women fighting their way to the Supreme Court for the right of women and children to reclaim their native status (resulting in the 1985 passing of Bill C31).

For First Nations women, the ongoing fight for justice and an end violence against their people could not be separated from the need to end violence in their homes. While women from all backgrounds - including First Nations, poor and immigrant women - participated in the movement to end violence against women, they struggled with feeling marginalized and invisible within a movement often dominated by a white middle class narrative.

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Mainstream women’s programs serving women victims of domestic violence and those intervening with men who batter focused primarily on developing a gendered analysis and practice. While women’s services were growing (building a network that today includes 63 fully staffed shelters in BC/Yukon), group programs for assaultive men were being developed and delivered by community providers. Funded primarily through the B.C. Corrections Branch, these programs served both court ordered men and self-referred men.

The separation that existed between men's programs and women's organizations paralleled the absence of men from the anti-violence movement. In the 1980's Vancouver Rape Relief's affiliation with Men Against Sexism, a group of men working to raise money for Rape Relief's transition house, was unusual. Lee Lakeman remembers that time as full of bitter fights about men with women who believed that it was impossible to have an empowering conversation with a man (Rebick). For the most part, women, injured by male violence and inequitable gender relationships fought fiercely for the safety of women only spaces and women only organizations.

Women's advocates often viewed men's treatment with hostility. Jill Cory, working at Family Services of Greater Vancouver until the mid 1990's, saw women's involvement in men's group treatment as initially motivated by suspiciousness rather than partnership.

In 1992 Domestic Peace in Smithers was one of the first women's organizations to offer simultaneous programs for assaultive men, women victims and affected children. Carol Seychuk, executive director, remembers the challenge. "There was an attitude that to be respectful was collusive. It was a struggle to find ways to be accountable to the needs of both the men's and women's programs."

Ninu Kang, working with South Asian immigrant men in Vancouver, also had to find her own way. "Early confrontation did not work," she said. "Eighty percent of these men were still living with their wives and we had to be careful to ensure their safety. We spent several weeks listening and enabling them to form a community before we could begin to challenge their abusive behaviour."

A stimulating dialogue slowly emerged. At Greater Vancouver Family Services, meetings were places to debate principles and develop innovative programming, rather than places to report on cases. Men and women's programs began to be viewed as equally important (and deserving of equal pay). What happened in women's groups was relevant to men's treatment, and both programs had to be mutually engaged in the prioritizing of women's safety and well-being (Cory).

Harry Stefanakis, current president of Ending Relationship Abuse, arrived in British Columbia in 1996, thinking that he had come to a place that was a leader in

men's treatment (Stefanakis). There were conferences, growing networks and vigorous debates about how to do the work: the merits and demerits of the pioneering Duluth model (still the most popular model in North America, combining a gender lens with a cognitive behavioural approach); the degree of challenge and confrontation that led to change; the difficulties in making meaning connections with angry and court-mandated men. Psychodynamic, narrative, social constructivist, anger management – all approaches were considered. Women's questioning (what's going on in there with those guys?) was a driving force in maintaining a gendered and systemic analysis that held women's voices central while pushing for coordinated community responses.

Coordination initiatives formally began in 1989, when the Ministry of Attorney General funded seven community coordination strategies to enhance local and collaborative responses to violence against women. Since that time, many similar initiatives have sprung up - currently there are coordination initiatives in over fifty communities - although since 2002 none have been funded by the provincial government (CWWS).

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First Nations women, however, in British Columbia and across Canada, always held a notion of community involvement in perpetrator programs. They felt that the criminal justice system was failing them, an experience shared with indigenous people worldwide. In Australia, the justice system, with its risk of "perpetrating traditional assimilation practices by eurocentrizing Aboriginal family structure...and increasing the already unacceptable levels of Aboriginal over-representation in the criminal justice system," (Blagg) kept women silent. Australian Aboriginal lawyer, Loretta Kelly, identified fear of their men dying in custody as a central concern for abused Aboriginal women (Kelly).

On Manitoba's Hollow Water reserve, a combination of community intervention teams, charging within the justice system, and court placing of the offender into the hands of an accountable community has slowly replaced " 'the long arm of the law' as a primary deterrent to violence and abuse" (Bopp) and an increasingly safer, empowered community.

At Hollow Water, accountability is not sacrificed. “The combined will and power of the community and the justice system places abusers within a very narrow band of choices: either submit to the monitoring and supervision of front-line community workers, admit to your entire life pattern of abuse become engaged fully in the deep healing work needed to get to the roots of abuse, or go to jail” (Bopp).

But in other instances, Aboriginal and Inuit women’s organizations have lobbied for criminal justice system interventions not to be replaced by community organizations or processes insufficiently committed to women’s safety (Stubbs). Both the successes and challenges of First Nations community based approaches reinforce principles that can apply to all communities: success comes when women’s safety is prioritized within an analysis of interlocking oppressions including gender, race and culture, and strong, committed communities of men and women create “a culture of vigilance...where each person’s safety and well being is considered a sacred trust of the whole community” (Bopp).

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In British Columbia, batterer’s education and treatment programs were delivered in numerous small contracts until a review by the Corrections Branch led to a new two-stage group model and a scripted curriculum. Respectful Relationships (RR), a ten week group implemented in 2001 by Corrections staff to primarily high and medium risk offenders, is followed by a community delivered 17 week group treatment, Relationship Violence Treatment Program (RVT), first delivered in 2003.

Many people involved in men’s programs and in providing input into the development of RR and RVT curriculum felt the curriculum supported the core approaches to the work developed in B.C. and appreciated that Corrections staff were becoming more familiar with domestic assault issues. But some were surprised when the government replaced local contracts with one province wide contract to deliver RVT.

When existing providers of assaultive men’s intervention were either not hired as sub-contractors or chose not to work within the RVT program, expertise became lost to the system. A casualty of the new structure was the breakdown of the evolving dialogue between women’s organizations and batterer’s programs, a breakdown which many fear

has led to diminishment of the essential systemic gender analysis in work with violent men. In some communities, women are unsure whether batterers programs include contact with women partners, despite contact with partners being “an essential, not optional part of the work” (Gondolf).

Another current concern is diminished access to treatment. Cross-regional discussions facilitated in 2005 by Community Coordination for Women’s Safety highlighted attendance restriction to primarily high and medium offenders as a problem (BCASVACP). Self referred men, a significant and important component of men’s groups, are excluded entirely.

“It is ironic,” said Ron Swartz, executive director of the Victoria Family Violence Centre, “that the government does not fund services for self-referred men, given that the vast majority of violent assaults are not reported.”

Because services are only available for court-mandated men, there has been a significant reduction in numbers of programs and men served. Domestic Peace in Smithers, one of few women’s organizations sub-contracted to provide court-mandated men’s programs, is also finding fewer court-mandated referrals and is running fewer groups. Domestic Peace attempts to deliver services to voluntary men but even the minimal fee they must charge is too much for many. Carol Seychuk feels fortunate to have obtained a contract to deliver a “Caring Dad’s” program, specific to men with violence problems who have been referred through child protection.

MOSAIC (which has one of three provincial contracts to deliver RVT to immigrant men) has also experienced diminished referrals to groups for battering South Asian men. Ninu Kang comments, however, that violence against women in relationships, including murder, in the South Asian community has not decreased. She is concerned that English speaking South Asian men are being mainstreamed by probation into RVT groups without discussion of which service would be most effective and culturally appropriate.

Although positive initiatives are springing up – for example, the Prince George violence against women in relationship committee initiated a program in which arrested men are contacted right away by volunteers and given information about violence and



treatment – these interventions are isolated. There is no integrated provincial system to link programs, let alone involve community men.

“If the voice of the perpetrator is absent”, said Gail Eidinger, regional coordinator for Community Coordination for Women’s Safety (CCWS), “even those men who are part of the coordinating committees don’t address the task of how to keep these guys accountable.” She noted, “Predominately, women are at the table.” For the most part, RVT facilitators and concerned male citizen/activists are absent.

Meanwhile, women, shocked by the drastic cutbacks in funding to sexual assault centers, women’s centers and women’s organization unveiled in 2002 in the first budget of the new Liberal government, were plunged into a fight for survival. Lacking the resources or the energy to be involved in the concurrent changes to the men’s treatment, women’s involvement in how their communities responded to assaultive men slipped away.

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In 2007, a B.C. briefing document argued strongly for effective and integrated system responses that hold men accountable through measures such as “rigorous arrest policies, thorough police investigations, rigorous charging policies, appropriate and consistent sanctions including an escalating element to sentencing, effective community supervision, effective enforcement of protection orders, and treatment options geared specifically to domestic violence offenders.” (BCASVACP).

The same document speaks to the need to hold offenders accountable through treatment embedded in comprehensive local communication systems that involve the victims, current partners of the men, service providers and probation officers.

Gondolf, who conducted a multi-year, multi-site evaluation of batterer intervention programs in four U.S. cities, would agree. His research concluded that *the system matters*. Even if batterer counselling and education programs strongly reinforce batterer accountability, they need to be supported ‘decisively and consistently’ through more integration of all levels of response. He ends his book with a plea that more be done, not only at the criminal justice and integrated service level, but “on many levels – in schools, in the culture, in the hearts of men” (Gondolf).

Certainly there are B.C. prevention initiatives to engage the hearts of men. For example, Chimo Crisis Services in Richmond is the lead agency for the White Ribbon Campaign in the Richmond Family Violence Prevention Campaign (BCASVACP). The WRC, now international, started in Canada in 1991 when a group of men decided they had a responsibility to speak out, using a white ribbon to symbolize men's opposition to violence against women. The WRC considers that real progress occurs only in partnership with women's organizations (WRC website). In Richmond, the campaign has included secondary school students and has the full support of the Mayor

A creative partnership is an alliance between B.C.'s resource and anti-violence sectors, a unique project bringing violence awareness and prevention to employers and workers in rural resource communities, identifying "appropriate responses from a corporate, union and individual perspective" (BCASVACP/ERA). A linked project is the recently released *Men Speak Up*, a DVD for anti-violence training that features male leaders speaking on the importance of addressing violence against women, including "politicians, RCMP, union leaders, and counsellors of abusive men" (BCASVACP/ERA).

In Victoria, the Family Violence Prevention Society established a mentoring project in which men who had all completed all sections of a phased program, and reached indicators of positive change over a one and a half year period were trained to co-facilitate assaultive men's groups and do community based violence prevention presentations.

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In Atlanta, Georgia, Men Stopping Violence (MSV) also enables program graduates give back through speaking at public meetings, providing community education, testifying at legislative hearings, or making other community contributions (Bathrick). Restoration brings healing and health both for the men and the community.

The Community Restoration Program is part of MSV's belief that *the system matters*, and is integrated into an overall commitment to linking batterer intervention programs strongly to community. Only community involvement can shift batterer intervention programs from individual rehabilitation to agents of wider change. The success of intervention programs is critically connected to the ability of community to

hold and support men moving from violence to non-violence. Too sharp a focus on the batterer lets other men off the hook and obscures the fact that individual man's violence is rooted in social norms.

Deeply committed to ensuring that men listen to women's voices and holding a strong gender perspective, MSV runs an innovative internship program in which men connect with experiences of women through attending volunteer trainings at women's resource centre for ending domestic violence and the local rape crisis centre.

At the same time, MSV's involvement with black Americans also led to an appreciation of the necessity for culturally specific responses that challenge dominant narratives through historical investigation of the experiences of diverse peoples, develop and model collaboration across both gender and racial lines, and encourage people of colour into leadership roles.

The cultural context model developed by feminist therapists responding to battering offers a model of accountability separate from those "institutionalized constructs...which represent oppressive control mechanisms of the dominant culture and neglect the realities of racially or culturally different batterers and their victims" (Almeida & Durkin). Accountability, they suggest, can be expanded to include cultural integrity. Men and women from a particular cultural group become 'cultural consultants' and part of the batterer intervention system.

Accountability, socio-education and sponsorship are critical aspects of the cultural context model, which strives for a 'community oriented morality' that examines the manifestation of patriarchy and diverse forms of power and oppression within a culture. One aspect of treatment is separate gender culture circles for male batterers and their female partners. (An interesting aspect of this approach is that the groups for batterers and groups for victims run concurrently for the same length of time.)

Male community sponsors, who may or may not have been violent themselves, provide mentoring to men through participation in the culture circles. They break down secrecy about battering and model a masculinity that is non-violent, and respectful of those who are different from oneself.

MSV brings batterer intervention program candidates and community volunteers together for orientation meetings for a men's education program, inviting them to work together in the program to end violence against women. Partway through the program, male community witnesses enter the classroom, challenging participants to embrace non-violence and committing to serve as mentors after program completion.

The cultural context model and MSV's radical integration of offenders and community members offer a challenge to anti-violence activists in British Columbia, where batterer intervention programs have become isolated, women's programs are often disconnected from the men in their community, and appropriate responses to marginalized communities have been few. Both prevention and intervention programs must be relevant to the participants, both in terms of the "forms of the program and the characteristics of the educators and participants themselves" (Flood).

In Vancouver, Battered Women Services Society (BWSS) engaged a small group of male activists from diverse cultures, with the question of how involve men in the prevention of violence against women. It was important, they said, to create spaces where men from equity seeking communities will "feel like they belong rather than feeling further marginalized and excluded" (Stefanakis). They felt strongly that marginalized men, already shamed, needed to address their violence without further shaming. Healing circles, explorations of powerlessness and multiple oppressions, the use of theatre, ceremony and ritual were all seen as avenues for transformation in which personal relinquishment of violence could evolve into community activism for social change.

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Everyone has a need to belong. Connectivity, the core of the cultural-relational feminist model, developed by the Stone Center, emphasizes the healing nature of engaged, authentic and non-shaming relationships and views disconnection as "the primary source of human suffering" (Walker).

Grace Perez, a founding member of Alianza's Brides' March, understands the need for inclusiveness. "Men have to join the struggle," she said, believing this necessary to support Alianza's vision which creates understanding, dialogue and solutions *that*

*move toward the elimination of domestic violence affecting Latino communities, through an understanding of the sacredness of all relations and communities (Perilla).*

“Deeply wounded men need to get involved,” said Jerry Tello, a member of the National Compadres Network in Santa Ana, California adding that this must be in a way “that touches their culture, spirit and values, as unhealed wounds are passed on to future generations.” (Bhatia)

The ‘ all my relations approach’ is shared by Robert Kiyoshk, a First Nations man who works with First Nations batterers in B.C. He views the wholistic Native American worldview as not dissimilar from modern systems theory concepts that stress the interdependence and interconnection of all life (Kiyoshk). He advocates for community interventions that come from the ground up, that when outside professionals (First Nations or otherwise) come to a community they must begin from the place of asking what is working and what is not working in the response to male battering of women. He describes his own work as ‘hard and soft.’ Denial and minimalization is not allowed and accountability is demanded - while at the same time connections are fostered between the men and their families, communities and traditions (BCIVF).

A northern California county research study on a coordinated approach to battering delivered over ten years program also demonstrates the importance of relationship within batterer interventions systems. This program includes a 52 week group treatment program (much longer than most programs), part of an integrated system that includes a DV court, a DV unit within probation, mandated group treatment, minimum conviction. The study revealed that over 60% of program participants strongly supported the long program, which enabled them to develop trust within the group and to challenge their own defenses. 96% of respondents identified the most valuable aspect of the group as group support, feedback from others and hearing other men’s stories. 86% valued connection with the group leader. (The third and fourth most valuable aspects of the groups were learning new coping tools for anger and learning about different kinds of abuse, power and control) (Rosenberg). The effectiveness of this program likely comes from a relational approach that encouraged participatory belonging without sacrificing

responsibility for violent behaviour, delivered within a highly integrated community system.

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“Outreach means just that – OUT-reach. It means more than translating posters and training manuals into Spanish, Vietnamese or Hmong. It means more than showing pictures of men of colour on our poster campaigns...OUTreach means reaching out of our agenda, perhaps even our perspective to do work in communities that are under-represented in our efforts... outreach means establishing relationships with key organizations, peoples, or groups which involves getting out of our offices and joining with ‘them’ (to find) areas of overlap where joint efforts can take place” (Funk).

In the Democratic Republic of Congo, Keayembe Tshibangu described himself as a normal man with a normal family life. “My wife was a slave to me, she had no rights and had to respect me absolutely...she was at my mercy for sexual activity, anytime, anyplace. Refusal went with punishment. I was a complete and absolute dictator. This was because I did not know way alternative way of being.”

The Men’s Leadership Program changed all that. “My family members and I talk and laugh together now. No more tears, no more sorrow. My wife has become my friend. I listen to her and take her advice....my wife and children and I go door to door to dialogue with other households. They are shocked and surprised and want to listen to what brought the change. Some people do not accept the message of change on the first encounter. As a follow up strategy, we divide ourselves: husband to husband, wife to wife, children to children... So far, we have touched the lives of 58 families, but the work goes on and on.” (Women For Women International)

For a long time Battered Women’s Support Services has worked to create an organization staffed by women truly representative of Vancouver’s diversity. And for the past two years, BWSS has also worked to reverse the gap between men and women in the anti-violence movement and to engage members of marginalized communities by developing partnerships with male community leaders involved in environmental, immigration, anti-racist and aboriginal justice movements who are conscious of power dynamics and women’s realities.

This outreach has led to both dialogue and action about how men and women in diverse communities can work to end violence, said Angela MacDougall, executive director of BWSS. Most recently, in April 2008, Maestro aka Wesley Williams, referred to as the “godfather of Canadian hip hop,” joined forces with BWSS to hold an event to bring an anti-sexism message to hip hop enthusiasts and together raise awareness about violence against women.

These examples of creative alliance can combine with reflections on where we have come from to encourage spirited conversations to flourish between women and men. Current relationships between batterer intervention programs, women’s anti-violence organizations and local communities can be viewed through a wide angle lens that examines gender, race, culture and the dynamics of power and oppression in differing communities. Together it is possible to create new ways of working effectively together to say no to violence and yes to strong and inclusive communities.

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