

How Do You Know Your Program Works?

By Dick Bathrick

During trainings, when Men Stopping Violence facilitators talk about community accountability as the key to ending male violence against women and girls, participants often shift the focus to the questions, “But what do you do in your groups, and how do you know whether they’re effective?”

Swift and Consistent Community Responses Reduce Recidivism.

These are not bad or spurious questions because it’s important to assess the efficacy of Batterers’ Intervention Programs (BIPs). Ed Gondolf’s comparative studies of batterers’ programs’ strengths and liabilities have been extremely illuminating. Among other things, they tell us that swift and consistent responses from the community reduce batterer recidivism. But to constantly focus on the practices and outcomes of the various BIP models may be leading us away from some more important strategies and solutions.

Community-Accountability

Men Stopping Violence long ago shifted its focus to community-accountability work by integrating the concept into our intervention component, called the Men’s Education Program, and by creating other initiatives that seek to engage male allies outside of the classroom.

The reasons for that shift were inspired by a number of different things.

Projecting from a National Family Violence Survey and BIP enrollments in a major city, it’s estimated that less than 2 percent of men who had pushed, shoved, slapped, or hit their partners – or done worse – ended up in a Batterers’ Intervention Program. So what are we doing with 98 percent of those men, who don’t get anywhere near a batterers’ class or group? And, for those men who do attend a class for two hours a week, for 24, 36, or 52 weeks, how many of them will internalize meaningful, lasting change?

For most of their lives, for the remaining 168 hours in their week, they are receiving and sending powerful messages about the importance of controlling others, particularly women. In the context of a culture whose messages about domination masculinity are as endemic as the air we breathe, what does it mean to focus our solutions on BIPs? One thing it means is that we are avoiding opportunities to change the misogynist culture that produces men who batter.

In the early eighties, some of the leading advocates in the Battered Women’s Movement questioned the purpose and efficacy of BIPs. Their questions were provocative and instructive. Those advocates questioned our strategies to change men’s minds and behaviors, one man or one men’s group at a time, instead of focusing our efforts on the culture that shapes the attitudes and beliefs of all men, whether they’re in a batterers’ program or not. For instance, “when Martin Luther King, Jr., went to confront racial injustice,” they said, “he didn’t mobilize or institute white people’s encounter groups.”

These challenges raised the fundamental question: *Should we be focusing on the few men who got caught or on the men who could stop them?*

Over time we speculated that there is no either/or answer to that question. At the same time, we also felt and heard implicit and explicit messages from community agencies and the general public that we should

be focusing our resources on the men who got caught. Were we getting that message because, if you send the “bad” guys to BIPs, the rest of the community is relieved of dealing with them? Or was it because resisting a culture that condones violence against women is just too daunting?

Including or Requiring Community-Based Responses

Men Stopping Violence’s response has been to create interventions with batterers that include or require community-based responses. Their function is to demystify and de-privatize the change process.

Men as Potential Allies

For example, men first come to learn about the 24-week Men’s Education Program at a public orientation attended by community volunteers as well as candidates for the program. Once in the room we welcome the men as potential allies to work with us to end violence against women. Having deconstructed the problem of men’s violence against women, we challenge the men, as volunteers or as candidates, to enroll in our classes to join us in stopping the violence against women. Then, one of the men from our Community Restoration Program (CRP) describes his worst incident of violence against a woman. In so doing he publicly models accountability for his violence.

CRP is for men who have completed our 24-week program and who have consistently demonstrated a willingness to challenge themselves and other men to change. They must show that they understand the need to restore to the community what they destroyed when they abused their partner. The partners of these men have indicated that this form of public accountability, in which men would assist us in educating the community, is a kind of restoration for them as well. Some of the CRP men speak at our public orientation, some testify at legislative hearings regarding bills that negatively affect battered women, and some provide community education as part of our Speakers’ Bureau.

Bringing in Other Men

Another way that Men Stopping Violence works to de-privatize men’s violence thru public accountability is to require men in our 24-week program to bring men from their community into the classroom to witness their work at the mid- and end- point of their class. Similar to Rhea Almedas’ Cultural Context Model, in which men bring sponsors into their groups to support them by challenging their abusive behaviors and coaching them to consider their affects on others, men in our classes bring men who have influence in their lives. These men, such as clergy or uncles or co-workers, practice challenging the men in class to change and they pledge to hold them accountable once they have completed the course.

One purpose of bringing witnesses into the class is to demystify the change process. We do this by increasing the number of men who can see that the issues men struggle with in a batterers’ class are the same issues with which most men struggle. They witness men in the class taking responsibility for behaviors that many men use but do not generally think of as controlling or abusive. They leave the class understanding that all men and not just the men in class can benefit from working changing the beliefs and attitudes that promote violence against women. Over our 25 years of work, we’ve learned that the more we expect of ourselves and of the men in our classes the more we’re all capable of doing.

The Community as Participant

We invite the community to observe our classes, both to make transparent the purpose and the process of the work, and to model the concept of the community holding men, including our facilitators, accountable. We constantly invite feedback from our community partners.

On several occasions we have held our classes in public arenas, including at our national trainings and as part of undergraduate seminars. We noticed that the men who volunteered to participate were as willing to get real with their work in public settings (acknowledging abuse, and confronting and supporting each other) as they were in the confines of our classroom. They saw these experiences as opportunities to educate the public on how men can work to hold men accountable.

We think the tipping point for men who are seeking change is when they understand that it's lifelong work and that they will have to enlist community support to sustain it.

Because We Have Daughters[®] Campaign

In these examples, we're working to demonstrate how BIPs can be instruments of community education and change. But when we shift our focus to mobilizing men in general we ask ourselves, how is it in our self-interest to make communities safer for women and girls? Our Because We Have Daughters[®] campaign answers that question. It provides opportunities for dads to strengthen their understanding and connection with their daughters while finding ways to create climates of safety for them. What we hope and expect is that many of those men will make the leap and begin to understand that their daughters will be safe when all women and girls are safe and that they have a role in making that happen.

Internship and Mentor Training Programs

Our Internship and Mentor Training programs provide opportunities for young men to engage with peers in school and community settings to prevent dating violence.

Strategies for ending violence against women are unlimited when we allow ourselves to think beyond the boundaries of BIPs. We are part of a growing network of men, including but in no way limited to, A Call to Men, Men's Resources International, and Men Can Stop Rape, who are relentlessly moving those boundaries. It's about time.

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