Re-offending battering

Re-offending in
Battering Intervention Programs
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Abstract
Programs which work with men who batter their wives/partners find that they must deal with re-offenses. The PIVOT Project in Houston has developed a procedure which addresses re-offending. When a man reports re-offending, the group participates with him in a consequence session whereby he goes through a procedure called the 5 R's--Recognition, Responsibility, Remorse, Restitution, and Reformation.

Program staff believe that advantages are to the woman, the man, the group in particular and to society in general.
Re-offending in Battering Intervention Programs

One of the ethical dilemmas which takes place in what we in Texas call Battering Intervention and Prevention Programs is that of what to do when a man re-offends. Most programs have some procedure which responds to re-offenses. In this paper, I discuss the procedure developed at The PIVOT Project.

As a regular part of each session, each man at PIVOT in his own words recites a pledge in which he reports to the group whether or not he has been violent in the past week, pledges to be non-violent in the week to come, and to report it to the group if he cannot honor the pledge. Pledging not to be violent commits a man to not being violent. Not being violent becomes a conscious choice. Contrary to what many people who do this work believe, which is that MEN CHOOSE TO BE VIOLENT, I believe that it is that MEN HAVE NOT CHOSEN NOT TO BE VIOLENT. An obvious criticism to the pledge
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is the possibility for lying about one's violence to the group. However, when a man does admit to a re-occurrence, it presents a forum by which a man can learn responsibility and accountability for his behavior, that he can be dealt with fairly and justly in a community of his peers, and he can restore himself to the group in particular and to society in general. When one man does this and others observe it, the taking of responsibility becomes the honorable and decent choice. The group, the facilitator, and the man himself participate in the development of an appropriate consequence for his offense. No man is required to accept any consequence that he is not willing to complete. The group must work until it finds consequences which are acceptable and appropriate. Desirable outcomes are possible as a result of the consequence procedure. As a man practices non-violence and non-abuse by recognizing, monitoring, and adjusting his own behavior, he does not need outside agents (police, courts) to do so. His possible realization that violence and abuse are morally wrong offers a higher level response than a
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change in behavior simply to avoid punishment.

In order to derive and carry out consequences, a man at PIVOT completes four tasks which should ultimately result in the fifth. We term them the Five R's.

R #1) Recognition. Before any change can occur, the man has to recognize that something is awry and needs to be attended to. *A woman has been battered and abused; she is afraid. I note that has happened.*

R #2) Responsibility. The man has to accept responsibility for his part of the act. *A woman has been battered and abused; she is afraid. No matter what other circumstances were involved, I was the one who did this.*

R #3) Remorse. The man has to feel that what he did was not a good thing to do and feel sorry for it. Many men would like to believe they have completed the process when they reach this point. Saying that they are sorry clears the slate and nothing further is required. *A woman has been battered and abused; she is afraid. No matter what other circumstances were involved, I was the one who did this. It was not a good thing for me to do and I am deeply sorry for it. I feel very badly about it.*

4) Restitution. Action is required in this
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critical step which borrows from the Alcoholics Anonymous step of making amends. Consequences must be devised, accepted, carried out and reported back to the group. Consequence formulation is slippery. In group, when a man once admitted re-offending, another member of the group believed it to be consequence enough for him just to have made confession in front of the group.

Having an unsubstantial consequence makes the offense trivial. Some programs are at the other end of the spectrum. They require that when a man admits a re-offense, he be discharged. Their reasoning is that a continuance of violence is not acceptable and that success and failure are measured as all or nothing, pass or fail. While this is understandable, I believe doing so loses the opportunity for his and his group mates' participation in a ritual by which they learn that responsibility for actions can have a restoring and growth-promoting outcome. At PIVOT, consequences have been versatile and have included the following: Pleading guilty to charges in the criminal justice system. Beginning group again either by staying in same group or transferring to another facilitator. Not
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watching favorite programs while cleaning the kitchen totally for two months. Admitting in the police academy training a re-offense has occurred; thereby subjecting oneself to public exposure and censure. Getting a divorce without presenting any obstacles to partner. Setting up money and an agreement not to go after her should she leave as part of a safety plan and signing confession for her to have for authorities should he not honor the plan.

What is basic in coming up with consequences is having them be helpful and constructive to the one upon whom the offense was committed if it serves her well in particular and/or for society in general. A woman has been battered and abused; she is afraid. I note what has happened. No matter what other circumstances were involved, I was the one who did this. It was not a good thing for me to do and I am deeply sorry for it. To demonstrate my remorse and accountability, I am going to put money in an account for her which she will have for her own safety and security. Additionally, I am going to offer my services to the battered women's shelter in my city as a volunteer who will use his truck to pick up and deliver donations.

R #5) Reformation: Reformation is the by-product of the first four R's having been performed adequately.
Assimilation and accommodation are the taking in and processing of new information and then adjusting and changing given the new perspective. Danny Glover's character as the husband of Celie in THE COLOR PURPLE illustrates this concept. After being abusive for years to Whoopi Goldberg's Celie, he is later instrumental in reuniting her with her children. He did not do it for reward from her. She was not aware of his efforts. In his performance of the task, he became changed in a way that would not have occurred otherwise. A woman has been battered and abused; she is afraid. I note what has happened. No matter what other circumstances were involved, I was the one who did this. It was not a good thing for me to do and I am deeply sorry for it. To demonstrate my remorse and accountability, I am going to put money in an account for her which she will have for her own safety and security. Additionally, I am going to offer my services to the battered women's shelter in my city as a volunteer who will use his truck to pick up and deliver donations. I will have done this with no expectation of reward. by performing these tasks, I will have reinforced my own choice of non-violence, demonstrated responsibility for my own actions, been a positive example for my peers, improved the situation for my wife, and taken on some action of social responsibility and concern which will be for the betterment of my community. As a result I will have become a better, more
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developed person though I may not even be conscious of these changes. I have been an agent in my own reformation.

When the consequence process works as it should, the benefit is not only to the man, but also to all other members of the group. The group will have experienced that it is safe to be honest in the group. Facing consequences rather than avoiding them can be an integral part in a man's evolving to a more complete and better human being and that ultimately enhances safety of and self-determination and justice for women.
BIOGRAPHY

Toby Myers is a longtime worker in the Battered Women's Movement. She helped to found a shelter in Houston, Texas. She was one of the original organizers of the Texas Council on Family Violence. She has served on the board of the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence and has chaired the Family Violence Advisory Committee for the Department of Human Services. She was one of the 150 appointees by Surgeon General Everett Koop to his Workshop on Violence and Public Health. Her research has been published in domestic and international journals. She is a Licensed Professional Counselor, a Psychological Associate, and a Certified Social Worker-Advanced Clinical Practitioner. Dr. Myers holds faculty positions at the University of Houston Clear Lake and at the University of Texas School of Public Health. She currently directs The PIVOT Group which is her private practice and The PIVOT Project of Aid to Victims of Domestic Abuse (AVDA)—a Battering Intervention and Prevention Program. She was on the original board of AVDA and served many years as
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Treasurer. For having made a positive contribution to her community, she was honored by the National Council of Jewish Women with their Hannah G. Solomon Award. She has received special commendation from the Board of the Texas Department of Human Services for her work in behalf of battered women. The Texas Council on Family Violence considering her as the Mother of the Texas Battered Women's Movement has named an annual award for her and granted her a lifetime seat on its board. She was honored by the National Council on Crime Prevention and McGruff (who takes the bite out of crime) with the Spotlight Houston Award.

Her dream is that people can learn to live in intimate relationships which are not only violence free, but are also mutually respectful, mutually satisfying, and growth promoting.