

Family Violence and Men of Color: Healing the Wounded Spirit

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Chapter Five

**African American Men Who Batter:
A Community-Centered Approach to Prevention and Intervention**

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INTRODUCTION

Race matters.

This is one of the core organizing principles that informs the practices of Men Stopping Violence (MSV), a 26-year-old, Atlanta-based organization that works to end male violence against women.

As part of that overarching mission, we challenge systems that oppress both men and women because of class, gender, sexual orientation, age, and/or race/ethnicity. MSV asserts that violence against women is not an individual pathology, but a systemic control tactic that cannot be uncoupled from other oppressive systems of control, such as racial discrimination or heterosexism. The work of MSV is based on the premise that these systems are integrated and, therefore, should be addressed as parts of a whole.

In working with African American men, facilitators for MSV's Men's Education Program (MEP) acknowledge the reality of the racial and class oppression that the men experience while simultaneously challenging them to engage in rigorous self-examination and be accountable for their abusive and violent behavior toward women. Our experience with African

American men indicates that they are more willing to be engaged in this process and more open to the intervention experience when they are part of a homogeneous group.

The limited research in this area supports these observations. A small study conducted in 1995 found that African American men who participated in a racially homogeneous group, in which the facilitator was also African American, were more likely to feel comfortable participating, trust the feedback they received, accept challenges from other men, and connect with the facilitator (Williams, 1995).

More research is needed on outcomes for African American men who participate in racially homogeneous batterer intervention classes/groups. However, studies that have examined outcomes for other types of work involving African Americans also point to the need for what Williams and Gondolf (2001) have termed culturally focused counseling. They write:

According to clinical observations and research findings in other fields, cultural issues may explain the poor outcomes associated with African American men in conventional batterer counseling. Practitioner-researchers recommend culturally focused batterer counseling as an appropriate response to these issues. (Williams and Gondolf, 2001, p. 283)

One of the classes that MSV conducts for men as part of our 24-week program (part of the MEP) is made up entirely of African Americans, including facilitators. The aim of the class is not to isolate or segregate but to provide a setting that facilitates deeper engagement and encourages increased participation from Black men. (This does not mean that issues related to racial oppression are not addressed in the two other, mixed-race, classes that we conduct as part of the 24-week program. All men can benefit from a deeper understanding of the ways in which racism and sexism are related.)

MSV also conducts a class, Tactics and Choices, for men who have been arrested on domestic violence charges in DeKalb County, Georgia. Men are required by the courts to attend this class as a condition of being released on bond. Routinely, African Americans make up more than 98% of this one-time, three-hour class, although the total African American population of the county is about 56%, according to 2005 U.S. Census figures. The men in this class represent mainly the working poor and working class. The makeup of these classes is clearly a reflection of racism and classism within the criminal-legal system. Whether they are in the 24-week program or in the one-time Tactics and Choices class, for these men racism is the presenting issue.

MSV also has a number of programs that engage men who have not been identified as batterers. They include the Internship Program, in which MSV mentors young men who are interested in organizing to end violence against women; the Because We Have Daughters® (BWHD) Program, which strengthens relationships between fathers and daughters while educating fathers about challenges faced by women and girls; the Mentor Training Program, for men who want to mentor boys; and education and training for practitioners, researchers, policymakers, and other community stakeholders interested in ending violence against women. The dearth of African American male facilitators, advocates, and researchers working in the area of violence against women has spurred MSV to seek assertively to engage African American men in these programs, especially young men recruited into the Internship and Mentor Training programs.

All of these efforts reflect MSV's view that strategic, community-based engagement is necessary for changing the social and cultural climate in which violence against women occurs. This view is also reflected in the analytical tools we use—specifically the Men Stopping

Violence Community-Accountability Model—to assess the problem and create effective solutions.

This chapter will explain MSV’s philosophical framework as it relates to African-American men, including the Community-Accountability Model; present the Core Principles of MSV’s work with African-American men; and discuss programs and practices based on those principles.

PHILOSOPHICAL FRAMEWORK

Many practitioners who work with batterers are still reluctant to explore the question, “Why do some men batter?” And, given the focus of this chapter, “Why do some African American men batter?”

MSV shares this concern and asserts that it is more instructive to focus on the function of a batterer’s abuse. One of the risks in asking “why” is that the batterer—and his justifications and story—become the focus, and his female victim becomes invisible. The batterer becomes recast as a victim—of the system and perhaps of what he sees as her use of the system to victimize him. It might appear that facilitators who focus on “why” are supporting the batterer at the expense of the female victim, with the effect being that his abuse is justified.

This is one reason why facilitators and educators might resist examining the psycho-social context in which African American men’s violence against women occurs. MSV examines that context, considering how historical, cultural, and social factors have influenced individual behavior and perception, not because it justifies African American men’s abuse, but because it informs that behavior. This awareness allows facilitators to design intervention and prevention strategies that deepen African American men’s engagement—in the classroom and in the community.

Historical Context

MSV identifies the direct cause of men's violence against women as the cultural assumption that manhood is defined by the ability to dominate and control people, situations, and environments. Our culture has as its foundation a patriarchal system that demands that females be viewed as inferior to males and subject to male control. African American author and activist bell hooks (2004) defines patriarchy as

A political-social system that insists that males are inherently dominating, superior to everything and everyone deemed weak, especially females, and endowed with the right to dominate and rule over the weak and to maintain that dominance through various forms of psychological terrorism and violence. (hooks, 2004, p. 18)

Given that cultural mandate, is the man who perpetrates violence against a woman engaging in aberrant behavior, which is the common view? Or, rather, is he being loyal to the patriarchal system that educated him? MSV ascribes to the latter view. The batterer is—consciously or unconsciously—using coercion and violence to secure his place in a patriarchal system.

hooks's definition implies that patriarchy is ideological. Anyone, regardless of sexual orientation, gender, class, and race can internalize patriarchal values, though men are more encouraged and nurtured to internalize these ideals, and patriarchy requires all men to develop the will to use violence to sustain the system.

African American males, like all males, are told from birth to death, directly and subliminally, that to be female is to be inferior. Very early in life the African American male gets the message that to be vulnerable is to be weak, and to act compassionately and lovingly is inviting others to take advantage of you and possibly destroy you. These "soft" traits are

traditionally assigned to females, and the overriding message is that the worst thing you can do as a male is to act “like a girl.”

MSV intervenes with approximately 100 African American men in any given month. Some of these are part of our one-time Tactics and Choices class and others are part of the 24-week class. Facilitators who work with these men week after week observe how consistently these messages are presented. African American men have so deeply internalized these patriarchal messages that alternatives to this way of being seem unimaginable. This is especially evident in men who reside in communities where the life philosophy is “survival of the fittest.” Any invitation to consider nonaggressive, nonviolent ways of living is experienced as a threat to their very survival.

As we will see later, the MSV Community-Accountability Model illustrates the ways in which African American males are socialized through primary, micro, macro, and global systems to, essentially, go to war. The psychological indoctrination that soldiers undergo to enable them to fight wars mirrors the ways in which the African American male’s socialization is carried out. Unfortunately, girls and women are often the enemy targets.

In its work with African American men, MSV acknowledges that some of these men are in partnerships with women of all ethnicities. However, since most of the African American men MSV encounters are partnered with African American women, and most interpersonal violence occurs intraracially, this analysis focuses on intraracial relationships between African American men and women.

Roots of Male-Female Tension in African American Communities

While African American males are socialized in similar ways to other racial and ethnic groups, their historic and cultural experiences have shaped their gender relations in a unique way.

African-American males' particular brand of sexism has been shaped by racism, with its deep roots in slavery. Many social scientists continue to document the impact of slavery on African American family life. Some assert that the tensions between African American men and women today can be traced to the slave experience.

Sociologist Donna L. Franklin (2000) argues that healing the rifts between African American men and women requires an understanding of slavery and its aftermath and a strategy for attending to the effects that are deeply present in the minds, bodies, and souls of Black folk. Slavery had a devastating impact on the Black family. Franklin writes:

The roots of black gender conflict can be traced to this experience of powerlessness during slavery. Stripped of the most fundamental control over their family lives, slaves could not ordinarily choose how to fulfill the human roles of husbands and wives, fathers and mothers, sons and daughters. (Franklin, 2000, p. 28)

Africans' experiences in America took away the roles that defined men and women in West African culture. African men could no longer expect to fulfill their roles as warriors, husbands and, most importantly, fathers. African women had no protection from any quarter: no protection under marriage, none from forced liaisons with White men, no protection under the law, no right to marry or raise children.

These injustices continued after emancipation, with Whites in power exploiting the tensions between Black men and women. Former slaves were challenged with reinventing and constructing new family life in the new conditions of freedom. White men—former slave masters and other men in power—exploited the relationships between Black men and Black women, engendering distrust between them and encouraging Black men to use any means necessary, including violence, to control Black women.

Franklin describes how gender relations between Black men and women were complicated by the Freedman's Bureau:

The bureau was established by the Republican Congress in 1865, ostensibly to protect the rights of former slaves by providing them with education and medical care. It was the bureau's responsibility to monitor labor contracts and oversee "problems" encountered by this new labor force. It soon became clear, however, that the primary aim of the bureau was to protect the interests of the planters, not the interests of black families, and still less the interests of black women. Southern whites saw the aspirations of black women to attend to their own households and care for their own children as jeopardizing agricultural productivity. Dismayed by the dramatic reduction in the black labor force, with black women withdrawn, planters appealed in writing to the Freedman's Bureau for measures that would ensure their return to the fields. (Franklin, 2000, p. 49–50)

Franklin further asserts that once the Freedman's Bureau made the commitment to protect White planters' interests by mandating Black women's return to the fields, it reinforced that directive by strengthening its relationship with Black men. The bureau gave Black men authority over their wives, designating the husband as head of the household and establishing his right to sign contracts for the labor of his entire family. Families without a male head of household were allotted less land. Black husbands were also held accountable by bureau agents for their wives' work performance. Black women were paid a lower wage than Black men for the same labor.

This Faustian bargain struck by white and black men, was the first signal after emancipation of the erosion of gender relations in the African-American community. The bureau reported receiving hundreds of complaints from black women of battery, adultery and nonpayment of child support. (Franklin, 2000, p. 51–52)

An examination of social-political and economic policies and practices over recent decades shows that they mirror those of the nineteenth-century Freedman's Bureau. There are institutional policies and practices that facilitate tensions between Black men and Black women and encourage patriarchal structural arrangements in African American communities. MSV theorizes that African American men's use of violence or the threat of violence is, in part, both an unconscious and a conscious attempt to regain their perceived lost or diminished rightful place in the home.

A century after Reconstruction, U.S. government policies were still influencing the structure of the Black family. One of the most well-known analyses of Black poverty was authored by Daniel Patrick Moynihan, who at that time was Assistant Secretary of Labor in the Johnson Administration. What came to be known as "The Moynihan Report" identified Black female-headed households as a major factor in creating and perpetuating Black poverty and in essence described such familial arrangements as anti-American if not pathological. In a section of the report headed "The Tangle of Pathology" it was stated:

In essence, the Negro community has been forced into a matriarchal structure which, because it is too out of line with the rest of the American society, seriously retards the progress of the group as a whole, and imposes a crushing burden on the Negro male and, in consequence, on a great many Negro women as well.

. . . Ours is a society which presumes male leadership in private and public affairs. The arrangements of society facilitate such leadership and reward it. A subculture, such as that of the Negro American, in which this is not the pattern, is placed at a distinct disadvantage. (U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Policy Planning and Research, 1965)

The Moynihan Report seemed to place the blame for Black poverty squarely on the shoulders of Black women, who, the report implied, would be in much better circumstances if they were in families led by men. This attitude continues to carry weight as government policies and private initiatives alike seek to promote traditional patriarchal, hierarchical families as the norm, in essence sustaining the Faustian bargain.

The “Code of Silence” Within African American Communities

The historical facts of slavery, segregation, and the continuing discrimination that occurs at every level of American life demand a thoughtful and thorough examination of race and how it influences the work to end male violence against women. In acknowledging that we all live and operate within cultural and political systems based on inequality, domination, and patriarchal values, we begin to get to the root causes of male violence against women and have a clearer picture of how that violence affects everyone.

Many African Americans have developed a code of silence about dysfunction within their communities to counter the negative ideas and images that traditionally have been part of the American cultural conversation about Black people.

African Americans’ experiences with the criminal-legal system have also prompted them to shield problems within African American communities from the larger society. Given the use of law enforcement, the court system, and other authorities to control, manipulate, and unlawfully abuse and imprison African Americans, Black women have reason to mistrust the state and its proposed solutions. Therefore, many of them have not been comfortable relying on the criminal-legal system to resolve domestic violence cases in their communities. Many African Americans have advocated for and developed alternative approaches and models.

Given race relations in this country, there are few occasions where African Americans and Whites discuss these issues in any meaningful way. Most Whites continue to deny and reject African Americans' experience of America as racist. Poll after poll document diametrically opposing views over whether certain events had anything to do with race. A recent event that provided an illustration of this point was the government's ineffective response to Hurricane Katrina in 2005. In an ABC News poll conducted in September 2005, 76% of African Americans said that race affected the government response to the hurricane, whereas 73% of Whites said race did not affect the response (Langer, 2005).

The persistent denial and minimization of racism and slavery's aftermath must be rigorously challenged if we are to effectively address violence against women in African American communities.

MSV'S COMMUNITY-ACCOUNTABILITY MODEL

Patriarchal and racist ideologies have demanded that we address the problem of male violence against women by focusing on the few men who get caught (mostly the poor and men of color) rather than on the structural inequalities, policies, and practices that encourage and nurture male violence. As discussed in the previous section, MSV views African American males' violence against women as a problem deeply rooted in historical and societal values.

MSV's Community-Accountability Model of Male Violence Against Women offers a view of the cultural and historical mechanisms that support male violence against women and includes information on the ways in which multiple oppressive systems intersect. The model, and the strategies and programs related to it, demonstrate the potential for disrupting traditions of abuse and dominance at the individual, familial, local, national, and global community levels.

The model invites African-American men to consider the many unique social and cultural messages that they receive about women and about their male roles. The model also shows the relationships between social systems and individuals, and how the systemic oppression of people—whether they are women, lesbians, gay or transgendered people, people of color, or some other marginalized group—informs the culture of violence against women.

By showing how familial and community systems rooted in patriarchy are connected, men gain insight into the way their life patterns are formed and informed by those systems, which helps them begin to disrupt destructive patterns.

Ecological Models

The Community-Accountability Model is an ecological model. Ecological models have been influential in sociological and psychological research and the formation of social policy since psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner began his work on human ecology, using a model that showed the ways in which family, culture, and environment shaped how children developed into adulthood. His theories (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) have had widespread influence on the study of how people interact with their environments.

Variations of Bronfenbrenner's model began to be applied to a number of research subjects, including male violence against women. A review of these and several other published models of violence and violence against women shows that they have in common an emphasis on identifying risk factors in order to excavate the causes of violence and, consequently, predict individual behavior so that interventions can be developed.

Rather than attempting to predict individual violent behavior by identifying risk factors, the MSV model identifies the socializing messages and behaviors that help create a climate of violence by pressuring individuals to be loyal to a patriarchal, hierarchal value system. This

approach helps MSV craft responses that advocate individual responsibility at the same time that it looks beyond the individual to encourage necessary cultural change (see Figure 5.1).

Interconnected Community Systems

The MSV model identifies patriarchy and colonialism as root causes of male violence against women. It also illustrates the ways in which gender, racial, and class hierarchies support the use of violence to maintain oppressive systems, and how sociopolitical systems instruct individuals at different levels of community to enforce and reinforce the messages used to maintain those systems.

The model is organized around the different levels of influence at which hierarchies based on patriarchy, gender, race, and class assert themselves, and identifies those levels at which cultural norms can be disrupted. MSV names the function of each level of socialization and focuses on the messages conveyed by each community represented. How these communities interconnect and how their messages are interpreted, acted upon, and redeployed back throughout the system of communities is vital to understanding how individual men are influenced and how, in turn, they influence the communities of which they are a part.

This analysis views this political-social system as a global one that is sustained and strengthened by smaller, related systems that control smaller spheres of influence. The analysis focuses on the roles of interconnected community systems in both socializing men and reinforcing patriarchal male behavior.

This model allows MSV to view African American men—batterers or not—not only as individuals who are abusive, but as people in relationship with their environment and with other individuals and groups that perform socializing functions. MSV's work seeks not only to

intervene at different community levels to encourage individuals to change, but to train African American men to become catalysts that shift social norms toward nonviolent, nonsexist, and nonpatriarchal manifestations. MSV views community accountability in this sense as more than sanctions imposed by the criminal-legal system, social service agencies, and other government entities. MSV strategies seek to encourage nongovernmental actions initiated by individuals making up a number of different kinds of communities—family, the workplace, faith communities, schools, and others.

Levels of Community Influence

MSV's Community-Accountability Model depicts five levels of community influence: the individual and the primary, micro, macro, and global communities. The individual male, his actions, and the forces that act upon him are represented by the smallest ellipse in the model. The primary community is that group just outside of the individual, consisting of his family of origin, school friends, clubs, gangs, or any group that fulfills a familial role. Beyond this is the micro community (workplace, legal system, faith communities, social service agencies); the macro community (governments, mass media, high level courts such as the U.S. Supreme Court, corporations); and the global community (patriarchy and colonialism).

The arrows indicate the flow of energy and influence among these communities, how they act upon each other, and how actions at each level influence the other levels. Energy and influence flows not only from the global community through smaller levels down to the individual but in the opposite direction; the individual's actions may either help maintain the system or have the potential to effect social change.

The colonial and patriarchal cultural systems upheld by interactions between communities ensure that African American boys and men encounter powerful messages

establishing male supremacy as the historical and cultural norm. They internalize the notion of male privilege and use it in their everyday lives. Major and minor norm-setting institutions send explicit and implicit messages to boys and girls, men and women, about the superiority of men. Girls and women also internalize the message that male dominance is an established norm that must be either accepted or resisted, and neither choice ensures a woman's safety from male violence.

Such a reality points to a need for strategies that acknowledge the limitations of practices to address African American men's violence against women that do not account for racism and colonialism. MSV developed Core Principles to guide practitioners, organizers, and other community stakeholders interested in working to end male violence against women in African-American and other communities.

PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICES

The principles and practices of MSV center around community-based strategies for addressing male violence against women. The classes/groups act as laboratories in which we stay connected to the core issue of male violence against women. The lessons learned are integrated into theory and practices in all parts of our community organizing.

In the next section, we describe five Core Principles that have been developed, reviewed and refined over two decades.

Principle 1: We Are the Work

Commitment to the cause of ending violence against women means committing to conducting ongoing personal work. This awareness is necessary in order to advocate for women and confront men about their sexist beliefs and behaviors. While facilitators/organizers are unlikely

to engage in blatantly abusive behaviors, they can collude with the system of patriarchal masculinity in a number of subtle ways.

African American male facilitators, for example, may instinctively identify with men in their classroom and subtly validate their beliefs and behaviors in order to strengthen that identification and also to maintain their own male privilege. Personal work (a lifelong process) allows practitioners to take responsibility for their own behavior, examine the ways in which they collude, and to hold themselves and others accountable. It also helps facilitators explore their motivations for working with African American men.

In the classroom or in the community organizing with men, whatever our gender or ethnicity/race, we are more likely to enhance victim safety and increase accountability for men when we engage in honest and critical introspection.

Application of Principle

There are a number of ways in which MSV practitioners engage in the work of self-examination.

The foundation for this practice is laid when male potential staff members for MSV enter the Men's Education Program's 24-week class. Any male interested in working at MSV is required to complete this program, which has male accountability and self-examination as core practices.

Men who work for MSV continue this process in regular Men's Accountability Meetings. In these gatherings, men recount circumstances in which they may have used sexist, racist, or heterosexist behavior in their day-to-day lives. The meeting is an opportunity for men to be accountable for this behavior and to hold other men accountable in a respectful and assertive way. Staff members also provide each other with feedback outside of these meetings.

MSV also encourages men to practice self-care. Creating safety and justice for women includes challenging men to take care of their own physical and emotional needs. As part of their patriarchal training, men have been socialized to view women as their caretakers, and because women cannot adhere to this unreasonable expectation, many men resort to violence or the threat of violence to punish them.

Self-examination is important and useful for practitioners who work with or plan to work with African American men since the culture promotes racist ideas about black men and racist and sexist ideas about black women. African American facilitators and practitioners are not immune; they often carry these racial biases about African Americans as well. So for them self-examination is also necessary.

In our trainings, MSV uses exercises to challenge practitioners around their beliefs. One tool we often use in trainings is a “sentence stem exercise,” which requires participants to complete statements about Black men. For example, a sentence might start out with “I wish Black men would _____” and participants are asked to fill in the rest of the statement with the first thing that comes to mind, which assists in bypassing the conscious mind. Many White participants who may have viewed themselves as progressive or nonracist often express surprise at the beliefs they hold about Black men. Some Black women participating in the exercise also find this exercise illuminating as well and express surprise at the level of the anger they hold toward Black men.

It makes sense that practitioners, no matter how conscious they are, might still hold damaging beliefs about race and gender; it is extremely difficult not to internalize what the culture says about African American men and women. The work of practitioners is to be aware

that such internalized beliefs could affect their work with African American men and to, therefore, engage in ongoing self-examination.

Principle 2: African American Women's Voices Must Be Central to the Work

The primary goal of MSV in working with African American men is to enhance the safety of African American women. As previously noted, most interpersonal violence is intraracial.

Therefore, we seek out the voices of African American women in order to hear how they are affected by male violence. When African American men are the focus of this work, it is easy for the voices of African American women to become lost.

African American women develop a clear understanding of patriarchy and how it works. They must in order to keep themselves safe in a culture where the threat of male violence is so pervasive. At the same time, they are very familiar with the ways in which African American men use their experiences with racism to avoid accountability for their violence against women. Being able to hear the truth of African American women's experiences and being given opportunities to empathize with their physical and emotional pain is important for both practitioners and African American class participants, who so often hide their abusive actions behind the pain of their own experiences with oppression.

Application of Principle

African American women have been part of the conversation at MSV since early in the organization's life. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, MSV began the African American Initiative to ensure that African American women's voices were heard and that MSV's work was informed by Black women's experiences and reality. A group of African American women from the board and community and African American men from staff and the board met monthly.

In addition to being a laboratory for learning about and addressing gender relations in African American communities, these meetings provided the foundation for a number of practices at MSV.

The African American Initiative recommended that MSV begin an all-African American men's class, and this class continues to be a critical part of our mission. As stated earlier, the aim of the class is not to isolate African American men, but to create a climate that enhances the participants' willingness to attend to gender oppression.

Another recommendation was for MSV to be proactive in seeking and encouraging African American leadership in the organization. By 1998, one of the co-executive directors of MSV was an African American man, and African Americans continue to fill leadership positions at the organization.

MSV was also advised to fill more Board of Directors positions with African American women. Since then, Black women have continued to be active on the MSV board, and three immediate past board presidents have been African American women.

Another way that MSV invites input from African American women is to maintain strong relationships with the Women's Resource Center to End Domestic Violence (WRC), a Georgia-based organization that serves domestic violence victims. One of the recommendations of the WRC and other advocates was that MSV should cease "accountability checks" with the female partners of men in the 24-week program. Instead, the WRC, which has a predominantly African American staff and client base, provides liaisons between female partners of batterers and MSV. This allows the voices of African American women victims to be heard without jeopardizing their safety.

Another way that African American women's experiences are heard is through the use of materials—readings, music, and video—in the classroom. Often, a piece is used to open the class session. This material includes work by such women as bell hooks, Beverly Guy-Sheftall, Johnetta Betsch Cole, Evelyn White, Gladys Knight, and Aretha Franklin.

Beginning class with women's voices sets the tone, keeping women's reality present. Once the material is shared, men have an opportunity to respond. Often the reading serves as a discussion topic. The men are encouraged to respond to what they are feeling, thinking or remembering.

Principle 3: Race Matters

In the work to end violence against women, race matters because, although it is a social construct, race has meaning for how people are treated. The concept of race affects MSV's work with African American men in a number of ways.

When working with African American men, race is always in the room. As stated earlier in the chapter, MSV conducts a class, Tactics and Choices, for DeKalb County, Georgia, and men are required to attend as condition of their bond posted for a family violence offense. We conduct this course every two weeks, and out of approximately 45 men per session, 98% of them are Black. That is not representative of the demographics of DeKalb County nor an accurate breakdown of men who are committing domestic violence-related crimes.

For the 24-week class, some men come, theoretically, by choice and some men are court-ordered. Most White men state that they are coming by choice, and most men of color—and poor men in general—state that they are court-ordered. This shows that White men and men with more economic power have the privilege to avoid incarceration and can be perceived as more willing to attend because they did not need a court order. However, MSV facilitators observe no

difference in the degree of willingness to take responsibility for abusive and controlling behaviors and make positive changes.

Ignoring race gives men another justification for denying, minimizing, or otherwise detaching themselves from their violence against women. Without a frank discussion of the realities of race, African American men can fall back on their own victimization by a racist culture. While it is important to validate these men's struggles because of oppression, MSV's work calls for facilitators to use skills to hold these men accountable for their abuse of women.

Without attending to race, including examining their own racist beliefs and attitudes, practitioners run the risk of participating in the marginalization of African American women's voices.

Even within movements to end abuse against women, there have been differences between the experiences of White women victimized by male abuse and those of African American women victims. Also, women of color in the Violence Against Women's Movement have always insisted that race be addressed. However, the White, middle-class narrative tended to dominate, and issues of race were marginalized.

Also, the historical use of law enforcement to oppress African Americans means that African American women are unlikely to view law enforcement in the same ways as White women do. The Battered Women's Movement worked very hard for the recognition of battering as a serious crime that required serious attention from the criminal-legal system. However, African American women may be reluctant to rely on a system that they perceive as racist and in which African Americans are disproportionately represented. Instead of placing their trust in the state, they may first seek other systems of support that they recognize as being valid, such as churches, sororities, families, and extended families.

All of these factors make it imperative that practitioners who work with African American men not adopt a “colorblind” strategy but develop practices that attend to race without undermining the work to end violence against African American women.

Application of Principle

The all–African American class that MSV conducts is a way of enhancing the safety of African American women by creating an environment that helps men take responsibility for their actions. MSV has two mixed-race classes also, and the observation has been that African American men have a higher level of willingness to take responsibility for their actions when they are among other Black men, including Black facilitators.

For African American men even to begin to take on sexism, their struggles as victims of racism have to be acknowledged and validated. The oppressive nature of the criminal-legal system must be named. However, the MSV facilitators of this class, both African American, do not allow men to stay grounded in their own victimization.

The use of African American male facilitators for this class and other educational settings is one way that MSV signals that attending to race is critical to the work of ending violence against women. Another way is the use of educational materials that reflect African American interests, for example, readings by African American writers such as bell hooks and videos that depict African American subjects.

Outside of the classroom, MSV is intentional about seeking out, organizing, and engaging African American men for all our programs. The Training and Community Education Program works with African American men in congregations, civic organizations, and other groups; African American fathers are actively recruited for the BWHD Program; and we recruit

men of color for the Internship Program so that the next generation of practitioners will be more diverse.

MSV also maintains a diverse staff and has African Americans at the leadership level who have roles in policy making, decision making, and organizational structure. MSV facilitators are encouraged to undergo antiracism training on an ongoing basis, and they regularly engage in antiracism work in the community.

In addition, we provide training and support for African American men who are doing the work, through our programs and through our relationships with other African American organizations doing domestic violence work. These include such groups as A Call to Men and the Institute on Domestic Violence in the African American Community.

Absent the presence of African American facilitators, organizations that work with African American men should ensure that their staff has a high level of knowledge and consciousness about race issues. That means engaging in accountability work around race and attending the appropriate workshops and trainings. MSV has provided training that specifically addresses working with African American men in both classroom and community. The Office on Violence Against Women (OVW) of the U.S. Department of Justice has supported that work.

Principle 4: Intersectionality (Race, Gender, Class, Sexual Orientation) Matters

All forms of oppression are interconnected. Intersectionality is the relationship between oppressions, including those based on race, gender, class, and sexual orientation. Racism cannot be ignored when working with men from different cultural backgrounds. Homophobia cannot be ignored when grappling with the ways in which we define manhood. Class hierarchies affect the ways in which men enter a program like MSV's and how men are viewed once there. Organizing

to end violence against women requires that advocates be aware and educated about these “isms.”

Our commitment to change begins with an awareness of how we ourselves move in the world, because we cannot organize in a meaningful way without exposing our own roles in maintaining inequities. By educating ourselves about the interrelatedness of oppressions, advocates have a more complete set of tools when addressing violence in all of its forms.

The point of being attentive to intersectionality, therefore, is to better understand the factors that are at work in African Americans’ lives at any given moment. Although various issues of oppression are framed in the media and in some organizations as separate, an individual’s experience cannot easily be broken apart and categorized.

Activist Ami Mattison wrote:

Within current political parlance, we are bombarded by nonsensical distinctions among questions of freedom and justice: It’s a gay issue, a black issue, an Asian/Pacific Islander issue, a women’s issue, an immigrants issue, a homeless issue, an AIDS issue, a welfare issue, etc. While we must assert the specificity of our causes and concerns, we know that justice cannot be compartmentalized in this way. (Mattison, 1997, p. 1)

Application of Principle

In our trainings and classes, race and gender, particularly as they relate to African-Americans, are placed in the broader context of oppression, those restrictions and assaults on humanity suffered because of not only race and gender, but because of class, sexual orientation, age, education level, country of origin, language barriers, and many, many other identifiers.

At national trainings, MSV has used the Anita Hill/Clarence Thomas story to illuminate the issue of intersectionality. We show excerpts from a PBS documentary about the 1991

confirmation hearings for Thomas's Supreme Court nomination. Hill, who had worked for Thomas when he headed the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, testified before a Senate committee about Thomas' alleged sexual harassment.

Some of the African Americans interviewed for the PBS film made it clear that they thought that any possible sexism suffered by Anita Hill should be subordinated to concerns about possible racism suffered by Clarence Thomas. Classism played a role as well in some African Americans' view of the hearings. Many African Americans thought that it was inappropriate for any Black person to go public with such accusations. But they were especially uncomfortable hearing highly educated, upper middle-class African Americans like Hill and Thomas "airing dirty laundry."

Another exercise MSV uses, "The Myth of the Level Playing Field," demonstrates how all kinds of oppressive, hierarchical ideas come into play as people navigate their lives. This activity, by illustrating areas of privilege and marginalization, has been an eye opener for many training participants. For example, at the end of the exercise, many African American men in attendance are surprised to recognize their own privilege. In considering oppressive hierarchies, other factors besides gender and race need to be part of the conversation.

To help men in the classroom consider the relationship between sexism and other oppressions, we use an exercise in which we begin by asking men to cite negative messages they have heard about women. Once we have a substantial list of negative messages, we label this list "Gender Prejudice." We then invite men to name some of the powerful institutions in this country that set the norms for the socialization of men and women (government, media, religion, etc.). When we think of who is responsible for how these powerful institutions are created and

operated, we see that most are run or governed by White males. We present the men in class with the equation: Gender Prejudice + Power = Sexism.

Once men are clear about this definition, we change part of the equation. We change the word “gender” to “race” and then ask men how this change affects the list of negative messages that was developed about women. Men begin to realize that the list of messages can also be applied to their experiences with race prejudice; there is little difference between most of the negative messages about women that men hear and internalize and the negative messages about Black people that White people hear and internalize.

When we now look at the list of powerful institutions, again we see that White men are responsible for establishing and operating these institutions. Thus we have created a new equation: Race Prejudice + Power = Racism.

For many African American men, it is the first time they have considered that their treatment of women is an act of oppression comparable to that of racists.

Another way that MSV is attentive to issues of intersectionality is by engaging in activities that, at first glance, are seemingly outside the work of ending male violence against women. That includes participating in activities celebrating the Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday, in particular the annual King Day March, and the annual Gay Pride celebration in Atlanta.

Principle 5: Community Accountability Is Key

MSV advocates a shift from a sole focus on intervention to prevention strategies that seek to educate a critical mass of African American men to work in their communities. In this way, the analysis of the problem and the strategies that grow out of that analysis benefit not only men who attend batterer intervention programs (BIPs), but all men.

BIPs as we know them generally have not taken on the work of community and social change as a way of working to end violence against women. The majority of them have no connection to the community except through the criminal-legal system. MSV's experience has led us to believe that community-based strategies aimed at identifying and educating more male allies and strengthening collaborative ties between men and women are key to creating safety for women.

There are a number of reasons for this community-based focus. First, there are a significant number of women who are affected by male violence who are not being helped by BIPs, and nationally the number of men attending BIPs represents only a fraction of those who commit violence against women. Most BIP participants are court-referred. The National Institute of Justice (NIJ) has reported that approximately 80% of the men participating in BIPs surveyed nationwide were court-referred (Healy, Smith, & Sullivan, 1998). However, a significant number of incidents of violence against women never make it to the courts. Information gathered by the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) shows that between 1993 and 1998 an average of 47% of the incidents of intimate partner violence that occurred in the United States (about 400,000 incidents) were never reported to the police (Rennison & Welchans, 2000).

These statistics illustrate a need for solutions that engage a greater number of men in order to increase the safety of those women and girls who do not turn to the criminal-legal system for safety and justice.

Application of Principle

MSV has expanded or begun programs that take the work even deeper into communities, actively challenging men of conscience to accept responsibility for the problem and the

solutions. In educating *all* men about male violence against women, MSV brings communities to the classroom and the classroom to communities.

Community accountability is a strong brick in the foundation of the 24-week program. We view the classroom not as a cocoon of confidentiality, but as part of the community in which we live and work. The classroom is open to those interested in doing the work and witnessing the work of violence intervention and prevention.

The course work of the 24-week program requires men enrolled to hold each other accountable and also requires them to bring men from their congregations, workplaces, families, and other communities into class as witnesses and accountability partners. Currently, men in the program are required to bring men two times during the 24 weeks.

The aim of inviting these community witnesses is, in part, to help men who complete the program to sustain change. But, just as importantly, the inclusion of men from outside the program provides those men with opportunities to question and challenge themselves and exposes them to the work of ending violence against women.

The classroom is, therefore, open to advocates, facilitators, and others interested in witnessing the educational process. MSV was identified by the Judicial Oversight Demonstration Initiative (JODI), a project of OVW, as a program that was using innovative practices to work with African American men. Representatives from the Dorchester County, Massachusetts, and Washtenaw County, Michigan, JODI sites visited to observe the work. Several of the attendees, who included judges, defense attorneys, advocates, and facilitators, commented later that the visit was a powerful experience that changed the way they looked at themselves and changed their work with African American men. That visit and others like it also has the effect of

providing us with feedback about our practices, so that we may be held accountable for how we work.

MSV also routinely arranges opportunities for men in the 24-week program to interact with communities outside the classroom. The all–African American class, for example, has held a session on the campus of Morehouse College, a male, predominantly Black college in Atlanta. Students observed the class and afterward participated in a facilitated discussion of what they witnessed. The African American class has also been required to attend forums and community events related to the work of ending violence against women, including a candlelight vigil for victims of domestic violence murders, a book event for author/activist bell hooks, film screenings, and more. Some fathers in the class have participated in MSV’s BWHD Program.

Upon completion of the 24-week program, men are invited to join the Community Restoration Program (CRP). CRP allows men—most of whom have been through the 24-week program or are former MSV interns—to continue to support each other and the work of MSV. For the past few years, this group has also been seriously involved in community education on the issue of male violence against women. They have lobbied lawmakers in Georgia and nationally about legislation that affects the safety of women and children.

MSV also conducts ongoing work within African American communities—with churches, civic organizations, educators, and others interested in the issue—to assist in helping these groups define the problem and formulate their own strategies for tackling it. MSV continually challenges communities to be educated and to get creative about ways to take on this problem without total dependence on the criminal-legal system.

Media appearances are also vital to linking the work we do to community. MSV staffers are regularly called upon to discuss male violence against women in both electronic and print media, both locally and nationally.

CONCLUSION: A CASE STUDY

The following example illustrates how work done in MEP classrooms can galvanize community groups, which, in turn, helps create safety for women who might not ever depend on the criminal-legal system.

Several years ago, an African American MSV facilitator invited one of the ministers from his church to visit the Tactics and Choices class that our organization conducts for men arrested on domestic violence charges in DeKalb County, Georgia. The minister was Black, and the church was predominantly Black.

The minister attended the class and participated in discussion. One of the exercises conducted during the class helps men to identify tactics they have used to control and dominate women. The minister shared with the class one of the tactics he has used in his relationship and how he believed his partner was affected because of his actions.

The minister was so affected by his experience and by the high level of interaction that the men engaged in that he decided to attend a session of the all-African American class that is part of the 24-week program. Here he witnessed men taking responsibility for their actions and challenging each other around their choices to use aggression, control, and violence in relationships.

Inspired by the depth of the work the men were doing, he announced to the class that night that he was going to share his experience with his congregation and talk to his pastor about the church finding a way to address male violence against women.

As a result of this man's witnessing of the work being done in the classes, his church created a ministry to address the concerns and needs of women in the congregation who were involved in abusive and controlling relationships. The ministry grew into a support network for women, who come together to meet and share their experiences and to be in a safe space where their experiences are acknowledged and taken seriously.

MSV conducted an informational meeting with men in the congregation to educate them and raise awareness about issues of intimate partner violence. Conversations about how men conduct themselves in relationship to women are now an ongoing part of the monthly meeting of the church's men's group.

Recently, the women of the women's support group initiated a meeting with men from the men's group to develop a protocol for addressing domestic violence within the congregation. One of the issues discussed in that meeting was the importance of our pastor speaking to the issue of intimate partner violence on Sundays during services, and since that meeting the pastor has intentionally named male violence in relationships as unacceptable behavior during the Sunday service.

Subsequently, the female and male church members developed a protocol to provide safety for women and to hold men accountable for any abusive or violent behavior.

This is one of a number of examples of how the work of MSV has moved beyond the conventional work of just working with men who batter. Our commitment to community accountability, community involvement, and community creativity is an acknowledgment that true safety for African American women means thinking differently. The ongoing challenge is to promote a view of prevention and intervention that gives more than lip service to the idea that violence against women is a community problem that demands a community-based response.

It is no small task. African American communities and communities of all sorts have in the past been willing to deny ownership of the epidemic of violence against women. Part of that denial takes the form of diverting men into BIPs without attempting to examine and challenge the social context in which their violence takes place.

MSV is advocating for no less than a paradigm shift away from a methodology that focuses primarily on BIPs and toward one that provides all men with opportunities to become change agents within their communities.

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Figure 5.1

The Men Stopping Violence Community-Accountability Model of Male Violence Ag

