Organizing to End Violence Against Women: Putting Principles Into Practice

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INTRODUCTION

For 24 years, Men Stopping Violence (MSV) has done the very necessary work of creating and testing theories, strategies, and techniques for working with men to end male violence against women. Continuous examination of our work and its effectiveness has taught us that confronting a problem as entrenched as violence against women requires critical analysis of existing standards, creative thinking, and the courage to introduce new paradigms. Our goal is no less than social change.

The now-standard methods of working with men through Batterers' Intervention Programs (BIPs) have severe limitations. Our 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.

These convictions are based on many years of developing theories and practices, and our ongoing work with women advocates. MSV has always looked to the battered women's movement for direction in defining the problem and developing solutions, and advocates in that movement have long questioned the effectiveness of the BIPs in use throughout the country. They contend that such programs tend to protect male privilege by focusing on "fixing" male perpetrators and not honoring the reality and experiences of female victims. Also, very few violent, abusive or controlling men enter intervention programs, which means that the vast majority of female victims are not being helped.

Community Accountability Creates True Change

Such realities require Men Stopping Violence to continually examine and adjust our programs and practices. We base our work on the Men Stopping Violence Community-Accountability Model, which views violence against women in a historical, sociological, and cultural context. This analysis has strengthened our commitment to working with male allies in all settings. Although we continue to work with men in the classroom, we have expanded the scope of that work by using it to dissect male privilege and teach methods of ending violence that rely on systems of community accountability.

At the same time, 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. Early in the development of these programs, Men Stopping Violence recognized a number of obstacles to identifying potential male allies and strengthening the connections that current male advocates had to the work.

First, and most simply, we knew we needed to involve *more* men, particularly young men and men of color. Second, we observed that men already involved in violence prevention work were looking for more effective ways to collaborate with women advocates. Third, our work with African-American men confirmed that the reality of racial discrimination cannot be ignored when developing strategies that increase the safety of African-American women.

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Why This Document

This publication demonstrates how theory and practice converge in the work of ending violence against women as viewed through the development of two MSV programs: The Regional Training Institutes and the Internship Program. These initiatives provide models for advocates, practitioners and others seeking to develop effective strategies and programs for their work in communities.

Part One presents the organizing principles that are the foundation of Men Stopping Violence's work overall and the basis of our work during the three Regional Training Institutes. The experiences of facilitators and participants at the two-day Institutes served to reinforce the validity of those principles and to strengthen the practices MSV uses to engage and organize individuals and groups in the work of ending male violence against women. Attended by victims' advocates, criminal justice professionals, social workers, therapists, and others, our Institutes focused on improving collaboration between female and male advocates, and the development of strategies for working in and with African-American communities.

The planning process engaged in by the men and women of the Training Institute team reflect the challenges of keeping these principles at the core of the work. The struggles that go on around these issues frustrate even the most well-meaning and well-trained. The result of this often uncomfortable process, however, was the refinement and validation of MSV principles and practices.

Part Two presents the experiences of the seven young men who completed the Men Stopping Violence Summer Internship Program in 2005. Altogether, eleven men have been through MSV Internships and a number of them have committed to continuing social justice work.

The interns worked to internalize Men Stopping Violence's organizing principles and put them into practice throughout their educational and training experience. Their struggles to live those principles offer real lessons for those of us who want to become catalysts for social change.

Participants left both the Institutes and the Internship Program with guiding principles and tested practices to take back and modify for their own communities. We believe that our strategies and processes in planning and implementing these programs can aid anyone seeking to take the work of ending male violence against women out of closed rooms and into the light of day.

PART ONE: THE TRAINING INSTITUTES

Keeping in mind Men Stopping Violence's mission to engage all men as allies, the Training Institutes sought to create a microcosm of how community accountability works, including how strong and authentic alliances between men and women advance the work, and how sexism, racism, classism, heterosexism and other intersecting oppressions hinder the work.

Training Institute participants found no neatly packaged answers to their how-to questions about addressing male violence against women. Instead, the Institutes created a community, and members of that community did more than sit in chairs and hear information. They had to find common ground, despite their own perceptions and prejudices. Exercises compelled them to confront patriarchal norms and racial realities, speak truthfully, and respect and listen to women's voices and experiences. The Institutes put MSV's organizing principles front and center and became an opportunity to experience the meaning of work around those principles in a safe environment.

Men Stopping Violence's organizing principles have been developed, reviewed and refined over two decades. They are:

1. Women's voices and experiences must be central to the work.
2. Race matters.
3. Intersectionality matters.
4. Community accountability is key to ending male violence against women.
5. Organizing male allies to end violence against women takes precedence over intervening with batterers.
6. We are also the work.
7. Patriarchal violence, which includes domestic violence, must be addressed.

In our examination of each organizing principle, we will present its main points and draw from the experiences of the Training Institutes to further illuminate the importance of that principle to the work of ending male violence against women.

Those Institutes were: Closing the Gap: A Shared Vision: Men and Women Working Together to End Violence Against Women (October 2004); Closing the Gap: A Shared Vision: Men and Women Working Together to End Violence Against Women (May 2005); and African-American Men Who Batter: A Community-Centered Approach to Prevention and Intervention (September 2005).

Women's Voices and Experiences Must be Central to the Work

The truth about male violence against women is this: It will not end until men decide to end it. That decision-making process does not happen, however, unless men learn important truths about how patriarchal masculinity works. And when it comes to the male dominance, violence, abuse and control of patriarchal masculinity, women are the experts.

A major survival tactic for marginalized groups is to become well-informed authorities on dominant groups. Slaves had to know the minds and moods of their owners to survive. Women's collective awareness about male violence requires them to study men closely in order to preserve their safety.

But not all women see things in the same way or believe the same truths, or say the same things.

To really learn about the many ways in which women see and experience men, men must seek out the voices of a wide variety of women across divisions of race, ethnicity, class and sexual orientation. Men don't have to agree with everything that all women say and see. But if men are to move effectively to end violence against women, they must learn to respect women's voices, visions, and experiences, whether women are in agreement with each other or not. Men can learn about women's realities by reading women's articles, literature, poetry, by experiencing women's music and art or, when men are willing, by listening to women's voices.

The Men Stopping Violence Regional Training Institutes were an opportunity for men to practice listening and for women to practice speaking authentically. The Institutes gave *both* a safe space to practice what it takes to unmask the dehumanizing violence of patriarchy.

Two of the Institutes dealt directly with the challenges that female and male advocates face when attempting to collaborate. At the "Closing the Gap" Institutes (October 2004 and May 2005), participants expressed their frustration with attempts to form strong alliances. They expressed a desire to uncover the keys to working together more effectively. What the Institutes made clear was that effective partnerships began when men became willing to listen to women's reality and accept leadership from women around this issue.

In planning "Closing the Gap," we had to allow space for the participants to experience women's reality by first exploring for themselves what it would mean for women to speak their truths without reservation. Facilitators had to be prepared to challenge women about being "good daughters of the patriarchy" by speaking inauthentically or by being apologists for male participants. Planners also had to decide when it would be appropriate for women to watch or participate in training activities dedicated to men.

We also had to ask ourselves how to train men while keeping women, particularly female survivors of male violence, central. Men and women talk differently, so understanding how to talk with one another is another challenge that facilitators and participants have to take on.

Facilitators began each day's session with a ritual to focus our energies on advancing the safety of women. A candle would be lit in honor of women victims and survivors of male violence and an appropriate musical selection played. The candle would burn throughout

the session. At the May 2005 conference, a portion of the Atlanta Clothesline Project, shirts decorated by women in honor of female victims of violence, was also presented.

These activities were useful in keeping victims in mind. But one of the points that was stressed repeatedly at the "Closing the Gap" Institutes was the need to go beyond thinking of women as victims only and making space for female leadership and full participation in collaborations with men. Facilitator Sandra K. Barnhill, an African-American, came back to this point many times during the May 2005 Institute. At one point she talked about being a witness to a white man's racism at the Institute's social mixer and about her inner dialogue about if, when, and how to bring it into the conversation. In bringing the incident to the group's attention, Sandra was able to model what it means for an African-American woman to bring her authentic voice to the table, fully aware of the ramifications of speaking honestly and directly. It is our belief that her honesty and her assertive but nonaggressive challenge to this man made it possible for him to accept responsibility for his actions.

Beginning this conversation changed the entire tone of the Institute and brought a certain amount of tension into the room, but it also opened up both facilitators and participants to engage more deeply in an examination of what it means to do the work of justice-making. Among other things, it gave women permission to let go of their socialized role of taking care of the men in the room and their fear of driving away any of the few men who have chosen to become allies. If Sandra had kept silent, an opportunity for growth for herself, for the man, and for the whole community of the Institute would have been lost.

Race Matters

There is no one size fits all approach to ending violence against women. Nowhere is this more obvious than when it comes to working with people of color.

Men Stopping Violence has many years of experience working in African-American communities, with African-American men in the classroom, and with African-American female advocates. Over the years we have maintained a commitment to African-American leadership in our organization. Although the principle *race matters* applies to relationships with other groups as well, our experience allows us to focus on race as it relates to African-Americans.

Race matters. It matters because, although race is a social construct, it has meaning for how people are treated. In justice-seeking, the marginalization of black women's voices undermines the work to end the violence perpetrated against them. That marginalization means that what works for white women doesn't always work for black women.

The histories of black women and white women are not parallel. Though the women's movement and the subsequent battered women's movement involved women of all races, the white, middle-class narrative tended to dominate the dialogue. The second-class status of African-Americans as a whole was also reflected in the development of the

women's movement. The dominant group controlled the conversation about what was considered equal, what strategies would be used, even what the struggle was about.

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 violence against women, specifically African-American women. In the September 2005 Training Institute, "African-American Men Who Batter: A Community-Centered Approach to Prevention and Intervention," we addressed this head-on. Instead of promoting the validity of "color-blind" strategies, Men Stopping Violence used both teaching moments and exercises to bring race into the room.

The objectives for the Institute were to present a psycho-social context for understanding gender-relations and violence against women in African American communities, and to examine the criminal justice system's response to violence against women in African American communities.

Facilitators presented a historical snapshot of African-Americans' cultural heritage that included an analysis of how gender relationships are informed by the intentional and organized violence and oppression perpetrated against African-Americans. They also emphasized the role that internalized oppression plays in the dynamic between black men and women.

Tensions between black men and black women have been, in part, the result of the white power structure's manipulation of their lives and their control of images and messages about African-Americans, beginning in slavery and continuing after emancipation.

In her book, "What's Love Got to Do With It? Healing the Rift Between Black Men and Women," Donna L. 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. (p.28)[1]

Facilitators described how Africans' experiences in America stripped black men and women of the roles that had defined them 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. A structurally racist and sexist system has over the years contributed to violence against African-American women and is still in place, affecting lives and relationships today.

Gender relations in the African-American community are related to a distinctive set of experiences that blacks have had in this country. The conflicts between black men and women have been created as blacks have endeavored to cope with racism and oppression and simultaneously to maintain their dignity and self-respect. (Franklin, p. 56.)

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.

Trying to shield their problems from the larger society was also a response to African-Americans' experience with the criminal justice system. The second objective of this Institute was to examine the criminal justice system's response to violence against women in African-American communities.

For white women in the battered women's movement, gaining recognition of domestic violence as a crime was a major victory. Many African-American women, however, have not welcomed the use of the criminal justice system to resolve domestic violence cases in their communities. Given the use of law enforcement, the court system and other authorities over the generations to control, manipulate and unlawfully abuse and imprison African-Americans, they have reason to mistrust the state and its proposed solutions.

Instead of placing their trust in the state, African-Americans have organized their communities around systems that they recognize as being valid – churches, sororities, families, extended families, etc. These are the entities that they have traditionally looked to for support and guidance.

The Institute framed the conversation around race as a challenge to both white and African-American participants to be present, authentic and supportive of those expressing their authenticity. Because of the way the subject of race is often broached, African-Americans sometimes move to a feeling of being blamed. They might perceive being seen as a "problem," as in the "race problem." Therefore it's important to have a conversation about race without re-victimization.

For people in positions of power, including white people who are working in collaboration with African-Americans, this kind of conversation means having to see or hear things that make them want to leave the table. But real collaborative work between whites and African-Americans requires the ability to stay in the room with the hard questions and the hard answers about race. Participants at the institute were asked to critically examine themselves and do some interior work. For example, they did an exercise that used sentence stems to explore their feelings about African-American men, filling in the blanks after such phrases as "African-American men are …" and "I don't understand why they …."

Men Stopping Violence formed an African-American initiative years ago because we as advocates, female and male, realized that African-Americans' experiences with the

system and the culture make their approach to ending violence against women unique. Mostly, African-American women advocates needed African-American brothers at the table.

This initiative resulted in the establishment of a Wednesday night re-education class for African-American men. We also paid increased attention to the ways in which we modeled collaborations between whites and blacks, and women and men, as a way of addressing tensions across gender and racial lines. Men Stopping Violence encouraged African-American leadership roles within our organization.

The growing need for advocates and facilitators who are more sensitive to the influence of racism in dealing with male violence against women suggests that this issue is going to be with us for many years to come. Recruiting more young men into advocacy work, therefore, becomes increasingly urgent. And our experiences with the intersection of race and gender prepared us to delve into how other forms of oppression influence our anti-violence work.

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. Organizing to end violence against women requires that advocates be aware and educated about how these "isms" are related to each other.

Facilitators at "Working With African-American Men Who Batter" introduced the concept of intersectionality by revisiting the Anita Hill/Clarence Thomas story. They showed excerpts from a PBS documentary about the 1991 confirmation hearings for Thomas' 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 those interviewed for the PBS film made it clear that they felt 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 black people felt that it was inappropriate for any black person to go public with such. But they were especially uncomfortable hearing highly educated, upper middle-class black people like Hill and Thomas "airing dirty laundry."

At the May 2005 "Closing the Gap" Institute, attendees participated in "The Myth of the Level Playing Field" exercise, a demonstration of how all kinds of oppressive, hierarchical ideas come into play as people navigate their lives. In the exercise, participants were asked to stand in a straight line and then step forward or backward depending on the instructions given by a facilitator. For example, the facilitator would instruct, "If you were born in this country, take one step forward," or "If you are 50 or older take two steps back."

This activity was an eye-opener for many of the participants. At the end of the exercise, many African-American men in attendance were surprised to find themselves near the front of the room, while the person who ended up in the back of the room was a white woman who happened to be the oldest person there. There were others near the back based on their responses to questions about education levels or citizenship status. In considering oppressive hierarchies, other factors besides gender and race need to be part of the conversation.

In all of the Institutes, race, particularly as it related to African-Americans, was placed in the broader context of oppression, those restrictions and assaults to humanity suffered not just because of ethnicity but because of class, gender, sexual orientation, age, education level, country of origin, language barriers, and many, many other identifiers. One thing that "The Myth of the Level Playing Field" exercise illustrated is the pervasiveness of these restrictive ideologies.

Educating themselves about the interrelatedness of oppressions gives advocates a more complete set of tools when addressing violence in all of its forms. Men Stopping Violence has had painful experiences with trying to organize men and work with them without addressing racism, classism and other forms of oppression. The different kinds of oppression suffered by different groups, or groups within groups, requires varied approaches and solutions. Advocates working to end violence against women who consciously or unconsciously insist on relying on a standard approach run the risk of further endangering women's lives.

For an African-American women who has been victimized by her partner, for example, the historical use of the criminal justice system to oppress black people and the alarming fact that a disproportionate number of incarcerated people are African-American might make her reluctant to report her abuse to the police or minimize what has been done to her once the police are on the scene. To the mainstream this might seem like a poor choice. For the woman, however, it is justified.

Attending to intersectionality also means viewing and evaluating the criminal justice system in terms of these inequalities. The imprisoned population is disproportionably represented by the poor and people of color. When such evidence of racism and classism within the criminal justice system presents itself, does it then seem useful or powerful to over-depend on that system to somehow solve the problem of sexism as it relates to violence against women?

The point of being attentive to intersectionality, therefore, is to better understand the factors that are at work in a person's life 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.

In 1997, 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.[2]

These issues exist in the lives of people simultaneously and ignoring them means ignoring their influences on individual behavior. Our commitment to changing the world begins with an awareness of how we ourselves move within it, because we cannot organize in a meaningful way without exposing our own roles in maintaining society's structural inequities. We all come to the table with our prejudices and our wounded spirits.

Institute organizers explored the concept of intersectionality through activities and dialogue. At the "Closing the Gap" Institutes, we used didactic exercises, music and break-out sessions to keep people engaged and stretch them beyond their comfort zones. To be open was terrifying to some, but was required in order to break through the barriers that prevent effective prevention and intervention.

Powerful dialogue heals. Through active listening, seeking to understand others' perspectives, practicing empathy, and asking for what you need from another person, meaningful dialogue can take place in an environment where each person feels safe and respected.

Community Accountability is Key to Ending Violence Against Women.

When we use a systemic analysis of violence against women, including how it's related to intersecting oppressions, it becomes clear that intervention strategies focusing solely on individuals who batter have limitations.

Focusing on batterers attempts to absolve the rest of us from the responsibility of seeing how we contribute to the problem. Men *not* identified as batterers support male dominance by using emotional manipulation, economic control, sexist behaviors and language, threats and intimidation, or by merely being silent in the face of other men's oppressive and violent actions. To view the problem systemically is to declare those men, and by extension the communities that they are part of, responsible for establishing a climate of safety and justice for women. In such a climate, the individual batterer is less likely to find validation for his violence.

Necessarily, this approach to violence prevention and intervention shifts the emphasis away from the BIP classroom and into deeper engagement with *all* men in the context of communities. Men Stopping Violence works from this perspective, using its Community-Accountability Model of Men's Violence Against Women as a philosophical framework.

The model offers an expansive view of the cultural and historical mechanisms that support violence against women. Institute participants who viewed a presentation of the

Community-Accountability Model were able to immediately grasp the ways in which violence against women is related to and supported by humanity's interlocking communities.

Viewed in the context of the model, an individual man's violence against women is unmasked and seen for what it is: a form of obedience to the cultural mandate to dominate and control. He is educated about his place in the social hierarchy by first his Primary Community (family, peer groups, etc.). That primary influence is itself influenced by larger communities: the Micro Community (churches, community institutions, social service agencies); the Macro Community (government, media, national court systems); and the Global Community (global patriarchal system).

The global patriarchal system, of which all of these communities are a part, creates an unsafe environment for women. But communities are made up of individuals, and men will stop committing acts of violence against women when men believe that the communities in which they reside won't tolerate it. Through policy and practice, men can send strong messages that women's safety is paramount; for those men who don't respect that, there will be meaningful consequences.

The pastor of a church, for example, might preach that violence against women is immoral and make it clear that men in the congregation who commit violence will be confronted and challenged. Simultaneously, the congregation can support the victim, giving her safe haven and backing her if she should choose to pursue redress through the criminal justice system.

Till now we've leaned heavily on the criminal legal system to hold offenders accountable and provide safety and justice for victims. But, by itself, that system has proven inadequate in meeting the complex needs of victims and the multiple challenges presented by offenders.

Community Accountability, on the other hand, has the potential to unite male allies and advocates. A community coalition that addresses sexism, and violence and control against women has a better chance of preserving women's safety.

Organizing Male Allies to End Violence Against Women Takes Precedence Over Intervening With Batterers

Historically, the driving force for ending violence against women has been women themselves – survivors, feminists, and activists. If women were to be safe, then women had to strategize, advocate, and agitate. They had to motivate men to act.

Men Stopping Violence has been led by women and our collaborative bonds with female advocates have only grown stronger over the years. However, our unshakeable commitment to working in partnership with women has not obscured a fundamental truth: Men are responsible for male violence against women and that violence would end today if men decided to end it. As Kathleen Carlin, Men Stopping Violence's founding

Executive Director asked: "Who is going to say that men's self-interest lies in making justice?"

In programs throughout the country, the emphasis on rehabilitating batterers, while providing life-changing experiences for some men, has done little to transform the culture of violence. Only a tiny fraction of violent men enter intervention programs, so most women affected by violence are not helped by such programs. Further, so much of the physical and emotional danger that women encounter daily is masked as "normal" male behavior. Even if every man who completed an intervention program were successful in changing his personal behavior, very little would change about the culture, which rewards men for sexist, violent behavior. He would have little social support for maintaining what he learned in the intervention program.

Men Stopping Violence's analysis of the dehumanizing effects of patriarchy on men clearly shows that it is in men's self-interest to abandon that cultural system. However, our analysis also shows how difficult it is for men to recognize the ways in which their "normal" way of operating is detrimental to the safety of women, the health of their communities, and their own mental and emotional well-being.

In presenting the argument that social change is the business of all men, Men Stopping Violence provides all men, not just batterers, with opportunities to educate themselves about violence against women and the socio-cultural context in which it occurs. Participants in Men Stopping Violence's 24-week course, men from all walks of life, have benefited from this expansive view of the causes and costs of violence against women.

Although most of the men in the course over the years have been identified by the courts or otherwise as being violent or abusive, the course is not for batterers only. Whether actual batterers or not, men and boys are highly competent in the use of dominance, control, and physical or emotional abuse. By directing our energies to educating all men, we begin to build a community that will take responsibility for violence against women and move to stop it. We have a particular interest in bringing more young men and men of color into that community, mostly through our Internship Program.

We Are the Work

For men and women organizing to end violence against women, critical self-examination is absolutely necessary. The freedom to speak authentically and authoritatively about this issue comes from an honest assessment of our own beliefs and behaviors.

We have all been trained from birth to view patriarchal culture as normal. The dismantling of that culture requires us to reject our own socialization. We have the potential to go through life unaware or with only a faint awareness of how patriarchy feeds the culture of violence against women. Self-examination allows us to see the ways in which we are part of the problem; we can then make an informed decision to be part of the solution.

Without self-examination, we can fall into the trap of denying and minimizing the violence and abuse. Organizing men as allies is ineffective unless we are rigorous in making the connection between ourselves and the culture of violence, drawing on our own experiences as victims of violence or as perpetrators of violence. It's important for women to undergo this process, as well; they are bombarded by the same patriarchal messages as men and have learned that there are negative consequences for not adopting the society's definition of what it means to be a woman.

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 advocates are unlikely to engage in blatant abusive behaviors, they can collude with the system of patriarchal masculinity in a number of subtle ways. Male advocates may instinctively identify with men, and subtly validate their beliefs and behaviors in order to strengthen that identification and also to maintain their own male privilege. Even to do nothing when witnessing another man's abuse – to be a bystander – is to collude with the culture of patriarchal violence. Personal work (a lifelong process) allows advocates to take responsibility for their own behavior, examine the ways in which they collude, and to hold themselves and other men accountable.

As an organization, self-examination helps us guard against becoming only a service-delivery entity. Without advocates, administrators and facilitators constantly monitoring themselves, a gulf develops between advocates and the men with which they work. A service-delivery mindset implies that we are about the business of "fixing" people and then moving on.

Self-examination also extends to exploring why male advocates take up this work. It may be that they have been victimized themselves by violence or witnessed victimization. But there is also the need for some men to look good to women, to gain their approval. Whatever the reason, if the inner work does not take place, we run the risk of undermining women's trust. How can men truly commit to the work if they're working from a place of inauthenticity?

To engage in the work ourselves means that we are better equipped to deal with those men who come to us needing to start from the beginning. We cannot isolate ourselves from such men if we have any hope of recruiting them as allies. We cannot be afraid of what they say or what they do, but have to muster the fortitude to confront and challenge them constructively and lovingly. Such inner strength only comes through self-examination and critique that takes apart our own definitions of ourselves and begin the lifelong process of reconstructing what it means to be a man and what it means to be a woman without the oppressive weight of patriarchy. We cannot ask other men to do it if we have not done it ourselves.

Patriarchal Violence, Which Includes Domestic Violence, Must be Addressed
In her 2002 book, "The Will to Change," bell hooks wrote:

Patriarchy is 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. (p.18.)[3]

Men Stopping Violence identifies patriarchy as the root cause of men's violence against women. That hierarchical system teaches men that the control and dominance of women is an essential ingredient of manhood. Patriarchal violence, which includes domestic violence, is a control tactic used to maintain that system.

Without a deep, clear understanding of how patriarchy works, facilitators attempting to motivate men to stop violent and controlling behaviors are at a distinct disadvantage. This was made clear in presentations of the Men Stopping Violence Community-Accountability Model at the Training Institutes. While acknowledging that individuals must be held accountable for their violence, an examination of the patriarchal system deepens understanding of how men and women navigate their relationships day-to-day. In order to end their violence, men have to redefine manhood, and to redefine manhood is to go up against this culture, this system that devalues women and robs men of their humanity.

Refocusing our attention on how the individual navigates this social system naturally means a move away from the tendency to treat a man's violence against women as an individual pathology and one limited to his interactions at home, in the "domestic" realm. The cultural foundation of that violence is rarely examined or challenged. Also, Western culture's emphasis on individualism does not allow a close examination of patriarchy. So framing the problem of violence against women as an individual pathology rather than a cultural disease allows the patriarchal system to continue, to expand, and to sustain itself.

To reject that system as a way of explaining the role of women in our society requires an examination of ourselves – our beliefs, our behaviors, and our apologies for violence and control. Male violence against women is an outgrowth of patriarchy and employing intervention strategies without exploring that fact is ineffective. Presentation of the Community-Accountability Model at the Institutes and in other spaces, opened the door to that exploration.

An examination of patriarchal violence requires something deeper than intervention, where often men are sheltered in the privacy of the all-male group as they work on "fixing" themselves. Once they leave that environment, if they have not been educated about the destructive nature of patriarchy they will have few tools with which to resist that system and avoid the ideology that demands that they dominate and control women.

Casting the problem in the language of "domestic" violence also implies that men and women bear equal blame and responsibility for the violence that happens in the household. It implies that women are participants in their own victimization. A system set

up to deal with domestic violence, therefore, seeks ways to "rehabilitate" both the man and the woman.

Through the use of the Community-Accountability Model, Men Stopping Violence invites a more expansive view of violence against women and a more measured approach to addressing the problem.

PART TWO: THE INTERNSHIP PROGRAM

In recent years, leaders of the Violence Against Women Movement have had conversations about the role of men in ending violence against women. Pro-feminist mothers are looking at the scores of pro-feminist sons – good men – and asking: Why are they not standing side-by-side with women, crying out for justice? Why are they not activists, committed to protecting the rights of women? Why are they not *men stopping violence?*

"Men stopping violence is still a novel idea," writes author and activist Pearl Cleage. "Peaceful men are as rare as free women."

Rather than working solely with male batterers, we at Men Stopping Violence identify men who have the potential to be allies in the work of ending male violence against women and provide the education and support they need to do that work.

Not every man is willing, not even the "good men." To be willing is to have looked into the mirror of introspection and accepted the challenge to defy patriarchal masculinity. Without male mentors, even good men, including those sons of pro-feminist mothers, are going to have a doubly difficult time meeting that challenge.

The Men Stopping Violence Internship Program provides mentors – male and female – that demonstrate how to deconstruct long-held notions of manhood and support young men while they do the hard work of self-examination and advocacy. This intense, two-part experience combines theory and practice. Interns participate in Men Stopping Violence's Men's Intervention Program in community with other men, and at the same time engage with women advocates and community partners to keep the reality of the problem before them.

In 2005, Men Stopping Violence inaugurated its Summer Internship. To find young men who were willing to accept the challenge of this powerful experience, we turned to our peers and partners throughout the country. We asked them to join an Ambassadors' Board to identify and recruit men from their communities and grassroots networks. Ambassadors disseminated information and organized meetings with small groups of men to spark interest in the Internship Program. They added slides to their presentations to Batterers' Intervention Programs, to women's groups, and at training activities on college campuses. Several of them even worked to create jobs in their organizations so that when young men returned from their MSV Internship, they could use their experience to increase the number of male allies in their communities.

Ultimately, seven young men from throughout the United States and Puerto Rico, ranging from age 14 to 30, joined us as Summer Interns. To say that their experience was life-changing is an understatement. It is not only their own lives that have been transformed by their involvement, but the culture of the communities in which they live and work.

Men and Women in Partnership

MSV interns entered a world where the work to end men's violence against women is based on respect for women's reality, and where redefining manhood is imperative.

Part of the challenge for men working to end violence against women is relinquishing their power positions in order to collaborate with and accept leadership from women. Female survivors and advocates have said that they don't need men to lead them, but they do want responsible allies who will use their power and privilege to make ending male violence against women everybody's business.

This type of relationship cannot happen unless *women's voices and experiences are central to our work with men.* This is the first organizing principle of Men Stopping Violence and the way we measure whether what we do works. It's how members of a privileged group – men – learn about what life is like for an oppressed group – women.

Women's involvement began with development of the Internship Program. The contributions of Men Stopping Violence Executive Director Shelley Serdahely were vital to keeping the program's components firmly focused on women's needs and women's input.

Another one of the fundamental aims of the Internship Program was to create space for men to hear women's reality and to train them in the necessary listening skills. Interns attended sessions of the volunteer training for the Women' Resource Center to End Domestic Violence and participated in the 40-hour volunteer training at one of our partnership agencies, the DeKalb Rape Crisis Center (DRCC).

The DRCC training was primarily for women interested in working with victims of rape and supporting the organization's outreach and awareness efforts. Not only was this women's space, but it was a place where 50 percent of the women who volunteer have been victims of sexual assault. Having men in that space not only had real meaning for the interns, but for the women as well. The five MSV interns who attended represented the most men DRCC had ever had at a training. The young men's presence in the room became a challenge for the women as they discussed sexual assault.

The interns' experience at the DRCC training became illustrative of how men can dominate and control spaces both physically and verbally. When DRCC presenters asked questions, the interns were usually the first to respond and integrate their opinions and ideas into the discussion, and female trainees began deferring to the men. Although the interns had been learning about the principle of keeping women's voices and experiences

central, in practice they ignored it. Philosophically, they were in agreement with the principle, but in the real world they had little awareness of how they were violating it.

"We found ourselves re-enacting the same kinds of power dynamics that put women back into the space of re-visiting their victimization," said one of the interns. "The volunteer coordinator felt that we as a group of men who had this bond thing going, colluding the same way men colluded with her perpetrator."

The female presenters at DRCC identified what was happening and challenged the interns to look more deeply at what it means to acknowledge and respect women's voices and experiences.

The men struggled with this feedback; they saw only their good intentions and had a hard time recognizing that they were using dominating tactics. How could the women not understand that they just wanted to help? Couldn't they see that they weren't the bad guys? They were also at that time trying to live with ideas they had been reading in *Women's Reality* by Anne Wilson Schaffe, ideas that they didn't always agree with. Hearing women's truths would mean shedding their good-guy personas and living with the discomfort of not owning reality.

The work for these young men became learning to identify the beliefs and behaviors that separated them from women's voices and experiences. Interns wrestled with what happens when men hear the truth of their history of violence towards women. Men want to separate themselves from that history. They say, "I am not that man," and then set about to try and make the case for why they are not by denying or minimizing their dominant or controlling behaviors, and shifting the blame to women.

The interns took the women's feedback seriously and saw the need to do some accountability work. They took their concerns to the leadership of Men Stopping Violence. MSV Director of Programs Dick Bathrick and Director of Training Ulester Douglas talked with the men about how to stay with difficult truths, share space with women and challenge other men to do the same. They spoke of the need for the men to challenge themselves and others compassionately, without being patronizing to themselves or to women, and without self-righteous posturing.

The DRCC incident became part of ongoing examination and experimentation about how to increase awareness of women's reality, how to challenge each other while maintaining friendships, how to recognize the ways in which they were in collusion.

The incident also opened up an opportunity for the interns to observe how men on the MSV staff interacted with Executive Director Shelley Serdahely

This principle had to be reasserted over and over, because internalizing it is not a simple, linear process. It is an ongoing, lifelong monitoring of beliefs and behaviors. As these young men began to authentically own the centrality of women's voices, they were better equipped to be attentive to their behaviors. They began to pause before speaking in

groups to allow women to respond and participate and question themselves about when and where to challenge other men in authentic ways.

Any effective challenge to patriarchy has to include ways for men to hear and respect women's reality. But just as important is men's willingness to risk being *wrong* in order to destroy barriers to true collaboration with women. If this kind of work doesn't take place within the safe, nurturing environment of spaces like Men Stopping Violence, it won't take place outside of them either.

The Role of Race

Over the years of work with African-American men, we at Men Stopping Violence have found that no conversation about oppression, dominance and social control can take place in the absence of a frank acknowledgement of racism. In navigating the complex relationships that influence the culture of violence that we are trying to change, *race matters.*

We believe that dealing competently with race as it manifests itself in our community requires an organizational structure that places African-American men in leadership positions and a commitment to forming partnerships with organizations that serve diverse populations. That commitment extends to the education and training of young men of color to step into leadership roles at organizations throughout the country.

We stressed to our Ambassadors and to others we asked to identify potential interns that placing young men of color in the program was a priority. As a result of this emphasis, four of the seven men who completed the Summer Internship were African-American and Latino. All of the interns benefited from the mentorship of African-American men here at Men Stopping Violence and from work done in partnership with metro Atlanta agencies such as Caminar Latino, a community-based intervention program for Latino families affected by domestic violence, and Tapestri, an organization dedicated ending violence and oppression in immigrant communities.

We offered young men the opportunity to experience men of color in leadership positions. And because the Internship Program is not only about the public work of ending violence against women but also about the intensely personal inner struggles men have with their own beliefs and behaviors, the presence of other men who are sensitive to challenges around race, privilege and power was just as important.

For these young men to have an authentic experience in working with other men to end violence against women, they needed to be in culturally competent environments. Interns found safe spaces to learn, grow, and contribute, not only with Men Stopping Violence mentors, but with men in our intervention classes, one of which comprises African-American men, and while working with Latino men through our partnership with Caminar Latino.

Two interns, Samuel D. Francés Vasquez and César Alvarado, were placed at Caminar Latino, and they immediately impressed the organization's founder, Julia Perilla, with their ability to work in solidarity with women. She had been struggling with men on the Caminar Latino staff about challenging machismo, validating women's reality and respecting women's voices, and these two young Latino men were modeling the kind of behavior she felt would benefit her organization.

César and Samuel could effect change at Caminar Latino in a way that Ulester, who is African-American, and Dick, who is white, could not. The Latino men on staff and in the intervention classes had a chance to observe that modeling with men who shared their language and cultural experience.

César challenged men in intervention classes at Caminar Latino and checked in with the women co-facilitators for guidance and leadership. The interns asked other men to think about how the female victim felt, and challenged other facilitators to bring women's voices into the room. They identified instances of male collusion and were compassionate about expressing difficult truths to other men.

In addition to participating in intervention classes with men, César and Samuel were invited by Julia to lead meetings and strategic planning sessions for the organization.

MSV's Men's Intervention Program classes became another laboratory in which the interns explored the potentially volatile territory of race. Most of the men who attend are African-American. The interns who were white had to figure out how to negotiate that environment.

"The internship has really expanded my view of just how complex the systems of oppression are in our society and in the world," said John Tramel. "Men Stopping Violence does such an incredible job of giving you every angle to those issues. … I have to deal with the ways in which I collude with oppression and the way that I contribute to oppression in some cases, whether it's with my partner and our relationship or in the world. Being constantly aware of how I move about has been huge for me."

Intern Chris Hamilton spoke of the classroom as the place where the intersection of racism and sexism became real to him. Also his awareness of his privileged status as a white man in our culture, created a struggle for him around giving feedback to the African-American men in class, and he turned to his Men Stopping Violence mentor, Dick Bathrick, for insight.

"Dick challenged me to see that being silent isn't helping anybody," said Chris. He was encouraged to speak from his own experience and monitor the way he was interacting with the men in the class. Who was he having contact with and who was he not? What kinds of conversations was he having with black men? Was he being superficial in his engagement with them?

His work around these issues also gave him the tools to challenge other whites' racism. At the September 2005 Training Institute, Chris was able to confront a participant who made a racist joke in a straightforward and nonconfrontational way.

"I learned a valuable lesson from Men Stopping Violence about speaking from one's own experience," he said. "So it wasn't about me trying to protect the African-Americans in the room, but rather speak to how I was being affected."

Men Stopping Violence interns also planned the "Echoes of Violence" conference, which brought together groups and individuals from around the country who are working to end violence, poverty, and oppression. They solicited and approved workshop proposals from groups throughout the country for sessions dealing with everything from "Men's Work in a Multi-cultural Setting" to "The Color of Rape: Race, Gender and the Politics of Sexual Power." The conference was the culmination of the interns' summer work.

Community Responsibility

Our analysis of how communities – Primary, Micro, Macro, and Global – influence individual male behavior has reinforced the importance of social change within those communities. We approach social change in communities on a number of fronts: through developing partnerships with other individuals and organizations; by fostering a willingness to challenge the norms that support a culture of violence; and by becoming willing to accept those challenges from other men and women. *Community accountability is key to ending violence against women.*

Men Stopping Violence interns went to work in the community, and they went to work *as* a community, to put this principle into practice. We brought these young men into the room with veteran advocates who deal with ongoing and emerging issues and who have experience developing strategic responses to those issues.

Our community partnerships, particularly those that brought the interns into contact with women in leadership positions, created space for these young men to be held accountable and to learn how to hold others accountable. The interns' training involved educational opportunities with the Georgia Network to End Sexual Assault, the Shelia Wellstone Institute and Men Can Stop Rape; work with partner agencies such as the DeKalb Rape Crisis Center; and the organization of the "Echoes of Violence" conference.

These structured experiences, along with training and mentoring by Men Stopping Violence staff, prepared the interns for those moments when they would have to put the principle of community accountability into practice and truly become male allies in the work to end violence against women.

There were a number of opportunities for the interns to practice this principle during the summer. In one memorable instance, three of the interns intervened with a man who was physically and verbally abusing a woman at an Atlanta transit station. The training that

they had gone through at that point and their support of each other in that moment gave them the tools necessary to nonviolently challenge this man about his behavior.

"As I walked close to the turnstile," said César Alvarado. "I saw the man move in front of the woman and push her with both hands against her chest. I told him: 'Chill out,' 'Take a couple of breaths,' and 'This is not cool.' He said, 'This is none of your business,' and tried to tell me about how she 'did this and that to me.' I told him, it *was* my business."

The interns stayed with the woman at the station to prevent more abuse and they involved the authorities when they saw that their conversations with the man didn't stop his behavior.

They did not know these two people. They were not challenging this man in the "safe" space of the Men's Intervention Program classroom. Their decisions and actions in that moment were part and parcel of the work of community change, as vital to the shift away from the culture of violence as the classroom work and trainings that they were undergoing within the structure of the Internship Program.

Without that structure, however, they might not have been ready to accept their responsibility as male allies. *With* that structure and training, the interns were able to make this woman's safety their business and act under the assumption that men – all men – have a responsibility to challenge violence against women. Their response demonstrated a willingness to confront other men, stand in solidarity with women, and practice accountability in their daily lives.

Looking Within

Men Stopping Violence invites men to examine their beliefs and behaviors in a way that gets to the very core of what it means to be a man. To authentically and compassionately challenge other men, we have to be willing to excavate our own belief systems and face the ways that they might be destructive to ourselves and to women. We do this not to shame each other, punish ourselves, or impress women with our sensitivity. We do it to free ourselves and to clear a path for other men to follow in taking on the work of ending violence against women. We do it so that we can challenge ourselves and challenge other men with authority and compassion. *We are also the work.*

Internship Program education and training is not only about the public work of violence intervention and prevention. It is about the intensely personal work – men struggling with their own beliefs and behaviors – that helps create the will to act. The interns were not exempt from this process of self-examination. In addition to their training and work with partners, they each were enrolled in a Men's Intervention Program class.

Without this aspect of the work, the interns would not be able to scrutinize their everyday, personal choices in their relationships. Unless they could challenge themselves, they would be ill-equipped to challenge other men.

For the interns, who came to the Men Stopping Violence Internship Program because they had a need to promote safety and justice for women, viewing themselves in the context of their place in the violent and dominant system of patriarchal masculinity was difficult, emotional and sometimes painful. Several of the interns had already been involved in social justice work before coming to Men Stopping Violence, and all of the interns were intentionally seeking educational experiences about the work of ending violence against women. By requiring the intervention class, we at MSV were asking the interns to understand that having good intentions was only the first step; changing the culture of violence requires men to scrutinize their places in it, to move beyond a philosophical inquiry into the problem and on to a personal commitment to end the problem.

Becoming part of a community of men who were dealing with their violent behaviors against women was an opportunity for interns to let go of the good-guy persona. This was not easy. It took a few weeks of class work for the interns to understand why that work was important. But as they deepened their involvement in the classes these young men were able to locate themselves in the context of patriarchal masculinity and identify the beliefs and behaviors that might impede their work to end violence against women. They understood themselves better as men and thus were in a better position to offer support to other men who were struggling around these issues. They practiced challenging and being challenged.

"To have conversations with men from all different walks of life about real stuff has just been powerful," said intern Chris Hamilton. "It's not a therapeutic kind of listening. It's a kind of listening that says, 'I'm going to hold you accountable.' I feel like it's a kind of loving listening that men don't ever do with one another."

The interns spoke of the class bringing their lives as men into focus by forcing them to examine how their self-definition of themselves as men connected to the work. They had to take inventory of their behaviors, and how they treated people in everyday, real situations. Only then were they able to work on being accountable to other men and be prepared to hear hard truths *from* other men. For the interns, it was the work around this principle that made Men Stopping Violence worth trusting.

References

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