EFFECTIVE MULTI-CULTURAL ORGANIZING STRATEGIES FOR MEN TO END MEN'S VIOLENCE

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Introduction

Sexual violence is a men's issue. Men perpetrate the vast majority of sexual assault – regardless of the gender of the person victimized; men too are victimized, and men are the significant others (lovers, housemates, sons, classmates, brothers, cousins…) of women and men who are sexually victimized. In all of these ways, sexual violence is an issue that men confront. In spite of this, and in spite of the increasing efforts over the past 20 years to define sexual violence as a men's issue, men, by and large, continue to ignore, deny, minimize, and otherwise avoid the issues of sexual violence. Sexual violence is still conceived of as a "woman's issue," and men still make up only a tiny minority of those present at events addressing sexual assault.

In part, this historic and continuing lack of involvement and leadership by men in the efforts to address sexual violence is linked to the ways that sexual violence is understood culturally. As Lisa Fontes has described, sexual violence has different meaning depending, in part, on the culture in which it occurs. This is not to say that there are cultures that are more or less lenient or supportive of sexual violence (although there may be, as the earlier work of Peggy Sanday suggests), but rather that the meaning of sexual violence is in part culturally determined – the ways that it impacts people who are victimized, what holding men who rape accountable looks like, how prevention is understood and the forms of prevention that are deemed as appropriate, etc.

In addition, if men's sexual violence is understood as an issue that is grounded in sexism (as it is here) then we mush also recognize that men's relationship to sexism and sexual violence differs depending in part on their positionality of race/ethnicity, sexual/affectional orientation, age, religious background, and socio-economic class. How men define masculinity and understand themselves as men is in part, determined by these factors (see Connel, 1995), so it only makes sense that they way men understand sexist violence and abuse is also impacted by these factors.

In order to mobilize men from various backgrounds into an organized body working in a coordinated manner to address men's violence, the different relationships need to be understood and incorporated into the mobilizing and organizing efforts – indeed, even into the very outreach efforts which are engaged in. This short paper will explore these differences of positionality, examine these differences and the ramifications for organizing men, and offer some concrete ideas as to how move forward towards a multicultural men's movement to end men's violence

Theoretical Underpinnings

I begin with a feminist understanding of violence against women that recognizes rape, sexual assault, domestic violence, sexual harassment, dating abuse, stalking, pornography, prostitution, and other forms of men's violence to be based on sexism (Berkowitz, 2001; Funk, 1994; Kilmartin, 2000; Warshaw, 1994). It is from the belief in men's alleged superiority over women that is the foundation for men's violence against women. In addition, and as a part of this theoretical position, all forms of men's violence against women are seen as linked (as Kauffman, 1999) and Funk (forthcoming) argue, this is also a part of the foundation of men's violence against other men as well). Because men are raised to believe that women are not their equals, and this imbalance is institutionalized in many of the systems and practices of patriarchal cultures (such as the dominant cultures in the U.S.), then women's voices are not listened to as completely, and women's perspectives aren't as valued. This devaluation occurs in both the public arenas and in the private relationships between women and men.

Coupled with this institutionalized devaluation of women and femininity and over-valuation of men and masculinity, are social practices of men's entitlement. Men are raised to believe that they have a series of inherent rights vis-à-vis women. For example, men are raised to believe that they have the inherent right to sexual release with women – especially if they are feeling aroused or "turned on." In addition, however, men are also entitled to be in control of their relationships with women, have the right to express their anger using violence, and are entitled to have their lives taken more seriously than they need to take the lives of women in their lives.

This coupling of these senses of entitlement with the personal expressions of institutionalized sexism result in men seeing behaviors that are violent and abusive against women as normal, acceptable and within their realm of options. Be that coercing a woman to have sex when she says no, manipulating a woman into a compromising position where she feels she can't say no, or outright force. Since these behaviors are often seen as within the normative range for men, they are not seen as problematic and the harm they cause are not seen by most men.

To this foundation, I add the work of Kimberle Crenshaw (1992) and Patricia Hill Collins (1998) in which they define "intersectional theory." According to intersectional theory, our identity, how we come to understand or define ourselves, is at the intersection of various categories of identity (race/ethnicity, sexual/affectional orientation, gender, etc.). Within these identities, we are always moving and at different times, there are different identities (or groups of identities) that are called forth. For example, as I am writing this paper examining issues of men's violence against women and multi-cultural issues; my gender, sexual orientation, and racial identities are most at the fore; while my class background, regional attachment, and religious identities are (seemingly) less relevant. Intersectional theory has critical implications for our understanding of men's violence and our efforts to educate, organize and mobilize men of multicultural backgrounds and identities.

Finally, critical race theory (Delgado, 1995, Fine et al, 1997, Frankenburg, 1997, and Hill, 1997) and critical gender studies (Connell, 1995, Funk, 2001-a, Lorber, 1995, and Pease, 2000) offer perspectives for examining race and gender (and by extension, one can examine other identity markers) from a perspective relating to and underscoring power, privilege and domination – wherein all of these identity markers are located.

Organizing Men

Given these theoretical foundations, what does this mean for actually organizing men?

The movement against men's violence and for gender justice has often been criticized for under-representing people and communities from non-dominant cultures in the U.S. (people and communities of color, sexual/affectional minorities, people of working class and poor background, etc.). As a result, some have argued that the efforts initiated have privileged the biases and perspectives of these populations, and have not reflected the understanding of men's violence, the issues of men's violence or the possible solutions to men's violence that are true in other communities. As a result, it has been argued that women of color, Jewish and Moslem women, sexual and affectional minority women, and poor and working class women not only must confront the sexism and sexist violence and abuse, but must also confront disrespect, abuse and perhaps violence within the movement.

Many of these same concerns can be raised at the men's movements against men's violence. These efforts, like their sister efforts, are still largely organized and led by European-American men, heterosexual men, and men from middle class and owning class backgrounds. In addition to this, most of the efforts to organize and mobilize men are based on college campuses, which only further fuel these discrepancies, and adds yet another layer of privileging to the current efforts to sensitize men around issues of sexism, sexist violence and gender justice.

As a result, the men's movement tends to reflect the understanding and analysis of these men, privileging these perspectives over those of men of color; gay, bisexual or transgendered men; Jewish, Moslem, or men of faith other than Christian; and working class or poor men. In order to effectively sensitize, mobilize and organize men from a variety of background and identities to work against men's sexism and violence; and work for gender justice, these disparities must be addressed.

Just as we need be leery of promoting and critical of the already existing hegemonic masculinity; we must also be leery of suggesting that there is ***a*** relationship between masculinity, manhood, men and sexism or men's violence. Men from different cultural backgrounds (and, using intersectional theory, depending on which of men's identities are most present at any given time) have different relationships with, and understanding of both sexism and men's violence. Rape is certainly a weapon of sexism, but is also a weapon of racism, homophobia, and other forms of oppression and dominance as well.

Institutionally, rape is used to target certain populations and to maintain the power imbalance that exists.

For example, the myth of the black rapist has been used in periods of our nation's history to target African American men for degradation, violence and even sexualized murder. Most of the lynchings that occurred during the early part of the 20th century were the result of allegations of African American's men's sexual exploits with European American women. Simultaneous to this, the myth of the Black seductress meant that the sexual violence of European American men targeting African American women was not identified as such, not prosecuted and not considered problematic (except for women and men of color). The targeting African American women for sexual violence also occurred in the context of a growing hegemonic masculinity that attempted to define manhood, at least in part, as the ability to protect "our women" and defend "our honor." By perpetrating sexual violence against African American women, not only were European American men violating African American women, but were also challenging the masculinity (at least as defined by European American culture) of African American men. Thus, rape was a weapon of racism.

But this historical legacy and practices did not stop with the end of lynching. To this day, men of color (in particularly African American men) are more likely to be convicted and more likely to serve longer sentences than are European American men for the same kinds of charges. Similarly, African American women are less likely than European American women to have their rape allegations taken seriously, responded to appropriately, and result in arrest or conviction. Rape is still a weapon of racism.

In order to effectively mobilize and organize men of color (and, in this case, African American men) this history, legacy and ongoing practices must be understood, and framed in a way that men's efforts are not only working to promote gender justice between African American women and African American men, but are also working to promote racial justice.

These issues will be brought to the fore in any multi-racial/multiethnic efforts the result being either that the issues are addressed, confronted and dealt with openly and directly, or that men of color leave the organization/effort. Therefore, it is incumbent upon the European American men in the movement to ensure that there is room for honest introspection about issues of race, racism, power and privilege. This responsibility falls on the European American men, as part of the responsibility for the privilege they receive. Part of the privilege is that it is often unsafe (literally and figuratively) for men of color to raise the issues of race with European Americans – particularly where the issues of race and sexual violence intersect. European Americans don't have the same fear (which is not to say that they may not feel intimidated, threatened or fearful if they do raise or address these issues).

In addition, this responsibility is a natural extension of the responsibility that we are all asking for all men to take in relation to issues of gender justice, sexism and sexist violence with women. We understand, as men, that it is our responsibility to take the

initiative in addressing our own sexism and abusive behaviors, as well as confront the institutionalized forms of male dominance; similarly, as men in positions of relative position vis-à-vis other men with whom we are organizing, it is our responsibility to take the initiative to address those forms of privilege and oppression in our behaviors, as well as the institutionalized forms as well.

Similar dynamics occurs with all populations of men who are positioned at the intersection of being privileged for being male, and being oppressed in some other identity. In general, it is far easier to identify with and mobilize towards action around the ways that people are harmed than it is to identify with and mobile to act around the ways that they have been privileged. Gay or bisexual men who become involved in this predominately heterosexual movement (at least in the U.S.) are confronted with just this issue. They must not only identify with being gay or bisexual in a heterosexist culture (and in the organization as well), but must also simultaneously identify with the ways that they are privileged in a patriarchal culture – no easy feat.

To complicate the dynamics even further, men who are involved in anti-sexist efforts and who are privileged vis-à-vis other men who are involved often act out both forms of privilege in groups. As a European American male, I often act in ways that express my male privilege as well as act in other ways that express my white-skin privilege. When involved in organizing efforts with men of color, around these issues which are already, inherently, difficult, complicated, and paradoxical; my expressions of white-skin privilege often intensify the difficulty and complicated nature of the work. As such, I need be doubly aware of and sensitive to my expressions of privilege, and responsive to the men of color who are involved as to how they experience me. It is through this kind of dialogue and these experiences that the trust can be built – a trust that is necessary to build upon for further coalition work.

In order to work effectively in multi-cultural men's groups, we need to be aware of the subtle and not-so-subtle expression of privilege, dominance and abuse that occur and learn the skills necessary to label and confront these behaviors. But we must also work within these organizations to ensure that the organization, group, or collective addresses the institutionalized forms of oppression and dominance as well. Being an ally to men of color means more than working on my personal forms of racism and white-skin privilege, it also means that I work in partnership with them to address institutionalized forms of racism and white supremacy. For example, it is not a leap for anti-rape groups to also address police brutality and/or gay bashing. To do so will not only likely enhance our ability to work effectively across cultural differences, but will also likely make our analysis about the issues of men's violence stronger and more comprehensive.

Outreach

Outreach means just that – OUT-reach. It means much more than translating posters, brochures and training manuals into Spanish, Vietnamese or Hmong. It means more than showing pictures of men of color on our poster campaigns, or having a sign language interpreter at speaking events. ***Out***reach means reaching out of our agenda, perhaps even

our perspective to do work in communities that are under-represented in our efforts. One key question to ask yourself is why should "they" come to our event (join our organization, partner with us for a special outing) when we are unwilling to go to "their" events? Doing effective outreach means establishing relationships with key organizations, people or groups which involves getting out of our offices and joining with "them." Outreach means working with others on what is "their" agenda and finding areas of overlap where joint efforts can take place.

For example, Yom Hashoah is the Jewish day of remembrance. By recognizing the Holocaust as a form of men's violence and linking with local or student Jewish groups, a men's group that has not historically had strong Jewish representation can begin to establish the personal relationships as well as develop the shared analysis where by ongoing joint efforts are possible, even likely. In addition, by supporting, mobilizing for and joining in a Yam Hashoah celebration, some Jewish men will likely be made aware of your efforts, sensitized to the issues and may choose to become supporters or members as well.

Making Room in the Inn

Aside from doing effective outreach, addressing personal dynamics of oppression and privilege, and working to dismantle institutional forms of repression and dominance; building multicultural men's groups means recognizing the myriad of ways that culture impacts how we operate. Organizations that attempt to become more multi-cultural often must address the ways that different cultures have different norms, values and rules of interacting. As a result, some of the core principles of how the organization operates will likely need to be challenged and confronted as well.

Cultures have different rules and ideas about how space is used, communication patterns, how hierarchies operate, the role of support within "business" meetings, the role of food and music, etc. Without examining these differences and exploring what they mean in terms of the way the group operates, then regardless of how much difference is reflected in the organization, it is not yet truly multi-cultural. It is simply another organization or group from the dominant paradigm that has men from multiple cultures involved.

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