



Men's and Women's Institute

We started on a high note by considering our vision of a community with no violence that would necessitate men and women working together. We suggested words like fearlessness, unity, respect, cooperation, courage, peace, tranquil, trust, shared, safe, harmony, honesty, respect and finally holy, words loaded with emotion and high hope. We four facilitators, two men and two women, two whites and two blacks, younger and older, gay and straight represented almost as much diversity as any four people could represent.

But there was controversy even before we started. The original "Men's Institute" became a "Men's and Women's Institute" because women did not trust men working together on violence against women without women monitoring the process. For the first time in anyone's memory, we were working on violence against women with more men than women in the room. For some, the experiential nature of the workshop was too much to bear. Wouldn't it be easier to listen to didactic lectures, facts and research? It is certainly less threatening to take notes without exploring our own positions and feelings.

When we separated in two groups by gender, even that was hard. What was the other group doing without us? We wanted to know. We wanted to watch.

Many of the women identified as survivors of violence perpetrated by men. But, our theory and philosophy covered the spectrum. Some of us believe that violence is an individual pathology and others (including the facilitators) believe that violence against women is a social construct based on the oppression of women.

When we came back together the women asked the men to consider the following:

- Recognize this is primarily a [battered] woman's movement
- Recognize we [women] are the experts
- Check your need to be in control
- Hold all males accountable
- Change in belief system
- Walk lightly with consciousness
- [Men are] welcome as allies
- We take their role seriously
- Provide child care/cook/clean more without looking for praise

More mutual respect
Homophobia

One man asked why couldn't this be a people's movement instead of a woman's movement? A facilitator asked him to consider his question in terms of what the women had asked him to consider. After a pause the man reframed his statement recognizing that the women had already asked him to recognize this as a women's movement.

Listening to each other was difficult. The men bravely spoke from their hearts and yet, could not avoid talking from their perspectives of power and privilege. When the women courageously spoke of their pain the men were silenced and hurt by the powerful anger and mistrust. The women did not agree with each other about our own movement and that was confusing. Men felt threatened by the truth-telling honesty expressed by the women. It is hard for men to listen, really listen to women who have been hurt by men without feeling defensive and attacked. Other women leaped in to the conversation to support the men and to take care of them and make sure their feelings were not hurt. Some women were angry that the men were not being treated with enough care and kindness. The discussion was emotional. Some felt unprepared for the depth of emotions conveyed.

We ended with a discussion about what we can do to address men's violence against women. We especially asked the group to consider alternatives other than the criminal justice system. The group we brainstormed the following list:

- Address patriarchy in places of worship
- Education in schools
- Support from employers
 - for survivors
 - to hold perpetrators accountable
- Use the media
- Begin with the family
- Walk the walk daily
- Be mindful of language
- Organize economically
- Men's organizations accountable to women
- Higher pay for women
- Stiffer penalties [for men who are violent]
- Challenge exclusion from country clubs
- DV treated as a crime like other crimes
- Eliminate exploitation/violence in production of food
- Build social capital rooted in communities
- Network of women to educate and support other women
- No confidentiality

Addressing power and control in sex education for young men; safety planning for young women

Get larger number of men to speak out

Targeted outreach to community colleges

Challenge gender stereotypes

Direct money to where it is needed

Database of male offenders open to the public

Can the men really be allies to the battered women's movement? I believe they can. Will the work be uncomfortable? I believe it will. Should we keep exploring men's role in the battered women's movement? I believe we should.

For those who wish to engage further, you are invited to continue the dialogue.

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