

Alternative Interventions to Intimate Violence:
Defining Political and Pragmatic Challenges

Pp. 193 – 217 in Ptacek, J. (Ed.), *Feminism and Restorative Justice*, (NY: Oxford Press, 2010)

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Creative Interventions

Acknowledgements. Mimi Kim wishes to thank the board and advisors of Creative Interventions: Crystal Baik, Trishala Deb, Staci Haines, Isabel Kang, Kalei Valli Kanuha, Helen Kim, Susun Kim, Thao Le, Sujin Lee, Catie Magee, Ann Rhee Menzie, Susan Murray, Sue Osthoff, Joan Pennell, Julia Perilla, Beth Richie, Poroshat Shekarloo and Kabzuag Vaj; sisters at Incite! Women of Color against Violence; Generation Five, with special appreciation to Sara Kershner; courageous collaborators at Shimtuh, Asian Women's Shelter, Narika and DataCenter; Critical Resistance-Oakland with special thanks to Rachel Herzing, Serena Huang and Nat Smith; and the many other friends and colleagues who have helped to support this project.

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Abstract

This chapter introduces the “community-based intervention approach” of Creative Interventions, an Oakland-based organization established to create models, tools and other accessible community resources supporting alternative community-based, non-state interventions to intimate violence. Kim describes the Community-Based Interventions Project which is developing, pilot testing, evaluating and disseminating a replicable community-based model for violence intervention. The work of Creative Interventions is placed within the “landscape of alternatives” including the emerging frameworks of “transformative justice,” “community accountability,” and “harm-free zones.” Kim introduces the Creative Interventions approach with a narrative contributed to the National Story Collecting Project featuring a Maori family’s collective attempts to stop a father from beating his son. The story illustrates the capacity for families and communities violence to develop more flexible and effective responses to violence than prevailing social service and criminal legal remedies. Kim then critiques current intervention responses by illustrating the alignment of the binary logic of conventional feminism with individualistic and state-based remedies. She follows with the alternative concept of intersectionality and the radical challenges represented by Incite! Women of Color against Violence and Critical Resistance. The chapter ends with some observations based upon the early implementation experiences of Creative Interventions and the successes and contradictions they suggest.

Alternative Interventions to Intimate Violence: Defining Political and Pragmatic Challenges

We live in a town, but many of my husband's whanau (extended family) live in the valley where he grew up about forty kilometres away. My husband and his brother are renowned for a number of things – one being how they extend the life of their cars and vans using highly technical items like string and wire – another how they share these vehicles for a variety of tasks such as moving furniture or transporting relatives, building materials, tractor parts, rongoa (traditional herbal medicines), eels, vegetables, dogs, and pigs (dead or alive). They are renowned for being people of the people, the ones to call on in times of trouble and death, the ones who will solve the problem and make the plan. They travel to and from town, to the coast to dive for sea food, to endless meetings, to visit whanau (extended family) – along the many kilometres of dirt roads in and around the valley, through flood or dust depending on the season in those patched up, beat up, prized cars.

There are a number of things to know about the valley – one is that the last thirty-three children in the world of their hapu ririki (small subtribe) to grow up and be educated on their own lands go to school here, despite government efforts to close the school. Another is that the valley is known to outsiders and insiders as 'patu wahine' – literally meaning to 'beat women,' and this is not said as a joke. The mountain for this valley is named as the doorway spirits pass through on their way to their final departure from this life. This valley is also the valley where my husband and his siblings were beaten at school for speaking their first language. It is the valley their mother sent them to so they would be safe from their father – back to her people. It is where they milked cows, pulled a plough, fed pigs but often went hungry, and were stock whipped, beaten and worse.

My brother-in-law still lives in the valley, in a group of houses next to the school. So it's no surprise that one of our cars would be parked by these houses – right by where the children play. Perhaps also not a surprise that while playing that time old international game of rock throwing our eight year old nephew shattered the back window of the car. If I'd been listening I probably would have heard the 'oh' and 'ah' of the other children that accompanied the sound of glass breaking from town, and if I'd been really tuned in I would have heard the rapid, frightened heart beat of 'that boy' as well.

His mother is my husband's cousin – and she was on the phone to us right away. She was anxious to assure us 'that boy' would get it when his father came home. His father is a big man with a pig hunter's hands who hoists his pigs onto a meat hook unaided. He is man of movement

and action, not a man for talking. Those hands would carry all the force of proving that he was a man who knew how to keep his children in their place. Beating 'that boy' would be his way of telling us that he had also learned his own childhood lessons well.

So before he got home we burned up the phone lines – sister to sister, cousin to cousin, brother-in-law to sister-in-law, wife to husband, brother to brother. This was because my husband and his brother know that there are some lessons you are taught as a child that should not be passed on. The sound of calloused hand on tender flesh, the whimpers of watching sisters, the smell of your own fear, the taste of your own blood and sweat as you lie in the dust – useless, useless, better not born. This is a curriculum like no other. A set of lessons destined to repeat unless you are granted the grace of insight and choose to embrace new learning.

So when the father of 'that boy' came home and heard the story of the window, 'that boy' was protected by our combined aroha (love) and good humor, by the presence of a senior uncle, by invitations to decide how to get the window fixed in the shortest time for the least money. Once again phone calls were exchanged with an agreement being made on appropriate restitution. How a barrel of diesel turns into a car window is a story for another time.

Next time my husband drove into the valley it was to pick up the car, and 'that boy' was an anxious witness to his arrival. My husband also has very big hands, hands that belong to a man who has spent most of his life outdoors. These were the hands that reached out to 'that boy' to hug not hurt.

A lot of bad things still happen in the valley, but more and more they are being named and resisted. Many adults who learned their early lessons there will never return. For tangata whenua (people of the land) this is profound loss – our first identifiers on meeting are not our own names but those of our mountains, rivers, hapu (subtribe) and iwi (tribe). To be totally separate from these is a dislocation of spirit for the already wounded. This is only a small story that took place in an unknown valley, not marked on many maps. When these small stories are told and repeated so our lives join and connect, when we choose to embrace new learning and use our 'bigness' to heal not hurt, then we are growing grace and wisdom on the earth.

He Korero Iti (A Small Story) submitted to the StoryCollecting & Organizing Project (STOP), a project of Creative Interventions, by Di Grennell, Whangarei, Aotearoa-New Zealand.

Introduction

Creative Interventions was established in Oakland in 2004 as a resource center to create and promote community-based interventions to intimate and interpersonal violence in alignment with the liberatory goals of the social justice movement. The motivations for this endeavor stem from multiple concerns spanning from political to pragmatic, each pointing towards an approach to violence intervention which for now this organization refers to as “community-based interventions to violence.” While Creative Interventions is grounded in the needs and experiences of communities of color including immigrant and lesbian/gay/bi-sexual/transgender/queer (queer) communities, the implications of its work transcend the specificity of these oppressed communities and are intended to challenge prevailing conventions within the anti-violence and social justice movements.

At the heart of Creative Interventions is the deeply held belief that our approach to violence intervention needs to be guided by the knowledge held by everyday people, carried out by those closest to and most impacted by violence and situated in the very spaces and places where violence occurs, i.e., within our homes, neighborhoods and communities. Looking straight into the face of violence perpetrated upon those we love, live with, raise, and grow old with provides an opportunity for us to disentangle ourselves from the madness which guides our world today and free ourselves to come together as co-creators of a future closer to that of which so many of us dream.

We live at a time when communities face unprecedented rates of dislocation and devastation. Domestic violence, sexual abuse, child abuse and other forms of intimate and interpersonal violence result from community conditions of increasing economic, social and environmental degradation and contribute to their deterioration. We yearn for community while deeply distrusting those very people with whom we live and work. We look for community and often find only scattered remains. Thus we have created a system outside of community to protect us from violence – shelters, advocacy centers, child welfare systems, foster care homes, prisons – with a qualified set of experts to manage our way towards a mirage called safety.

Community education and publicity campaigns reach out to communities, heightening awareness about intimate violence and asking us to take a stand. However, community education merely informs us how to recognize violence, how to provide emotional support to survivors of violence and where to call to end violence. The end to violence is to be found in a program which may not speak our language, a restraining order which may ask us to leave someone whom we

do not wish to leave, a lawyer who may be able to process our divorce for a cost we cannot afford, or the police who may decide to arrest the perpetrator of violence or who may even end up arresting us.

The community-based interventions approach turns back to community, not expecting a healthy, thriving, cooperative set of family members, friends, neighbors or congregation members, but rather an incomplete and imperfect collection of individuals connected in some way to a situation of intimate violence which we assume at least some are motivated to end. Whether defined by family ties, geography, identity, workplace, religion or merely by convenience or happenstance, many of us remain connected to others in ways which form the basis for concern and collective action.

The community-based intervention model is fundamentally an organizing model. It seizes upon the opportunities offered by violence rather than succumbing to its disintegrating effects. It shifts attention and resources back towards those directly impacted by violence, beyond individual survivors and perpetrators to engage circles of friends, families and communities. Through the process of coming together to address violence, identify the problem, map allies, create common goals, and coordinate a plan of action and response, communities in their various formations can create a new set of norms, practices and relationships to not only end violence but to build community health.

What models to violence intervention can we create to support caring and motivated individuals to come together and take effective action to end violence and replace it with a shared commitment to safety and healing? How can we provide adequate information, skills-building and accessible resources to strengthen these systems enough to be effective in sustaining what will need to be long-term strategies? How can we learn from these strategies and share successes with other communities thus expanding our collective capacity to end violence?

Communities already have a lot to tell us. The National Story Collecting Project of Creative Interventions in collaboration with DataCenter, Generation Five and individuals and organizations across the country is collecting stories from everyday people who have already come together to try to end violence. These stories such as He Korero Iti (A Small Story) which introduces this chapter excavates the wisdom embedded in otherwise neglected and forgotten community memory to inspire and inform us on the creative and courageous efforts of everyday people.

The anti-violence movement in the U.S. and across the globe offers many lessons about the ways in which survivors transform from victimization towards a sense of power, about the

complexity and persistence of patterns of abuse, and about how some perpetrators have changed their own behaviors so that they can enjoy relationships based upon respect and equality rather than power and control.

We begin with this partnership between grassroots communities, the anti-violence movement and the broader social justice movement to build towards an alternative response to intimate violence. And we take advantage of the structure and resources of an organization committed to long-term social change to transform these lessons and experiences into accessible community resources. In this way, we contribute to ongoing efforts to build a new set of community-based knowledge and practices which may some day become as familiar as violence is today.

Political and Programmatic Lineage

Creative Interventions is just one among a growing community of individuals and organizations working towards alternative social justice responses to intimate and interpersonal violence. While the project of Creative Interventions is the creation of practical on-the-ground models of community-based interventions to violence which can be carried out by individuals, organizations and community institutions, this work is situated within a broader context of emerging conceptual and political frameworks. A landscape of alternative interventions to violence is developing throughout various sectors of the social justice movement. Constantly shifting, evolving and renaming itself, this landscape currently includes such formations as “transformative justice” as articulated by Generation Five (Generation Five 2007) and Critical Resistance in the U.S. and a broad movement of organizations and individuals throughout Canada, Australia and New Zealand-Aotearoa (Second Maori Taskforce on Whanau Violence 2004). “Harm free zones” constitute a set of principles and practices developed by a coalition of New York community-based social justice organizations challenging state violence, intimate violence and community violence (Harm Free Zone N.d.). The more general term, “community accountability,” is used by Incite! Women of Color against Violence (Incite! 2003, 2005, 2006) and other social justice organizations (CARA 2006; Kim 2005) to describe a wider array of practices challenging interpersonal violence and other forms of violence outside of the context of the state.

While those working within the sphere of “restorative justice” have engaged many similar concerns (Coker 1999, 2002; Pennell and Anderson 2005; Pennell and Burford 2002; Pranis 2002; Strang and Braithwaite 2002), anti-violence advocates and social justice activists have

been largely removed from such discussions and practices. Indeed, many of the alternative frameworks have developed in part as a response to perceived limitations of “restorative justice” concepts and practices (Generation Five 2007; Second Maori Taskforce on Whanau Violence 2004; Smith 2005). This book offers a much needed opportunity for dialogue across these terrains.

Creative Interventions also draws upon the concrete programmatic advances of many sister organizations in the movement led by women of color, immigrant and/or queer women. These include Communities Against Rape and Abuse (CARA 2006) and Northwest Network of Bi, Trans, Lesbian and Gay Survivors of Abuse in Seattle (Incite! 2003; Smith 2005); Institute for Family Services in Somerset, NJ (Almeida Dolan-Del Vecchio Parker 1999; Almeida and Durkin 1999); Audre Lorde Project and Sista Il Sista in Brooklyn (Incite! 2003; Smith 2005); Freedom, Inc. in Madison (Kim 2005); Caminar Latino in Atlanta (Perilla, Lavizzo, and Ibanez 2007; Perilla and Perez 2002); and Sharon Spencer’s Men’s Program and Ke Ala Lokahi in Hawaii (Kim 2005). Despite the marginalized or invisible status of many of these achievements, the resulting experiences and innovations hold wisdom for the diversity of oppressed classes and communities which constitute the majority of the U.S. population.

While these frameworks and programs have arisen as positive advances in struggles to address and end violence in its many forms in alignment with a broader social justice vision, they are also a response to the limitations of the conventional anti-violence movement. In this chapter, I outline how the binary logic of the conventional anti-violence model aligns with individualistic and state-based remedies. I follow with the alternative vision of intersectionality and the radical challenges represented by Incite! Women of Color against Violence, Critical Resistance and other organizations challenging interpersonal and state violence. I end with some observations based upon the early experiences of Creative Interventions and posit current successes and contradictions presented in a community-based intervention approach to intimate and interpersonal violence.

The Binary Logic of the Conventional Feminist Model

The prevailing feminist model of violence intervention follows a familiar coherence and logic. The dominant ideology within our culture and subcultures, whether it is a white middle class suburb of Cleveland, a Korean immigrant community in Los Angeles, or an African American neighborhood in Baltimore, remains decidedly patriarchal. Men’s lives are valued over women’s;

male-defined values determine dominant societal and subculture values; violence or the threat of violence continues as the way in which these values are maintained and enforced. Denial, minimizing, and victim blaming in the face of all forms of intimate violence remain rampant even in the most politically progressive communities. Those whose sexual orientation or gender identity fail to conform to conventional appearances or practices of heterosexual masculinity and femininity face invisibility, marginalization and endangerment not only within abusive intimate relationships but throughout the spaces and institutions of everyday life. They likewise fall out of the very conceptualization of patriarchy and liberatory framework of conventional feminism.

To counter these ideological and institutional patterns of patriarchy, the anti-violence movement has embraced the divisions of gender and turned it on its head, thus privileging the voices and perspectives of women. Championing those women who have suffered physical, sexual, emotional and economic violence at the behest of men and the demands of patriarchy, it has designated such forms of intimate violence as “gender-based.” Domestic violence, sexual assault, sexual harassment and child sexual abuse, formerly private, invisible, unnamed and unchallenged matters have risen to the forefront of public discussion and policy although with contradictory results.

Safety and protection for women and girls have become paramount principles in the face of what has been experienced as an overarching pattern of physical, sexual, economic and emotional violence from all levels of society. “Gender-based violence” is not only perpetrated by abusive family members, intimate partners and other individuals. It is maintained, supported or encouraged by a community often colluding with violence and a state which often responds with actions and policies paralleling or further contributing to harms inflicted by more intimate perpetrators.

In an effort to challenge the denial, minimizing, and victim blaming expressed by male perpetrators of violence and reinforced by colluding community members, the anti-violence movement has held a strong us-them position based upon the divisions of gender. “We” as women are the victims or survivors of intimate violence or advocates for survivors of violence. “They” are male perpetrators of gender-based violence or those who collude with the abuses of patriarchy. The framework for our understanding of gender-based violence is thus situated within an assumption of a conventionally gendered and heterosexually defined context. While we may contend that violence results from unequal power dynamics embedded within these structures and categories, we often fail to question the categories themselves.

The anti-violence movement has long been criticized for universalist categories of women which silently presume white, heterosexual, middle-class, Christian, able-bodied, U.S.-born, English-speaking characteristics. Despite some colorization within the anti-violence movement, today's leadership, prevailing program designs and policies remain largely driven and defined by this same constituency.

Patriarchal, white-supremacist, heterosexist notions of gender further define victims deserving protection as those who conform to this idealized norm (Kanuha 1996). Those deviating from this norm face reduced access to the institutions of protection and are even subject to persecution by these same systems (Richie 1996; Ritchie 2006, Smith 2005). Behind the bureaucratic language of "underserved" or "under-represented" communities lies the complex system of attitudes, procedures, policies and laws which constitute the institutionalized systems of oppression which we more familiarly name as racism, sexism, classism, ableism and so on.

Within the anti-violence social service sector, lack of access manifests in many different forms. In many communities, lack of access means complete unavailability of services. "Lack of access" can also remain embedded in program practices and policies such as screening processes designed to exclude "difficult/non-conforming" clients. Women who do not speak English are still denied shelter because they cannot participate in their support groups; undocumented women are still told that funding does not permit them access to services; women racially-profiled as drug users are still routinely screened with tyrannical scrutiny; persons who fall outside of the conventional definitions of sexual orientation or gender identity are often left with no options whatsoever or vulnerability to further dangers of homophobia or transphobia within those spaces meant to deliver safety.

The Anti-Violence Movement and the State

For many sectors of the anti-violence movement, the involvement of the state as an active agent in violence intervention and prevention follows an evolutionary process initiated by anti-violence advocates challenging the state's policies and practices of collusion with perpetrators of intimate violence. In the struggle to get state systems to "take violence against women seriously," advocates and activists have pushed local, state and federal legislation supporting the increased criminalization of acts of domestic violence and sexual assault. Changes in legislation have been accompanied by participation by anti-violence advocates in police and judicial trainings in an effort to "sensitize" these state agents to the issues facing survivors of violence and to their responsibility in enforcing laws meant to increase protection for survivors of violence and penalties for perpetrators.

This reformist strategy has resulted in increasing collaboration between the anti-violence sector and state as advocacy leads to legislative or procedural gains then followed by partnerships as these changes are negotiated and implemented into practice. Relative successes particularly within the domestic violence arena have resulted in what may be regarded as concrete benefits for this sector such as inclusion of domestic violence advocates in police review teams or state advisory panels and significant funding increases throughout the 1980's and 1990's.

The passage of the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) of 1994 represents a watershed moment for the anti-violence movement. This first federal act legislating violence against women remedied many of the measures devastating lives of immigrant women following passage of the draconian Immigration Fraud and Marriage Amendments of 1986 (Schor 2000). VAWA 1994 mandated a national domestic violence hotline and established the Office of Violence against Women, opening significant funding and advocacy opportunities for anti-violence programs. Advocates struggling many years for the passage of these provisions were finally able to get this Act passed as an attachment to the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 (Crime Act) under the Clinton Administration, an example of pragmatism or opportunism which took the breath away from many struck by the political and practical implications of this compromise.

The increasing coordination between the criminal legal system and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), formerly known as the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), presents further implications for violence intervention strategies which engage the state (Ritchie 2006). For example, felony conviction on domestic violence charges of non-citizen perpetrators can now result in deportation. Current practices allowing ICE "sweeps" of local jails for undocumented persons can also lead to deportation even if that person is never actually convicted of any criminal offense. While advocates could once reassure survivors of violence with some confidence that calling the police would not lead to deportation, this is no longer the case.

The child welfare system similarly poses threats particularly to communities of color which face disproportionate rates of removal of children. Recently, concerns have risen throughout the anti-violence movement due to increasingly punitive measures against mothers experiencing domestic violence such as charges of "failure to protect" against mothers remaining in violent relationships (Enos 2003; Generation Five 2007).

Many mothers face a complex web of threats – fears of harm to themselves and their children by abusive intimate partners, distrust of social services or state remedies, and threats that

any action or lack thereof could expose them to accusations of “failure to protect” their children. For parents involved in same-gender or gender-variant relationships, the real and perceived threats of child removal are heightened by discriminatory attitudes, policies and laws limiting the rights of parenthood for queer people. And immigrant women face further fears of ICE scrutiny and the risk of detention and deportation – their own, their partner’s and/or their children’s often compounded by repeated threats by abusive partners that seeking help will lead to the possibility of permanent separation from children.

The Primacy of Safety in the Anti-Violence Movement

In many ways, the conventional binary logic of the feminist anti-violence model supports the historic reliance upon the state. The response to the culture of patriarchal violence and danger has been increasingly focused on a concern for safety. Safety has been defined as an achievable state reached through securing individualized safety from the harm of the individual perpetrator. Physical safety is best met by physical distance from the perpetrator thereby requiring temporary if not permanent separation through leaving the relationship and/or separation of the perpetrator from physical access to the survivor of violence.

Thus the use of civil and criminal restraining orders, the most commonly applied criminal legal tool in situations of domestic violence, attains safety largely through mandated physical separation of the survivor from the perpetrator of violence, a requirement often surprising women who simply wanted a safeguard from the act of violence, not necessarily from the person perpetrating violence.

Because intimate violence is often characterized by a pattern consisting of many overt and covert acts of power and control and not simply a single act of violence, the maintenance of safety through a persistent state of separation from the person exhibiting this pattern of behavior offers an easily understood if not achievable goal. Many women experiencing domestic violence seek assistance from anti-violence programs with the goal of leaving an abusive relationship. But as we know, many women do not or only choose this option after all other possibilities have been exhausted or refused.

Those of us working in the anti-violence movement understand the power of the notion of safety for persons whose most intimate sense of safety has been ruptured or for those who have never experienced its possibility. Physical separation from an identified perpetrator of violence offers a seemingly controllable context in which safety can be achieved. Thus safety is reduced to

level of the individual physical body or perhaps expanded to include those of the children. It follows that if we find ways to maintain and sustain the individual woman or the woman and children separate from the perpetrator of violence, then we can find safety.

Accountability and Its Void

On the other side of this situation of violence is the perpetrator of violence. Insofar as we have identified the perpetrator to be men or as we often say, “95% of all intimate violence is men perpetrating against women,” our model of violence intervention still overlays the gender binary with the divide of victim/perpetrator. Our primary concern for women who conform to acceptable notions of femininity and the “deserving” victim can be stated as safety and the increase in choices. However, our position concerning men and/or perpetrators of violence falls into a void or a complex of emotions and opinions resulting in few definable principles or strategies. Many of us refuse to discuss “what about the men” because we rightly contend that this parallels the caretaking role of women in society. Crossing this line makes us susceptible to putting more energy and care into the wellbeing of men and those who violate us than for that of women and children. Others point to the countless experiences and studies finding that the possibility of changing violent behavior in men is questionable at best.

Currently, the anti-violence movement has adopted a common language of accountability, a term covering a range of meaning vastly divergent and rarely specified. Coming to terms with what we mean by accountability requires discussions demanding that we explore our concerns for men and/or perpetrators beyond our political and emotional comfort. In short, further exploration leads us into dangerous territories. On one hand, it may reveal sympathies for men and/or perpetrators of intimate violence sliding us perilously close to collusion. On the other, it may reveal hopelessness about the possibilities of change thereby questioning the real possibility of safety. Ultimately, we face untenable fears of our own complicity in and/or vulnerability to violence.

The anti-violence movement demands accountability but, in actuality, expects none. Understandable skepticism resulting from countless stories of manipulation, disappointments and lies by abusers claiming remorse and promises to change have ossified into a mantra of impossibility. Indeed, many of us fail to imagine what accountability would even mean. No wonder that we are left with a void only to be filled by the state and its one-dimensional response to this demand. Despite our growing recognition of the political and material problems

embedded in the criminal legal response, our answering machines still tell women in crisis to call 911 in case of emergency. We still instruct women whether they are undocumented immigrants, queer women, transgender women, fearful of the police due to targeted brutality, or otherwise unwilling to subject themselves or their abusers to this system to call the police.

Protectionism and State Partnership within the Anti-Violence Movement

The result of this coupling of the unquestioned primacy of safety with the void of accountability is the rise of a paternalistic protectionism within the anti-violence movement in partnership with the state as the overarching defender of safety. Our narrow focus on safety as individual physical separation from danger has led us to the belief that safety is best achieved through survivors leaving the abusive relationship or situation of violence. The ability and power to engage with abusers has been ceded to the state. The many women who do not want such outcomes are left with few alternative options.

Rather than expanding options for women, the anti-violence movement has endorsed a narrowing vision of safety supported throughout the interweaving systems of counseling centers, shelters, hotlines, and legal advocacy programs. What has become known as the “coordinated community response” (Pence and Shephard 1999) has promoted and legitimized the partnership between anti-violence programs and the state strengthened by “embedded” placement of many advocates within criminal legal settings. Many anti-violence programs have increased capacity due to expanded funding under the Office of Violence against Women following the Violence Against Women Act of 1994, a source of funding which has promoted such activities as enhanced arrest policies, narrowing definitions of intimate violence language to coincide with criminal codes and the recent proliferation of Family Justice Centers which have attempted to physically and procedurally centralize domestic violence related services under criminal legal leadership.

The anti-violence movement has unwittingly colluded with the state’s law and order agenda by allowing the state to determine certain activities and categories of people as threats to liberty and to control through the mechanisms of protection and punishment. In this way, reliance on the state to protect women from the patriarchal violence of “dangerous” men can be compared to U.S. military policy and its use of invasion and occupation to protect the rights of women in Afghanistan and Iraq against the tyranny of Islamic patriarchy (Razack 2004). How is it that so many segments of the feminist movement have fallen for such unquestioned support of policing and militarization as a solution to gender oppression and gender-based violence?

The Promise and Challenges of Intersectionality

Despite efforts to maintain the prevailing feminist model of violence intervention, the intersection of women of color, immigrant and queer people struggling to end violence against women in all of its forms has challenged the once-dominant white, middle-class, Christian, heterosexual and able-bodied leadership and assumptions of the anti-violence movement. Intersectionality is now publicly recognized as an alternative paradigm contesting the simple primacy of gender and promoting the perspectives and agendas of marginalized communities (Crenshaw 1994; Sokoloff and Dupont 2005).

In practice, intersectionality has meant that women of color including queer and gender variant people have increasingly created independent institutional spaces which support complex identities, analyses and responses to intimate violence and the intersection of state and other forms of violence. During the 1980's and 1990's much of this activity was focused on the creation of "language accessible and culturally competent" programs and institutions targeted to the needs of specific communities characterized by race, ethnicity, language, sexual orientation, gender identity and disability. Many of these programs were constructed in likeness to the conventional model of violence intervention with variations based on accommodations to culture, language, accessible community resources and geographic specificity.

The inclusive framework of intersectionality has too often been limited by a myopic interpretation and implementation. The concept is often employed to make room for one or two additional categories of oppression depending upon which best fits one's interests or experience. It often names and privileges certain categories while dismissing or excluding others. Hence, persons championing the rights and perspectives of women of color may fail to include immigrant women or disabled women or persons whose sexuality or gender identity falls beyond the boundaries of comprehension or concern.

The increasing visibility of transgender and gender variant persons offers a set of challenges and opportunities to the conceptualization of intersectionality among those challenging gender oppression. The questioning of woman-only spaces, gendered language and to our very definitions of women (and men) demands that we expand our notions of patriarchy and our views of liberation. It also asks us to broaden our understanding and practice of intersectionality to include the realities of gender variant persons and the differences marked by race, class, immigrant status, ability/disability, and so on.

Incite! and Critical Resistance: Defining a New Territory for Liberatory Alternatives

The founding of Incite! Women of Color against Violence in 2000 with the Color of Violence Conference in Santa Cruz represented a critical opportunity for women of color with a

radical agenda to organize nationally. Originally representing women of color with a history of participation and leadership in the anti-violence movement, the co-founders of Incite! created an institutional space from which to address interpersonal violence and state violence and the intersection of gender oppression and other systems of oppression including those based on race, class, sexual orientation, gender identity, ability/disability, and age. Critical Resistance, founded with the “Critical Resistance: Beyond the Prison-Industrial Complex” conference in Berkeley in 1998, represents the coalescence of a national and international organizing force challenging the prison-industrial-complex. These two organizations formed powerful new institutional spaces from which to push for an alternative social justice agenda.

Together, these two organizations came together to define the territory historically dividing the strands of the broader social justice movement represented by the anti-violence movement and the anti-prison-industrial-complex movement. The Incite! Critical Resistance Statement (Incite!/Critical Resistance 2005) names areas of challenge represented by each movement while committing to a common vision and future collaborative strategies.

While concerns regarding “overreliance on the criminal legal system” have gained attention among an increasing sector of the anti-violence movement (Ms. Foundation 2003), Incite! and other advocates and activists have moved beyond the language of “overreliance” to challenge the very notion of the state as a viable partner in the struggle against violence against women and children (Generation Five 2007; Harm Free Zone N.d.; Incite! 2003, 2006; Ritchie 2006; Smith 2005).

These movements also challenge the primacy of individual safety, noting that for oppressed people, the possibility of individual safety is a myth or a luxury afforded to the privileged few. The goal, rather, is liberation and can only be achieved through a collective struggle towards the radical transformation of the material conditions contributing to violence on all of its levels.

Alternative Community-Based Violence Intervention Strategies

Despite growing concerns over current anti-violence interventions to domestic violence, sexual assault and other forms of intimate and interpersonal violence, the development of concrete, on-the-ground alternative approaches and programs remain remarkably absent in comparison to the demand for such measures. National conversations and conferences have increasingly called for new strategies but with limited developments.

Although restorative justice responses have engaged the issues of intimate violence in limited instances, the few programs in North America, Australia and New Zealand-Aotearoa still remain the most documented strategies of alternative interventions to intimate violence (Coker 1999, 2002; Paulin, Kingi, Huiara, and Rash 2002; Pennell and Anderson 2005; Pennell and Burford 2002; Pranis 2002; Strang and Braithwaite 2002). Distrust of restorative justice measures among anti-violence advocates, the dominance of legal theorists and practitioners in discussions and implementation of restorative justice activities, and negative reports among anti-violence advocates witnessing the lack of power analysis and safety mechanisms in examples of restorative justice has limited meaningful discussion and engagement between anti-violence advocates and the proponents of restorative justice (Coker 1999, 2002; Smith 2005; Stubbs 1997, 2002).

Furthermore, restorative justice practices have primarily been initiated by the state or practiced in close coordination with the state (Generation Five 2007, Smith 2005). While they do represent alternatives to the conventional criminal legal response, they are generally diversionary practices still held within a criminal legal context. State control limits participation to those who are already within the criminal legal system, determines procedural constraints and allowable outcomes of such practices and excludes meaningful engagement by those challenging the viability of state intervention.

The Community-Based Intervention Model: Creative Interventions

Creative Interventions enters this relatively unexplored territory with a deliberate set of strategies aimed towards bridging the gap between critique and new possibilities, grassroots community needs and programmatic response, and safety concerns of the anti-violence movement and liberatory aims of the broader social justice movement.

Based upon initial discussions among the former Community Accountability Task Force of Incite! (Incite! 2003, 2005) and an early draft model co-created with Generation Five, Creative Interventions has begun some preliminary explorations in concrete situations of intimate and interpersonal violence with primary focus on communities of color including immigrant and queer communities. Several individuals and groups particularly from the social justice movement have come forward seeking alternative responses to their situations of violence.

These early explorations prepare Creative Interventions for the Community-Based Interventions Project, a demonstration project to develop, pilot test, evaluate, document and distribute a replicable comprehensive alternative community-based approach to violence intervention. This approach is aimed towards expanding the capacity of oppressed communities to

end and prevent violence by equipping its most accessible resources, i.e., family, friends, neighbors, co-workers and those towards whom persons in need first turn, with the model and tools to effectively intervene. This focus on the front lines of intimate and family violence raises the possibility of intervention at early stages of abuse; offers more accessible and sustainable resources; and builds intervention and prevention strategies into very spaces and places where violence occurs – homes, streets and communities.

The current phase of the Community-Based Interventions Project features a collaborative project led by Creative Interventions with Asian immigrant domestic violence organizations based in the San Francisco Bay Area. These organizations include Shimtuh, a domestic violence and sexual assault advocacy organization serving the Korean community; Narika, a South Asian domestic violence advocacy organization; and Asian Women's Shelter which is a pan-Asian domestic violence shelter with an interest in developing alternative strategies for the Asian Pacific Islander queer community and Mien community. It should be no surprise that interest in a community-based model is particularly keen within immigrant communities – distrustful of criminal legal systems, oriented towards problem-solving approaches actively engaging intimate networks, and interested in solutions which hold the possibility of keeping families and community intact.

Creative Interventions defines “community-based intervention to violence” as “any intervention to intimate violence which primarily involves community or collective solutions and/or engages the perpetrator without involving the state.” Central characteristics of the model distinguish it from most currently available options. Rather than relying upon social service organizations as the primary site for violence intervention, the model offers an alternative facilitated space for participants to create an intervention to violence which is carried out within their own home or community space.

Another significant characteristic of this approach is that the model engages anyone interested in exploring further action towards violence intervention including allies such as friends and family. It is not dependent upon the initial engagement by the survivor as are most conventional anti-violence services. It does not necessarily rely upon the knowledge or consent of the primary survivor. Leadership or at least buy-in of the primary survivor may be a desired goal of the particular intervention or this approach, in general, but is not presumed as a prerequisite to initiation or implementation.

Unlike most conventional anti-violence approaches, this alternative model does not presume safety to be the ultimate goal of violence intervention. Rather, Creative Interventions offers space for the articulation of a more nuanced individual and collectively-oriented set of

goals often held by survivors and community members (Davies, Lyon and Monti-Catania 1998). This articulation of individual goals, the transparency of tensions between individual goals often according to relationships of power and affiliation to respective players in situations of violence, and the construction of consensus within the collective involved in the intervention are key components of this model.

This organizing model recognizes anyone able and motivated to come forward to initiate a possible intervention as a potential leader and entry point to a given situation of intimate violence. From this starting point, the initial participant or participants are engaged in an organizing strategy which facilitates a process encouraging clarification of the situation of abuse, mapping of the parties involved, identifying common goals, preparation of safety plans and the creation and implementation of viable strategies for ending violence or promoting repair and healing. At each point, the possibility for further collective engagement is explored. Who else can help? What role can they play? Do they want to come into this facilitated space? Or do the participants want help preparing themselves to facilitate team-building on their own within their own community space?

Another feature is the possibility for engagement with the perpetrator of violence or the person doing harm. While this is by no means a necessary component of the model and is only approached with great care, it is considered as a possible option. The community-based model assumes that people within the survivor's intimate network may already be engaged with the perpetrator. Some may hold particular influence or connection. Some may also wield a meaningful threat. As restorative justice practices show, meaningful engagement of the perpetrator through the authority of the community and connection of care can hold more promise for long-term and sustainable change than the transfer of this authority to the criminal legal system (Pranis 2002).

What this model offers for the survivor of violence is a greater access to options than those conventionally available. What does she value? What are her goals? In what ways can she take leadership in attaining these goals? How can she organize her intimate network and other accessible resources to help her attain these goals or initiate others to take this role? If engagement with the perpetrator is a possibility, who can participate? Is this strategy feasible?

It also builds upon the capacity of those resources most accessible and meaningful to survivors of violence. While intimate networks have often failed to provide adequate support to survivors nor intervened effectively to reduce or end harm, they hold the most knowledge about those involved in violence, include those whose attitudes and actions may carry the most meaning,

and face the greatest risks when violence continues unabated or unaddressed. Meaningful collective action towards positive change holds transformative potential not only for individual survivors or perpetrators of violence but for all of those involved in creating healthy solutions or who at least come together to imagine their possibility.

While we share information regarding safety and explore critical questions regarding safety and safety planning, this model does not presume that immediate safety is a goal. The space to explore and co-create more meaningful goals allows for more creative strategies and actions more aligned with the broader principle of self-determination at the level of the individual and community.

A concrete example from one of the collaborative Asian immigrant organizations illustrates how this model offers access to a different array of options and displaces immediate physical safety as a necessary primary concern.

A young immigrant woman came to one of the collaborative organizations seeking assistance. She had gone to a party with her former employer, the owner of a bar. That evening, he attempted to rape her. She was able to struggle and get away. However, the experience was clearly traumatizing. The woman had decided that she wanted to confront this man. She talked to the advocate about her plan to enter the bar and confront her assailant, convinced that her sense of violation and indignity could only be met by this bold move.

The advocate, moved by the courage of this woman, responded by offering to go into the bar with her, a strategy ultimately challenged by the advocate's team of co-workers. This offer went beyond the usual practices of this organization and much beyond what most anti-violence organizations would recommend. Interested in the further exploration of this woman's request, this organization invoked the model of the community-based intervention and its role as a facilitator for further exploration rather than as an advocate accompanying her on this mission or imploring her to give up this idea for reasons of safety.

The staff team discussed what a facilitated community-based intervention would look like in this situation. The advocate met again with this young woman. This time she helped her explore her goals in confronting this man. Could her goals be met in other ways? Upon further exploration, it became clear that her goal was direct confrontation. She was open to discussing safety plans and to role play this action, but she was not willing to give up her primary goal.

The advocate role-played possible scenarios based upon her knowledge of the dynamics of sexual assault. She presented possible dangers as well as responses of victim-blaming, denial, threats and violence. She helped the woman explore who else in her intimate network might be

willing to help. The role play brought up many situations which this woman had not considered. It helped her to clarify a safer plan which still met her goals.

The woman could not identify anybody within her community to help out when this plan was first discussed. The exploration did raise possibilities as she prepared on her own. She talked to a friend who agreed to stay close to her phone in case any crisis occurred. She called her assailant and asked him to meet her at a restaurant. When she went to prepare for the meeting, she talked to the wait person and asked him to keep a close watch on the situation in case anything happened. It is notable that she ended up engaging another community member to participate in her plan.

The woman ended up meeting with her assailant, confronting him by naming his action and her outrage. He admitted his guilt and apologized without further incident. She called the organization following this confrontation with great appreciation, relief and a sense of closure.

This case illustrates the basic principles of this model, the critical role of helping the survivor identify her own goals and a plan of action to meet these goals. It also highlights the importance of exploring a collective response and the opportunity it opens for a different set of options resulting from the involvement of other people. It also offers one example of engagement with the perpetrator and the transformative power of this possibility for the survivor.

Of course, this example begs further questions. We do know that the survivor took back her sense of agency and power through this intervention. We can reasonably assume that the healing that this experience allowed was more immediate and powerful than a more conventional individual counseling approach or engagement with the state. We do not know if or how this man was changed by this experience. Did this prevent further assaults? Did this simply inform more successful strategies for future assaults? Did he find that apologies could relieve him of more painful consequences including the possibility of criminal legal engagement?

The “facilitated community-based intervention model” offers the organization’s central contribution to alternative interventions to intimate and interpersonal violence. If communities fail to provide concrete solutions to individual situations of violence, then conventional social service and criminal legal remedies will remain the only viable option. The development of effective intervention responses involving individual situations of violence, however, are linked to strategies addressing wider circles of community which violence impacts.

Effective and sustainable interventions rely upon the involvement of intimate networks including friends and family as well as broader community supports. The development of specific

education, tools and curriculum targeted to intimate network members is a critical component to the overall community-based intervention model.

The long-term vision for the development of this intervention approach includes the development and involvement of broad levels of community leadership as agents of community accountability. Programmatically, the training of informal and formal community leaders as intervention facilitators, community allies and community leaders promoting violence intervention and prevention are important components to the expansion and sustainability of this model. Further work on creative supports aimed at deeper and more sustainable change for perpetrators of violence are also being explored.

Contradictions and Challenges Facing Community-Based Interventions to Violence

Early experience with the model has also raised areas of contradiction and challenge. Collective involvement opens up the arena of public disclosure, defying usual anti-violence practices of confidentiality and community practices of secrecy surrounding intimate violence. Public disclosure for survivors still raises possibilities of shame and victim blaming. Public disclosure for perpetrators suggests public shaming as a punishment rather than a restorative measure or an attempt to de-stigmatize violence. Most communities are not yet prepared to perceive and carry out public disclosure without succumbing to the level of rumors, gossip, victim-blaming or persecution.

Another tension is between survivor-centered principles and notions of the collective good. The recognition of community as victims of violence as well as important actors in ending violence competes with the primacy of the individual survivor supported by the survivor-centered tenet of the anti-violence movement. While I contend earlier that the protectionism of the anti-violence movement and its partnership with the state actually subverts this very principle, the community-based intervention approach also challenges survivor-centeredness. At best, this model allows for a negotiated process in which the individual interests of the survivor and the allies who also have their own individual and collective interests can reach consensus about shared vision and goals. It also acknowledges the wide impact of violence not only on individual survivors but the broader community and supports the involvement of this wider network to coordinate more effective and sustainable solutions to violence. In practice, we have witnessed how the sentiments of the survivor can come into active conflict with those of the allies or how allies may feel pressured to comply with actions with which they disagree.

A related contradiction is between transformation and collusion. In the desire for a more reparative and holistic model for violence intervention, it would be easy to advocate for

resolutions which offer excuses to perpetrators and pressure survivors to accept processes or outcomes for the sake of the public perception of resolution and closure. Many of the criticisms of restorative justice warn of such tendencies (Coker 1999; 2002; Smith 2005; Stubbs 1997, 2002). And my own work in community conflicts reveals how easy it is to push for premature closure out of compassion, weariness and a host of other conflicting emotions and agendas. Political demands for alternative interventions to violence which are more “transformative” open ample opportunities for community processes which provide excuses for violence.

On the other side of this tendency is the replacement of state punishments with our own parallel forms of retributive community justice. Community banning, firing from jobs, persistent public shaming and persecution of perpetrators of violence, unclear and arbitrary consequences to unspecified demands, and physical violence are all tactics which have been employed in the name of community accountability. Are such tactics ever justified? In what situations?

Clearly, the accountability void discussed earlier in this chapter has not yet been filled by those seeking alternative interventions to violence. The tendencies either for punishment or easy excuses are unacceptable if we are looking for solutions which are truly transformative to survivors, perpetrators and communities. Unfortunately, it appears that we tend to choose one option or the other depending upon who has power, who we like, who we pity, who appears most accommodating, and a myriad of subjective factors.

As we create and test these alternative models, Creative Interventions also faces the contradictions of creating a community-based response from within the boundaries of a formal organizational structure. On the one hand, this structure allows for the consolidation of resources including funding, collaborative staffing, outreach capacity and so on thus increasing the possibility of reaching the goal of creating lasting documented public resources to support community-based alternatives. On the other hand, we constantly ask ourselves whether the models and approaches we create will ultimately rely upon the kinds of institutional resources afforded to formal organizations.

One of our most significant measures of success will be the ability for these models, tools and approaches to be adopted effectively and safely (enough) by the least resourced and least formally organized communities. The collection of stories deriving from grassroots communities through the National Story Collecting Project, the constant testing of practices within diverse organizational and community, and an attempt to maintain the least organizational infrastructure necessary to create the greatest desired outcomes are some of the intentional practices driving this project.

Promising Directions: A Tribute to Many Pathways

The exploration of accountability and principled and effective processes for accountability is an area requiring much more resources and research. Developments in other anti-violence programs offer promising conceptualizations and practices for accountability within a more transformative framework. The work of Alan Jenkins (Jenkins 1990; Jenkins, Hall, and Joy 2003) and the narrative therapy theorists and practitioners affiliated with the Dulwich Centre in Adelaide, Australia (Dulwich Centre 2003) have developed language and processes “inviting responsibility” as opposed to using more conventional authoritarian or behaviorist models found in “batterer treatment” programs. Rhea Almeida and the Cultural Context Model of the Institute for Family Services in Somerset, New Jersey promote active discussion and analysis of systems of oppression and individual acts and attitudes which collude with these systems. Their model also values change through collective engagement through group work and the inclusion of community allies to support accountability and transparency. Stith, Rosen, McCollum and Thomsen (2004) have developed and evaluated programs for couples experiencing domestic violence. In response to more conventional contraindications against such work, they have developed an innovative group model for couples which specifically addresses domestic violence. Pennell and Burford (Pennell and Anderson, 2005; Pennell and Burford 2002) developed restorative justice practices which build upon the expertise and motivations of family members closest to and most impacted by intimate violence, careful to include even the most problematic members in developing collective solutions which are workable for that family after they leave the office.

New models for addressing accountability which are rooted in communities of color specifically address the parallels between colonization, state-based violence and gender-based violence. Freedom, Inc. in Madison organizes with Hmong youth prioritizing an analysis of gender-based violence within the context of war, immigration, poverty, racism and state-based violence (Kim 2005). Caminar Latino has developed an explicitly “liberation” social change model which integrates women’s, men’s and children’s violence intervention programming, challenging gender- and generationally-separated conventions (Perilla, Lavizzo, and Ibanez 2007; Perilla and Perez 2002).

The Ke Ala Lokahi (Turning Point) program in Hilo, Hawaii has created a batterer’s treatment program based upon indigenous Hawaiian cosmology and an analogy between the destructive legacy of colonization on the Hawaiian people with the devastating impact of

domestic violence (Kim 2005). Whanau (family) violence intervention models among the Maori in New Zealand/Aotearoa have similarly posited a violence intervention framework which centers collective Maori values, recognizes colonization as the source of and historical context giving rise to the increase in family violence, and challenges Western state-based approaches which rely upon the punishment and criminalization of the Maori people (Second Maori Taskforce on Whanau Violence 2004). The Just Therapy Team operating out of The Family Centre in Wellington, New Zealand/Aotearoa, share a unique collaborative program model challenging pakeha (white) domination and colonization within a multi-racial organizational setting. The result has been an evolving set of holistic approaches to sexual violence and family violence intervention which build upon indigenous cultural values and practices grounded within Maori, Samoan and pakeha communities respectively (Waldegrave, Tamesese, Tuhaka, and Campbell 2003).

Each of these models and programs have developed through the search for solutions to intimate violence which do not replicate the individualism, separation and dislocation inherent in conventional remedies but rather build new visions and practices for collective and community change. Each has faced and continues to face challenges from those championing conventional violence intervention approaches. And each has offered invaluable insights and inspiration to the work of Creative Interventions.

Closure

Our collective work in creating a new approach to violence intervention is just beginning and, at the same time, follows trajectories which go as far back as violence, itself. Currently, many of us have refined our critique of the prevailing model of intervention model and must now challenge ourselves to take the risks necessary to shift our assumptions and defy our dogmas so that we can realize new possibilities. I believe that the answer lies deep within our own selves and our communities. If we learn to trust and build upon this wisdom, we will be able to create models which harness the creativity and reparative energy of those most motivated for change.

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