

Chapter 18

Addressing and Combatting Intimate Partner Sexual Violence

Rus Ervin Funk and Lundy Bancroft

Intimate partner sexual violence (IPSV) is a complex problem that has severe implications for interpersonal relationships and women's health and well-being, in addition to broader social consequences related to gender equality, women's human rights generally, and reproductive and sexual justice. Working to intervene with men who perpetrate IPSV requires that such intervention be done with men in the context of these broader social consequences. As critical as it is, it is not enough for interventionists to work solely to manage individual perpetrators, or to help men become less likely to re-offend. Interventionists must work in concert with other social justice advocates and activists, on this issue and others, to help make the social change necessary to prevent intimate partner sexual violence from occurring in the first place.

Male perpetration of IPSV occurs in a context in which women's sexuality is commodified and objectified. Women, in general, are under-valued vis-à-vis men. Sexuality, particularly women's sexuality, is restricted and problematized. For example, comprehensive and sex-positive sexuality education is limited or nonexistent (Gutmacher Institute, 2016). Along with numerous colleagues in the field, both of us believe – based on evidence from experience working in the field – that intervening with men who perpetrate intimate partner sexual violence without addressing these other factors has minimal effect. While we may be successful in reducing an individual's likelihood to reoffend, we do nothing to address or shift the broader social context that creates each next generation of men who perpetrate IPSV.

In this chapter, we explore some of the factors associated with male perpetration of IPSV, outline strategies for practitioners to work across many of these factors, and explore what a comprehensive intervention might look like. Together, we have more than 50 years' experience working with men who perpetrate sexual and intimate partner violence, and working at the community level to prevent all forms of gender-based violence.

Common Misconceptions Regarding the Causes of Sexual Offending

In order to intervene with sexual assault perpetrators, service providers need to base their work in a realistic understanding of where the exploitative behaviors stem from. There is a tendency to settle on one of two extreme perspectives in viewing the perpetrator, both of which are problematic. Both tend to focus on the individual as the sole source of the behavior.

One extreme is to view the perpetrator as someone who simply doesn't understand what appropriate behavior is and who misreads cues. From this view, the perpetrator doesn't need a punitive response; he just needs some clear education about boundaries and about consent, and then he won't make the same mistake again. This perspective seems to be an especially tempting one when the perpetrator is popular or is a valued member of his community—for example, as an athlete, educator, or faith leader (Edwards, 2013; Sander, 2007). It lends itself regrettably well to circumstances where the community doesn't want to believe that he committed the offense, or

wants to see it as a product of some kind of misunderstanding. The problematic outcomes of this view are several, including:

- 1) The perpetrator who doesn't experience uncomfortable consequences for his actions is unlikely to change.
- 2) In the absence of consequences, counseling and educational interventions for perpetrators are known to be largely ineffective, though research suggests that they do have some effectiveness when used *in combination with* meaningful strong consequences (Gondolf, 2002).
- 3) Skepticism may increase in response to future reports from victims of the same man, as people feel that "he dealt with his issues" and that therefore the new report is unlikely to be true.
- 4) Lack of systemic structures and processes of accountability means leaving these men to their own devices to figure out how to not get caught the next time.

The other extreme perspective is to see the sexual assault perpetrator as a monster, a person devoid of all human feeling, full of hatred and violence, who hides behind bushes or who drives up and forces victims into his car. Services for this man would be seen as pointless, and the goal would be to take the most punitive action possible. This view is actually no less dangerous to victims of sexual assault than the one we described above, for the following reasons:

- 1) Most sexual assault perpetrators do not fit this "monster" profile (although a few will) with the result that the great majority will tend to escape accountability because they won't be perceived as the "real" offender type.
- 2) This view has the effect of miseducating women about warning signs to watch for, thereby increasing their vulnerability to assault. (For example, the sexual assault perpetrator will more commonly come in a smooth, charming package than in the form of an obvious hostile threat.)
- 3) Although jailing perpetrators and imposing other kinds of consequences are important measures, they will very often not lead to lasting changes in the man's behavior. We need to find ways to get services to all perpetrators.
- 4) "Accountability" here is seen as the exclusive purview of the criminal legal system, relieving the rest of us of any responsibility to challenge the perpetrator in his behavior.

We believe that there is a need for a more nuanced and comprehensive view of the sexual assault perpetrator – both in general and specifically men who perpetrate intimate partner sexual violence. Because he may be perceived to be an upstanding member of the community, we can't simply demonize him; on the other hand, we can't minimize the depth and seriousness of his problems, even with a first-time offender. Further, we consider it crucial to understand the process by which he developed into a man willing to perpetrate violence and abuse towards women. This development takes place in a broader context. The attitudes and perspectives that reinforce his perpetrating behaviors have been supported and encouraged at multiple layers: friends, family and colleagues, social norms, and community values.

Effectively intervening means not only addressing his individual rationale for perpetrating sexual violence, but preparing him to manage the collusion he has received and will continue to receive from various key players at these levels. Better still, intervention with perpetrators of IPSV should be nested within current broader social change efforts that work to challenge and counter these layers of support that men receive to perpetrate violence and abuse. The ideal end result would be that intervention with men who perpetrate IPSV exists within a dynamic movement designed to eliminate the option for any men to ever perpetrate such violence.

Intimate partner sexual violence can be best understood as a subset of sexual violence overall. And men who perpetrate intimate partner sexual violence can be seen as a subset of sexual assault perpetrators. Therefore, misperceptions about sexual assault perpetrators have particular manifestations within the context of intimate partner relationships. As Ricardo and Barker (2008, p. 21) state, “Understandings of sexual violence are particularly complicated in the context of intimate relationship where perceptions of women’s consent and men’s entitlement are often confused or unclear, on the part of both men and women (and in many national laws).” In short, IPSV has particular and additional factors that contribute to its perpetration.

We tend to view a husband who rapes his wife as either a poorly misunderstood, probably sexually frustrated man who doesn’t know a better way to get his needs met, or as a complete bully who uses sexual violence in the context of other forms of violence and control within the relationship to dominate and humiliate his partner. Neither view provides an effect pathway for intervention, due to the failure to address the specific entitled attitudes, belief in ownership over females, view of sexuality as conquest, and other dynamics of coercive control that play such a central role in IPSV.

As Ricardo and Barker (2008) suggest, entitlement is one of the core factors contributing to men’s perpetration of intimate partner sexual violence. Men are not born with a sense of entitlement to women’s bodies in general, and their wives or girlfriends in particular. Men *learn* both that they are entitled to have sex with someone else – particularly a partner – and the specific ways to assert/enforce this sense of entitlement through multiple means. It is an entitlement that is reinforced across what Bronfenbrenner (1976) describes as the “social ecology.” He suggests, and others (see for example, Funk 2005, Flood, 2014, Douglas, et al, 2008) have developed this, that effective intervention requires work across the whole of the social ecology. Ultimately, if our goal is to end IPSV, working with men who perpetrate as a means to address these large social factors is a critical aspect of the work which, by and large, still needs to be developed.

What It Takes to Perpetrate Sexual Assault

From a variety of sources, including victim accounts, research studies, and confessed perpetrators, we know that a great deal has to occur before a man harms a female in a sexual way, particularly a female that he claims to love. What we refer to below is taking from the collective knowledge in regards to sexual assault perpetrators in general of which IPSV perpetrators can be conceived of as a sub-set. While we don’t necessarily reference IPSV in each

of these areas below, what we're describing refers to perpetrators of sexual violence more broadly as well as to perpetrators of IPSV. Specifically:

- 1) He has to develop an inordinate lack of empathy for the woman's feelings (Lisak & Ivan, 1995; Simons, Wurtele, & Heil, 2002). Although the perpetrator often claims that he had no idea that his behavior was causing her distress, the reality is that her lack of consent is obvious (as confessed perpetrators commonly admit) (Scully, 2013; Scully & Marolla, 1993). In order to harm someone in a sexual way, he has to have developed an internal process that allows him to decide that her pain doesn't count, that the long-term harm to her won't exist or doesn't matter, and that her lack of consent is irrelevant. In short, his blocks to empathy are huge.

This lack of empathy is not natural. The social ecology framework provides a model to explore how someone develops this lack of empathy and as such, suggests an intervention approach that is necessary in order to reestablish this empathy with others.

- 2) He has to construct an elaborate system of justifications for his behavior. The perpetrator has to live with what he has done, and in order to do so he has to persuade himself that exploiting women sexually is acceptable, that he is not responsible for his actions, and that women are beneath him. Further, he has to come to believe that lying to her, about her, and about his own actions are all excusable choices.

Intervening with men who perpetrate IPSV includes examining how their system of justification is established (so that it can be deconstructed), and how their construction of a system of justification is reinforced across the social ecology.

- 3) He has to envision sexual assault (including in most cases envisioning an assault against this specific victim – in IPSV, his partner). A majority of sexual assaults are planned; and even for those which were not planned, we have good reason to believe (based on accounts of confessed perpetrators) that the man had long experience of imagining what he might do to a woman and becoming enamored of those images.

DeKeseredy and Schwartz (2013) show how male peers support this kind of imagining and enamoring of sexual violence, and one needs only look at media images to see countless examples of this kind of imagery (see Chapters 13 and 14 for further discussion of social support of IPSV).

- 4) He has to feel a significant degree of social approval for his actions prior to committing them. (This is especially true of the more common, less monstrous, type of offender.) Sexual assault perpetrators learn justifications and strategies, and the mentality that allows them to block out the feelings and humanity of their victims, from various social sources. These include influences within the home (sexual assault perpetrators come disproportionately from homes where their father or another male in the home battered their mother); peer relationships, especially during their teenage years; violent pornography; and other sources (DeKeseredy & Corsianos, 2016).
- 5) He has to trust that his actions will be unlikely to be found out, and if they are, that he will not be held accountable for his behaviors in any significant ways.

As described above, these factors (and others) associated with male perpetration of IPSV (understood here as a subset of sexual violence) can be located on the social ecology and provide a further framework for effective intervention efforts. Recognizing the ways that multiple factors across the social ecology support these belief systems, interventionists are better able to work with men who perpetrate in ways that both counter these messages *and* can work to help undermine these factors. In this way, intervention efforts can become more effectively preventionist.

Examining some of the contributing factors, across the social ecology, which contribute to men's perpetration of IPSV suggests the following (Figure 18.1). Please note: this is not meant as an exhaustive list of the contributing factors at each level, but rather a snapshot for the purposes of this article).

On the individual level:

Sense of entitlement, having been sexually or physically abused himself, rigid and traditional gender roles, pornography use, perpetration of domestic violence

On the relational level:

Exposure to domestic violence as a child, have a close relationship with a father or father figure who held rigid gender roles, having a peer network that supports his attitudes if not his actual behavior

At the community level:

Gender inequality, lack of comprehensive and accessible sexuality education, prevalence of victim-blaming, nonexistent or inconsistent community sanctions against gender-based violence.

At the social level:

Lack of social or legal sanctions against IPSV, gender inequality, media images that promote male dominance and aggression and which promote victim-blaming

Effective intervention with men who perpetrate IPSV focuses on their individual behaviors in the context of these other factors. Working solely with the individual who perpetrates IPSV (if that is in individual treatment or in a group context) is not sufficient as an intervention strategy. Working with individual men in the context of their peer networks, community, and the broader social environment is also necessary.

<FIGURE 18.1 HERE>

Towards Solutions – A Comprehensive Approach

We see practitioners working with men who perpetrate IPSV as (at least potentially) on the front lines of our global work toward gender respect, gender equality, and gender justice. Aldarondo (2008) provides multiple examples of ways that practitioners, working clinically, can help promote broader social justice goals. Evidence and experience suggest that in environments that are respectful, equitable, and just, the perpetration of intimate partner and sexual violence is

reduced significantly. Although no one, to our knowledge, has specifically examined the relationship of a just and equitable social environment to the perpetration of IPSV, it would seem self-evident that this is the case. In these kinds of environments, efforts to work with, hold accountable, and help rehabilitate men who perpetrate IPSV are imbedded in robust comprehensive efforts to prevent all forms of gender-based violence and promote gender equity and gender justice more broadly.

From this perspective, working solely with individuals to promote gender respect, then releasing them into an ocean of gender disrespect and devaluing of women, may undo their progress in intervention groups. The work being done around the world to engage men in the prevention of gender-based violence is instructive. Based on the emerging data, working with men across the social ecology is proving, by leaps and bounds, to be most effective in shifting individuals' support for gender equality, enhancing social norms that promote gender equality, and changing community values and political support for gender equality (US AID, 2015; World Health Organization, 2007; Wells, et al., 2014).

Implications for Intervention with IPSV Perpetrators

The object of describing these preconditions in such detail is to make it clear that intervening to stop IPSV perpetrators from reoffending are necessarily part of a large and serious project. It is a fallacy to think that some brief education and counseling is going to have any significant effect. In order to have a meaningful impact, interventions will need to include:

- 1) Serious, unwelcome consequences for the perpetrator, both to dissuade him from reoffending and to increase his motivation to participate seriously in sexual offender services.
- 2) Services that address the full range of issues we laid out in the four points above regarding the preconditions of perpetration.
- 3) Services that are of long enough duration to be able to realistically foster change, given the length of process that is involved (generally viewed as in the range of 18 months to 3 years) to make lasting attitudinal and behavioral changes.
- 4) Service providers who will not be misled by the perpetrator's mild social persona, his convincing minimizations and distortions of his actions, and his victim-blaming.

Addressing sexual violence must be included in all programs and efforts working with men who batter. Sexual violence should be both a specific topic that is addressed, *and* content that is incorporated as an aspect of the coercive control tactics or abuse behaviors used by men who batter. It is safe to assume that the overwhelming majority of men who perpetrate intimate partner violence have also utilized some of these abusive tactics with respect to the sexual aspect of their intimate relationship. They may have used one or more sexual assaults as part of their violence tactics, but sexual violence within a relationship can also include demanding sex after a violent attack, forcing their partner to perform what they have viewed on pornography (with or without actual threats), demeaning their partners' sexuality or sexual "performance," or having other sexual partners and ensuring that their partner knows about these other encounters or

relationships. Abused women, their advocates, and scholars have raised concerns about the difficulty of defining any sex as consensual in the context of intimidation that abuse creates; in the words of one study, "Battered women know what they risk if they refuse the sexual advances of the batterer" (Mahoney & Williams, 1998, p. 130).

In intervention with men who batter, questions that explore the forms of coercion, manipulation, and force that they may have used in order to be sexual with their partner need to be a part of the assessment and the intervention (see Chapter 9 for additional information on the various forms of IPSV). For example, exploring their understanding of the difference between seduction and coercion is one strategy for assessing their perpetration of IPSV within the relationship. The degree to which the individual cannot distinguish between these two, is the degree to which a focus on IPSV should be incorporated as a part of that person's intervention process.

Since male peer support is a significant contributing factor to men's perpetration of domestic violence, sexual violence in general, and IPSV in particular, addressing this within an intervention strategy is a critical aspect of the intervention. In intervention groups, participants can learn how to develop new peer networks that hold values of gender respect, gender equality, and healthy sexuality; they can learn how to create peer networks of accountability; and they can learn to integrate their current peer networks into their process of becoming nonviolent and respectful within their relationships. These skills and concepts are critical to effective intervention models with men who perpetrate.

One example of just such a process comes from Men Stopping Violence in Atlanta. Their intervention strategy involves several sessions that include peer networks as identified by the men in the program (Douglass, Bathrick, & Perry, 2008). The client must bring a subset of his peer network to several sessions (the same peer network) in order for them to learn how to support him in his path towards nonviolence and gender respect. This model seems like a relatively easy addition to current intervention strategies that begin reaching out into the social ecology, and one that most intervention practitioners would implement.

Men who perpetrate can be encouraged and supported, as a part of their participation, to plan an event or program to combat intimate partner violence or promote gender equality community-wide. Consider the learning potential of having men, as a part of their intervention, design a community-wide "men's march against domestic violence." As a part of a group that Rus Funk led, participants were required to create and present an educational workshop to adolescent men about rape, sexual assault, sexual respect or some related topic (under the close supervision of Rus and the local rape crisis center). Using the tool "we all learn best when we start to teach," this experience proved a powerful learning opportunity for the men in the group, as well as a way for Rus to differently assess how they were doing in learning and integrating the content of the group.

Men who are in a group process to address their perpetration of IPSV can also be mobilized to challenge some of the media images that have fuelled their justifications for perpetrating sexual violence in the first place. This kind of strategy helps them to develop some critical media skills that can assist them in their recovery (i.e. how to continue to consume media while also challenging some of the socially negative and destructive messaging and social norming that

exist within those media). It can also begin to empower men individually and as a collective to have a voice to make social change. The experience of the ways in which working for social change contributes to the healing process for people who have been victimized (reference?) suggests that the potential value of these same strategies to help men who perpetrate to make amends in a different way, and be more accountable.

Concluding Thoughts

Working to effectively combat intimate partner sexual violence requires our working across the social ecology and at the intersections of IPSV with other social problems. It requires individual change efforts married with broader social change movements. And it requires that we, whoever “we” may be, work in collaboration with other partners to make these connections and to do what is necessary to promote relationships that never include sexual violence.

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