ABSTRACT

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Much energy has been invested in creating, operating, and evaluating programs to reform male batterers and reduce men’s violence against women. Research investigating batterer intervention programs (BIP) has focused primarily on enrollee characteristics, belief systems, and interactional processes as they relate to constructing and achieving program goals of reducing men’s violence. Based on ten weeks of fieldwork in a BIP and informal interviews with BIP facilitators, I identify a number of discursive strategies facilitators used to reform men’s understanding of manhood while also gaining and maintaining their trust and compliance. I conceptualize these strategies, collectively, as “gender bargaining,” which involved: (a) affirming dominant views of innate gender differences; (b) constructing men as victims of masculinity; (c) encouraging a view of egalitarian practices as rational acts of self-interest; and (d) elevating men over women. By engaging in gender bargaining, facilitators’ attempts to reform masculinity compromised program goals and left foundations of the gender hierarchy unchallenged. This thesis contributes to contemporary theoretical debates about the persistence of gender inequality, as well as to literature on gender, interpersonal violence, and batterer intervention programs.
Reforming Masculinity: Gender Bargaining in a Batterer Intervention Program

by
Michael Brinkman

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APPROVED BY:

_______________________________
Dr. Sinikka Elliott
Committee Chair

_______________________________
Dr. Stacy De Coster

_______________________________
Dr. Michael Schwalbe
DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my parents.
BIography

Michael Brinkman is a graduate student at North Carolina State University.
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I would like to thank my chair and advisor, Dr. Sinikka Elliot for guiding me through every stage of the research process. Without her wisdom and assistance this thesis would not have been possible. I would also like to thank my committee members, Dr. Stacy De Coster and Dr. Michael Schwalbe for their instrumental feedback and encouragement. Finally, thank you to Dr. Douglas Schrock, whose work informed my initial concern for this issue, and sociology more broadly.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>INTRODUCTION</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>LITERATURE REVIEW</strong></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Performance of Gender</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doing Violence as Doing Masculinity</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIPs: Mitigating Violent Masculinity?</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SETTING AND METHOD</strong></td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ANALYSIS</strong></td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender Bargaining</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reifying Gender Difference</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Man Box and Avoiding Institutional Connections</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appealing to Rational Self Interest</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affirming Men’s Status over Women</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CONCLUSION</strong></td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>REFERENCES</strong></td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

Violence against women takes many forms; one such embodiment is domestic assault at the hands of men. Men who utilize violence against an intimate partner may feel authorized by an ideology of supremacy and legitimated in their actions (Connell 1995). To address this social problem, in the 1970s activists and educators collaborated to produce batterer intervention programs (BIPs) by which men’s violence could be addressed, and batterers held accountable for their abuse (Gondolf 2004). The most commonly used curriculum to date is the Duluth Model (Paymer and Barnes 2008), despite conflicting research over the program’s effectiveness in preventing future violence (Babcock, Green, and Robbie 2004). The central aim of the Duluth curriculum is to spark critical self-reflection among violent men in order to transform them into nonviolent, compassionate, and egalitarian partners in their parenting, housework, and decision-making (Schrock and Padavic 2007). The curriculum is underpinned by feminist ideology, and thus draws connections between practices of domestic violence, men’s patriarchal entitlement, and tactics to maintain power and control over women (Paymer and Barnes 2008). Encouraging men to reflect upon and relinquish this desire for control, the program philosophy asserts, will reduce men’s violence. The capacity for this critical self-reflection is encouraged through facilitated discussion.

This thesis builds upon and extends existing literature exploring BIPs and contributes to contemporary scholarship on the reproduction of gender inequality and, more specifically, the modern “stall” in progress towards gender equality (England 2010; Ridgeway 2011). Based on fieldwork in a Duluth-based batterer intervention program, including observations of discussion sessions and intake interviews, as well as informal interviews with facilitators about how they
evaluate and make sense of their work, I find strains between facilitators and program enrollees over the meanings of manhood and violence (see also Schrock and Padavic 2007). In efforts to reduce strain and maintain enrollee participation, I argue that facilitators engage in strategies that emphasize gender difference, stress men’s rational self-interest in nonviolence, individualize and downplay the institutional foundations of the gender order, and affirm men’s superiority relative to women. I conceptualize these strategies as gender bargains aimed at gaining the compliance men participating in the program by reassuring them of their manhood. Yet, these strategies leave central underpinnings of the gender order unchallenged.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Domestic violence is a practice by which the patriarchal gender order is maintained. That is to say, men use violence against women in the maintenance and perpetuation of structured gendered inequality that involves a massive imbalance of power and resources (Connell 1987; Schwalbe 2014). The violence men use takes many forms, ranging from acts of street intimidation (Chubin 2014; Quinn 2002), to acts of gendered terrorism (Frammolino 1988) and state-sponsored violence (Foucault 1977; Hubbard, R. 1990; Hubbard, P. 2004). One manifestation of gendered violence is domestic assault. While both men and women can experience domestic assault (Drijber; Reijnders, and Ceeleen 2013), “currently fashionable” claims of gender symmetry in male and female victimization (Dobash et al. 1992, p 83; Fiebert 1997; Straus 1997) are unsupported by data showing that most assaults are perpetrated by men against women (Archer 2000; Dobash et al. 1992; Kimmel 2002). Despite the role of gender in shaping the context and enactment of interpersonal violence, much domestic violence research
has conceptualized gender as a dichotomous explanatory factor (e.g. Cui et al. 2013). As such, more research is needed to consider the myriad of ways in which gender, defined more complexly with respect to cultural definitions of manhood, matters for domestic violence (Anderson 2013). An interactionist framework is useful for considering the links between manhood and violence.

*The Performance of Gender*

Men and women are divisive fictions, socially constructed and maintained in everyday interaction (Butler 1990; Schwalbe 2014; West and Zimmerman 1987). Often prior to birth, people are sorted into binary sex categories comprised of socially created biological criteria related to genitalia or chromosomal typing. Those in the medical profession often surgically intervene on bodies that do not align with these criteria, thus ensuring that the binary remains intact in the face of deviation and ambiguity (Repo 2013). Further, people police in subtle and overt ways those who reject or challenge this binary (Ridgeway 2011; Schilt 2010; West and Zimmerman 1987).

Many people perform the gender binary by undertaking practices that culturally signify a sex category. The physical body is a means of signification. Through eating, exercise, and surgical intervention, the body is a canvas on which gender is painted (Bordo 2003; Crawley, Foley and Shehan 2007). Individuals also learn to utilize and compile symbols like clothing, hairstyles, and makeup to exhibit a gendered self (Barber 2016). These symbols and displays are fashioned depending on audience, setting, and other considerations (Goffman 1959). People are held accountable to these performances by others, and in this way, failure to display an appropriate gendered self can be consequential (Atkinson, Greenstein and Lang 2005; Denissen
and Saguy 2013; Schilt 2010; Schwalbe 2010; West and Zimmerman 1987). Displaying a normatively gendered self can also be consequential. In dominant discourse, biological difference is used to explain inequality between women and men, thereby naturalizing gender inequality as standard and inescapable (Lancaster 2003; Yanagisako and Delaney 1995). Feminist scholars, however, have amassed manifold empirical evidence on processes by which gender difference is crafted and coerced (Cahill 1986; Eder and Parker 1987; Lever 1978; Thorne 1992).

**Doing Violence as Doing Masculinity**

In order to signify a masculine self, and capture privilege from membership in the dominant gender group, individuals must signal their manhood to others. This process involves enacting a set of practices and is achieved situationally; thus manhood is not a fixed character trait, but rather an ongoing performance (Schwalbe 2014; West and Zimmerman 1987). These performances can be conceptualized as manhood acts staged to establish one’s credibility as a man (Schrock and Schwalbe 2009). To engage in a manhood act is to construct an identity deserving of rights and privileges that subordinate women relative to men (Schrock and Schwalbe 2009). Enacting this identity requires signaling a rational self who is capable of exerting power over others, and resistant to control from others (Schwalbe 2014).

One way to signal a masculine capability to exert power is to threaten or engage in acts of physical violence. Men disproportionately comprise institutions dedicated to techniques of violence (Connell 1995) and disproportionately own the means of violence (Smith and Smith 1994). Connections between manhood and violence are also evident at the interpersonal level. Men’s acts of intimidation (Dunn 2006), physical assault (Kimmel 1996), sexual assault
(Brownmiller 1975), and other abusive behaviors illustrate patterns of power and control that maintain and reproduce the dominant gender order. These behaviors can be both challenged through bureaucratic legal protections (DeJong and Burgess-Proctor 2006) and supported by existing laws and policies (Miller and Smolter 2011). Notably, not all men need to engage in these practices for men as a group to capture privilege from the collective image of power and danger that manhood acts of violence and power invoke and sustain (Schrock and Schwalbe 2009).

Men’s physical aggression and acts of power are culturally encouraged and expected (Messner 1992), but engaging in overt acts of violence can lead to legal trouble, especially if violence is utilized in a way that does not align with dominant ideas about men as rational, in control, and courteous towards women (Connell 1995). Thus, some scholars to argue that acts of violence do not signify a masculine self, but rather signal to others a failure of manhood (e.g., O’ Sullivan 1998). Jefferson (2002: 71), for instance, offers that men’s battering displays “both a feminine inability to control one’s emotions, and cowardice in attacking someone (usually) weaker than oneself.” In response to Jefferson, Connell (2002) argues that while men who batter may not be feted as cultural heroes, they nonetheless pull from cultural scripts that legitimate and normalize violence against and control over women. These scripts are shaped in both media (Berns 1999; McCaughey 2008; McManus and Dorfman 2003; Nettleton 2011) and formal policy (Kimmel 1996; Martin 1997; Ryan 1996; Zorza 1992). Sometimes, cultural scripts condoning men’s violence against women are performed quite literally. In 2012, a group of high school students donned blackface and staged a skit parodying a domestic violence incident in which the singer Chris Brown assaulted his then girlfriend Rihanna, a fellow music celebrity
(Basu and Sashin 2012). The students’ performance reflects, among other things, how domestic violence is often portrayed as trivial in dominant discourse.

**BIPs: Mitigating Violent Masculinity?**

In order to confront the cultural normalization of men’s violence against women, feminist activists and educators developed the first batterer intervention programs in the 1970s (BIPs) (National Institute of Justice 2003). Under new pressure from feminist advocacy organizations, legislators redefined domestic violence as a crime worthy of criminal justice intervention (Epstein 1999). As prosecution protocols were standardized, judges began ordering batterers to attend BIPs aimed at providing individual men with the desire for and capability of engaging in nonviolent practices (Caesar and Hamberger 1989).

Research investigating these programs has documented the characteristics and belief systems of batterers as they relate to creating batterer intervention programs (Dobash and Dobash 1998, Hearn 1998; Miller, Gregory and Iovanni 2005; Tolman and Bennett 1990) as well as discourses undertaken by men to normalize and justify their violence (Anderson and Umberson 2001) and interactional processes collaborated and enacted among men to undermine discussions and subvert program goals (Schrock and Padavic 2007). However, there has been little empirical research on the facilitators of these programs and the discursive strategies they use to communicate program material and pursue program goals. Documenting and analyzing the strategies undertaken by BIP facilitators contributes to understandings of interactional processes in the reproduction of gender inequality as well as challenges to achieving gender equality (England 2010; Ridgeway 2011).
In attempts to address men’s violence against women, BIP facilitators confront a central underpinning of gender inequality. Yet, the facilitators I observed deployed discursive strategies that I argue reproduced rather than challenged dominant ideas about gender. In what follows, I document facilitators’ attempts to earn the compliance of the men by affirming them in their manhood, despite their stated goals of ending violence and reforming the corresponding gender order. This analysis contributes to critical feminist scholarship on masculinity by examining the interactional and discursive dynamics by which manhood is constructed and contested in ways that may reform the dominant gender order without fundamentally uprooting it.

**SETTING AND METHOD**

The BIP I observed took place in an elementary school break room in a small southeastern city. Outside of weekly dues of $25 per enrollee, the program derived funding and support from a nearby woman’s shelter. I received initial access to the site from Carl (the head facilitator) and Jacky (the co facilitator). Before I was approved to attend sessions, I met with organizers at the women’s shelter, explained and verified my anonymity procedures, and filled out paper work involving a criminal background check. After this background check came through, I received formal approval to observe the program for one year. During program sessions, I disclosed to both facilitators and enrollees that I was conducting research and that I would use pseudonyms that would not identify anyone or the BIP. I also emphasized that participation was voluntary, and I would adhere to any request to exclude information, although no such request was made.
Completion of the program required enrollees to attend twenty-seven weekly sessions. Missing three consecutive sessions resulted in expulsion from the program, and the possibility of jail time. With the exception of one man who self-enrolled, during my time observing, all program participants were court ordered to attend sessions following the use of violence against an intimate partner. I did not have access to the enrollees records and therefore do not have complete information on their case histories.

Facilitators frequently lamented insufficient funds and reported difficulty coming up with building rent fees and replacing broken and eroding course material and technology. The financial obstacles faced by the program also proved consequential for my data collection. Although I received permission to observe sessions for one year, after I had attended weekly sessions for two and a half months, the program lost funding abruptly and went on an indefinite hiatus. What this meant for the enrollees varied on a case-by-case basis. As of this writing, the program has not resumed. This thesis is based on observations of ten ninety minute sessions along with observations of three intake sessions and numerous informal interviews with program facilitators before and after sessions.

The two facilitators, Carl and Jacky, co-facilitated eight of the 10 sessions I observed. Once during my observation period, Carl facilitated on his own and once Jacky did so. Carl had been facilitating for approximately three years, whereas Jacky had been a facilitator for approximately one year. Carl was designated the head facilitator by the women’s shelter and, as such, was responsible for conducting intake interviews, maintaining enrollee records, collecting fees, and communicating with the men’s lawyers or judges. He also underwent additional certification procedures and was responsible for paying the building rent. Although a formal
evaluation of the program had never been conducted, Carl claimed that no program graduate had ever recidivated and used this as evidence of the program’s effectiveness. I asked him where this information came from and he backtracked somewhat, replying, “We are not as good at keeping up with them [the statistics] as we should be.” Ultimately, he insinuated that he had “contacts” in the judicial system who helped him obtain this information. Out of fear of appearing to challenge Carl, I did not ask him further questions on this topic, planning to do so later when I had gained a longer track record with the program. The shuttering of the program meant I never had the opportunity. Another way that Carl described the program’s effectiveness was through graduation rates. Although it took longer than 27 weeks for some men to complete the program, most eventually did and Carl offered this as an indication that the program was working.

Maintaining enrollment was also important for the program’s feasibility given that participant numbers were consistently low.

During BIP sessions, facilitators attempted to stimulate self-reflection among the men to instill in them preferences and capabilities for nonviolence. The facilitators sought to achieve this by discussing various consequences of interpersonal violence, the importance of empathy, and methods for handling negative emotions nonviolently. In these discussions, facilitators drew on Duluth model course material, comprised of goals, strategies, and common issues to avoid violence. In addition, facilitators also frequently utilized personal anecdotes, and resources found online during sessions.

Throughout the data collection process, I observed sessions from a chair placed slightly behind the facilitators. This location gave me the advantage of being able to see the men’s expressions and interactions, but I was not able to as clearly see the facilitators’ faces. It also
meant I was positioned in a way that suggested clear alignment with the program and facilitators, rather than the enrollees. I was also highly visible to the enrollees and, as such, tried to downplay my overt note taking out of an awareness that this might make the men uncomfortable. I did so by utilizing idiosyncratic shorthand and trying to avoid looking at my notepad. I jotted copious notes during sessions and afterwards in my car, trying to capture in as much detail as possible the setting, the participants, the dialogue and the interactions (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw 1995). I got home late in the evening from sessions, and, could not write fieldnotes immediately as is best practice (Emerson et al. 1995). To address this, after the first session I began audio recording myself “talking out” sessions on my long drive home while they were still fresh in my mind, and spent several hours the next day writing up fieldnotes, drawing on my jottings and the audio recording of my observations and reflections. Although I was ultimately only able to observe 10 sessions, I wrote 12 to 15 pages of single-spaced fieldnotes containing detailed description and dialogue for each session I observed.

Like many qualitative researchers, I occupied a space between participation and observation, although, for the most part, I was an observer. Sometimes I participated at check in, when facilitators would ask me how my past week had been, but other times the facilitators skipped over me. On rare occasions, both during and after sessions, facilitators asked me to comment on course material. Before and after sessions, I conversed with facilitators and asked as many questions as the situation allowed. I made sure to balance weighty research questions with congenial ones in order to develop and maintain a friendly rapport. I took notes during these conversations.
As with any study, the data and analysis presented here is filtered through me, as the researcher (DeVault 1997). Remaining mindful of this helped me to better engage with my blind spots, values, and judgments (Emerson et al. 1995). I came to this study with a firm belief that men’s violence against women is endemic and problematic. Throughout my time in the field, I reflected on how my observations and understandings were influenced by my point of access, my academic training, and my own life experiences. I found that I had to balance the great respect I had for program facilitators with maintaining a critical eye towards their practices.

I began data collection with the broad goal of understanding the practices undertaken by the facilitators in the program, as well as the meanings that they gave to them. Thus, I used a grounded theory approach to interpret my data (Charmaz 2014; Strauss and Corbin 2008). I began analysis upon entering the field, writing memos and notes-on-notes from my first set of fieldnotes onward (Emerson et al. 1995; Lofland and Lofland 1984). Analysis was an iterative process of reading and rereading my fieldnotes, note-on-notes, and memos. Early in the research, I began line-by-line coding to help organize and interpret the data (Charmaz 2014). This coding process eventually became more focused as I began to group codes conceptually. I used incident by incident coding to draw distinctions between sessions where Jacky and Carl facilitated independently as well as those they co-facilitated. I also began writing and organizing memos that allowed me to develop questions, draw comparisons, and explore my ideas, including challenging my original conceptualizations. Eventually, I focused on the various discursive strategies around gender undertaken by facilitators to pursue program goals and deal with the resistance they encountered from enrollees and developed the analysis below.
ANALYSIS

Gender Bargaining

In informal interviews, facilitators consistently expressed weariness about program enrollees’ resistance and detailed the ways they strategized to increase the men’s compliance and buy-in with program goals. In what follows, I demonstrate that they did so by (a) engaging in discourses and performances that affirm, rather than challenge, the dominant notion of innate gender differences; (b) constructing the men as victims of manhood; (c) encouraging the men to view egalitarian practices as rational acts of self-interest; and (d) elevating men over women. I conceptualize these practices as “gender bargaining”: the enactment of compromises that reassure men in their manhood and construct gender equality as consistent with, rather than a challenge to, men’s power and status, despite facilitators’ larger intent of lessening gender inequality. Although some of these strategies are built into the program course material, as other scholars have observed, the way facilitators deliver and participants receive program material varies based on local context (Schrock and Padavic 2007). As my analysis demonstrates, gender bargains are often inconsistent and contradictory: situated in the moment, given the setting, context, and interactional dynamics therein. Within the context I observed, facilitators used gender bargains to reform men’s violence in a manner that maintained, rather than challenged, crucial underpinnings of the gender hierarchy.

Reifying Gender Difference

Facilitators used a number of related yet distinct techniques to gain the trust and compliance of the enrollees in their efforts to construct a nonviolent masculinity among program participants. Facilitators collaborated in producing these strategies, and one way they did so was
by reifying gender difference. Both facilitators tailored their presentations of self to dominant
gendered expectations. For Carl, this involved presenting an emotionally invulnerable and
seemingly rational self, resistant to control from others and capable of exerting authority when
necessary. For Jacky, this involved both presenting an empathic self, but also being a “strong
woman,” steadfast in the face of conflict or disputes. Facilitators explained these performances
that pulled from gendered cultural scripts as strategic program elements designed to help the men
identify with them and ultimately reform enrollees’ masculinity. For example, in an informal
interview both Jacky and Carl emphasized that effective implementation of course material
requires the experiences and insights of both a male and female facilitator working together.

Jacky says, “It’s important that I bring a certain view into discussions. It’s also important
I hold my own with the men, and not be intimidated when discussions turn, but it’s also
important that Carl backs me up, as a man, and remains my ally.” Carl nods, and says that
for this reason, the program works best with a man and a woman co-facilitating together.
He says, “The program doesn’t work with one or the other. I tried to run the program for
two months by myself, and it just didn’t work. Two women doesn’t work either, because
the dynamic is lost.”

In expressing a strong belief in the importance of a man and a woman co-facilitating as a team,
Jacky and Carl also constructed and endorsed the notion that men and women are fundamentally
different, a key aspect of the gender binary. As Jacky put it, “We try to reach the men from both
sides. I, as a woman, and Carl as a man. Carl brings something to discussion that I don’t have.”

This idea was not unique to the program I observed. When I attempted to gain access to a
different batterer intervention program in the area, a lead facilitator told me that despite my
complete lack of training in social work or knowledge of program material, my insights “as a
man” would be especially valuable to their facilitation team primarily composed of women. In
addition to drawing on the gender binary as a means of organizing daily life, this instance is also
a reminder of various advantages men receive in female-dominated occupations (Williams 1992) and organizations (Kolb 2007).

While men and women are widely held to be distinct categories of people, according to dominant discourse, their differences also supposedly bring them together (Gray 1992; Lancaster 2003). In this view, women and men complement one another by virtue of their beautiful differences. Men accomplish tasks that women might otherwise be unable to, and vice versa. Facilitators routinely expressed this paradigm with the intent to get the men to value the thoughts and actions of the women in their lives, yet these lessons reified gender differences. For example, during a session about intimate partners sharing responsibility, Carl and Jacky emphasized the differences between men and women:

Carl says, “Women are naturally thoughtful. When women do things, they put a lot of thought into it. They analyze everything and they plan everything out to the last detail.” Jacky agrees with Carl, and relates this point to her recent vacation with her husband. He did not plan much beyond booking the hotel, but if she had planned it she would have had an itinerary and packed snacks. She had to accept that her husband is spontaneous and likes to play things by ear. Carl wraps up this conversation by saying “next time around, put yourself in her shoes. You never know what thoughts go behind these things.”

Further, in sessions and in interactions with program enrollees, both facilitators presented a self that aligned with binary expectations and ideas. Carl stressed that as a man, he is rational and non-emotional, resists control from others, and is capable of asserting control when necessary. In various interactions with the men, Carl made it clear that he had control over them. For example, during an intake interview Carl emphasized to a new enrollee that he held indirect power over access to the enrollee’s children:

After the other men leave, Carl tells Brandon, “I know when you came in here you were intimidated by me, and you should be. Being in this class means that I can report to your lawyer and say ‘this guy is a piece of work and I don’t want him here’. This would really affect the visiting hours you have in place.”
During an informal interview, Carl said he makes threats to call lawyers to report bad
behavior or attendance issues, but prefers to “level with the men.” Carl said it was also important
to create an atmosphere in which the men might feel comfortable opening up emotionally. To do
so, he said he tried to tailor his presentation of self in a way that he believed was relatable to the
men. In sessions, Carl stressed that he was an uncontrollable character resistant to control from
others. For example, Carl often used anecdotes like the one below to describe himself as
someone who will not put up with things he does not like, whether they occur at work or at
home:

“At my work, people always ask me ‘how long are you planning on staying here?’ The
truth is – until somebody pisses me off.” The men laugh and Carl continues, “the answer
I tell my boss when he asks how long I plan to remain working there – ‘until somebody
pisses me off.’ I function that way in my relationships too. I’m surprised I’ve been with
my wife for as long as I have.”

In performances such as these, Carl draws on dominant gendered scripts to construct
himself as uncontrollable. As the laughter suggests, some of the men responded positively to
Carl’s depictions. That is to say, these acts provided the underpinnings of a sort of fraternity
between Carl and some of the men. Not all, however, seemed to enjoy these anecdotes. Kev, a
program enrollee, responded to Carl’s story by asserting, “You’re going to get pissed off when
you’re married. You can’t just skip town every time.” Stumbling over his words, Carl did not
respond to this criticism, and instead changed the subject.

Jacky had a different understanding of this fraternity. In a number of sessions, she
referred to the joking among Carl and the enrolled men as a “boys’ club” from which she was
actively excluded. Thus although Jacky often discursively reinforced the idea that men and
women are innately different, she also pushed back at the exclusionary gendered dynamics that
developed in sessions. Further, while Jacky periodically discussed her own invulnerability to authority and control in a similar manner as Carl, the men reacted to her differently. For example, in a session surrounding egalitarian decision-making, both Jacky and Carl utilized profanity to signify an uncontrollable character. Whereas Carl got laughs, the men greeted Jacky’s profanity with silence:

Carl cuts in, and says, “You know how I encourage my wife to make decisions? We have a system, and it’s important to have a system. Excuse me, Jacky; Jacky doesn’t know that I curse all the time. At work, I try not to curse. What I tell my wife is, ‘I really don’t give a shit’. All the men laugh. Vexed, Jacky says, “But that might signal that you don’t care!” Jacky elaborates, and says an alternative way to encourage decision-making involves displaying faith that a partner is capable of making right choices. After a long pause, Chris says this is relevant to his relationship. His partner often talks about a desire to go back to school; he tries to encourage her to do so, but grows increasingly frustrated with her indecision. Jacky says, “Well, pardon my French, but you just want to say, ‘shit or get off the pot.’” The men do not laugh. After a short pause, Chris folds his arms, and gives a monotonous “Yup.”

Facilitators draw from cultural scripts in their efforts to accomplish program goals, but program enrollees (and sometimes facilitators themselves) also hold facilitators accountable to gendered expectations. As seen in the excerpt above, Jacky challenged these expectations at times, but she also played into them in order to facilitate program goals. For example, Jacky often displayed empathic concern in efforts to chip away at what she characterized as men’s emotionally invulnerable façade. This is expressed clearly in Jacky’s own words, taken from an informal interview after a session.

“Chet is putting up a front. I talked to Chet last week after he had been yelling about not believing in divorce. After everyone left, I told him, ‘You must just be so hurt; that must be very painful for you right now. I know underneath all this anger is just so much hurt, because you are getting a divorce and that must be difficult’.”

In contrast, Carl did not use empathy in order to connect and communicate with enrollees. Instead, he presented a seemingly tough, unsympathetic, and emotionally invulnerable
character. For example, during an intake interview in which an enrollee wept when asked to recount his domestic violence incident, Carl made no acknowledgment that he saw the man’s tears:

As Jacky and the enrollees are exiting the room, Carl asks Matt to stay behind to complete his intake interview and fill out some paperwork. I am not sure if I should leave, but Carl tells me to stick around. After going over program procedures, Carl asks Matt to describe his case and narrate the domestic violence incident that led him into the program. Looking at the floor, Matt says he grabbed his wife’s arm during an intense argument and shoved her across a room. He tears up and his voice cracks as he relates this. Carl does not address Matt’s crying, and stresses that Matt will need to demonstrate he is doing well in this class if he wants to earn access to his children. Still crying, Matt nods and says, “Yes sir.”

In situating themselves within and performing in accordance with binary expectations, facilitators build on and reinforce the notion that men and women are different types of people suited for different tasks. Yet, this notion of gender difference is not just the idea of natural, complementary difference; it is the groundwork of gender inequality. It was not lost on Jacky that the men showed Carl more respect than they showed her. Jacky connected this to men’s disrespect of women and “the female perspective” in general, not her facilitation. In Jacky’s own words, “They [program participants] don’t respect me as a woman. Not necessarily me personally, but when I come in here, they don’t respect me as a woman.”

At times, the men collectively used joking to dismiss Jacky’s arguments. For example, in a session led by Jacky and co-facilitated by Carl, the men used humor to disparage Jacky for her visible display of emotion.

Kev cracks his knuckles and shifts around in his chair. He says, “But you can take this equality thing to an extreme. I mean, we are different creatures, right?” Jacky tilts her head and sighs. Chris states plainly, “Yeah, I agree.” Kev continues on and says, “Would you really want women on the front lines?” Jacky leans forward in her chair and rapidly states, “Well, why not? Am I less smart? Am I less capable? It’s not because I’m female
and I will talk you to death on this one, Kev.” The men laugh and Chris says, “Oh boy, you’ve really got her fired up now.”

In this way, Jacky faced resistance that Carl did not. In this instance where Jacky exercised her ability to exert control over the men by displaying her position to “talk them to death” as a facilitator, the men attempted to take control by making her statement appear laughable, and suggesting she was overly emotional. This resistance illustrates the gendered expectations and corresponding inequality facilitators encountered. Throughout sessions, the facilitators were held accountable to and typically performed in accordance with these expectations, even as they sought to dismantle them. Consistent with other literature documenting contention and contest between facilitators and enrollees (Schrock and Padavic 2007), when Jacky attempted to push back against the exclusionary gender dynamics of the program by deviating from these expectations, the men collectively put down her efforts. Jacky also noted that the men treated Carl’s opinions and insights on gender inequality as more objective than her own (and therefore more valued). During a conversation that Jacky, Carl and I had in the parking lot of the building where sessions were held, Jacky said:

“It’s just like that part in the video where he [Michael Kimmel] walks into the classroom, and the students say, ‘Finally, an objective opinion’.” Carl signals to me he is uncomfortable. He paces around the parking lot somewhat, sighs, and raises his eyebrows while Jacky is speaking. Looking back over to Carl, Jacky somewhat backtracks. She quickly switches to a quieter and less animated tone – and adds, “This is another reason why it is key to have a male facilitator.”

Although I did not formally interview Jacky about this topic, the emphasis on men and women as different but complementary, along with Carl’s leadership role as head facilitator, may have made it harder for Jacky, who tended to have a more critical feminist perspective than Carl, to openly express her disagreement with some of Carl’s statements and methods.
The Man Box and Avoiding Institutional Connections

To stimulate self-reflection among the men, facilitators encouraged program enrollees to think about their own gendered socialization and the gendered expectations they have come to hold as central to their sense of self. In sessions, facilitators referred to these expectations as the “man box,” a narrow idea of how to be masculine that traps men and limits their potential and capabilities. While this language highlights the restrictive nature of manhood, facilitators did not link this “box” to institutionalized processes and practices by which men as a group maintain power and privilege over women as a group. In other words, facilitators conceptually disassociated gendered practices from men’s domination and institutionalized privilege, and instead emphasized the ways men are harmed by masculinity. In one session, Carl presented statistical data to suggest that men are most likely to be victimized by other men’s violence, and therefore have the most to gain from the formation of a nonviolent masculinity.

Carl says, “As men, we think we have a lot to lose by cleaning up our acts. But in reality, we really have the most to gain; we are the real victims of the man box. We are trapped in this box and it’s so cramped in there we end up butting elbows.” Carl pulls out his laptop and projects some numbers for the men to look at. “You can see it right there, the number one victim of men’s violence is other men.”

In suggesting that men are the “number one” victims of male violence, and, more generally manhood, Carl elevates the men’s gendered experiences and injuries over those of women as a group. In utilizing this language, facilitators underscored that men are damaged and persecuted by the association between violence and manhood, without simultaneously linking manhood to institutional privilege and dominance, and male violence to a key way men’s dominance is sustained.
In many sessions, facilitators avoided discussions of institutional power and privileges that might contradict men’s victimhood. For example, due to the political nature of issues explored throughout sessions, as well as the timing of my observations, program enrollees were quick to connect program material to recent political events. Yet, I found facilitators were less willing to engage in discussion of politics. On one occasion, I observed Carl begin a session by stressing that political discussions were off limits because the goal of the program was not to “fundamentally change someone’s belief system,” suggesting the program is not designed to challenge the men’s perspectives:

“I know you all want to talk about politics, but I am sorry, we are not doing that here today. I will respect your personal beliefs, but you must respect that we are not talking politics today. You know, you would not want to fundamentally change someone’s belief system. That’s not what we are trying to do here.”

In informal interviews, Carl said that he avoided discussing political events out of a fear of dividing the men across party lines. Further, he indicated he did not want to give the men the opportunity to label or dismiss facilitators as pursuing particular political agendas. Yet, although both facilitators actively stifled political discussion, Jacky expressed a desire to discuss politics. For Jacky, political phenomena had a direct connection to program material, and she believed that a critical discussion of current politics might serve as a pathway for achieving program goals. This tension is perhaps clearest in a discussion I had with Jacky at the end of a session that Carl missed:

Jacky says, “I wanted to get more political, and go deeper, maybe even start a discussion of rape culture. This stuff really matters. The things being said out there [by Donald Trump] have real effects on what is said in here.”

Jacky echoes a feminist political argument underscoring connections between personal experience and larger social political structures. Carl frequently expressed interest in and an
understanding of these connections outside of program sessions. As head facilitator, however, he advised Jacky to discourage political discussion in order to maintain a non-divisive and nonthreatening environment in which enrollees might feel comfortable opening up emotionally. Jacky obliged, and generally refrained from engaging in such discussion.

Moreover, although facilitators did not discuss the political sphere as it related to manhood, Jacky facilitated a discussion centered upon institutionalized advantages men receive at the expense of women during a session for which Carl was not present. However, she did so in a way that normalized these advantages by fusing privilege with bodily difference, suggesting women too have privilege through their ability to give birth:

Jacky continues, “I’m not saying that all male privilege is wrong. I am not saying that you can’t like shows that have sexism in them. What I’m saying is, male privilege is there and it needs to be accounted for. Physically, you cannot have a baby. That’s female privilege. Sorry, you need me.”

While forbidding political talk and avoiding institutional connections to manhood facilitated the creation of a non-judgmental and hospitable environment for the enrollees, it also insulated them from reflecting upon the institutionalization of male privilege and the collective benefits they receive as men. Facilitators reifying the man box and conflating privilege with women’s ability to give birth further shrouded institutional connections between manhood, violence, and the preservation of inequality. Evading discussion of these issues aided facilitators in creating and maintaining a consensus about the men’s victimhood, but in doing so, severed connections between men’s practices and the disproportionate institutional power that these practices capture, reproduce, and legitimate.
Appealing to Rational Self Interest

Within the contemporary United States, a central element in appearing masculine involves presenting a rational and supposedly objective character and distancing oneself from emotion. As feminist scholars note, the reproduction of the gender order necessitates that people disparage evidence and explanation procured from emotions and personal experience in dominant discourse, institutional settings, and daily interaction (Hill Collins 2008; Smith 1974). Thus, a central element in constructing a masculine self involves rhetorically severing oneself from feeling, and putting down the feelings of others.

Throughout sessions, facilitators collaborated to create a space in which the enactment of nonviolent and equitable practices equated to the performance of rationality and calculated self-interest. For example, after presenting research findings that suggest men who engage in share household labor equally have sex more often than their non-egalitarian counterparts, facilitators painted parallels to the supposedly rational and cost effective world of business.

Carl continues, “Not that this is a sex class or anything, but really think about this. Don’t you think your wife would be more eager to please you if they didn’t have think about all the laundry they have to do? Think of it like a businessman. If the employees are happy, they are more likely to stay. There is better pay, less turnover, and all that.” Jacky agrees and says, “It ends up costing them less in the long run to keep employees happy.” Kevin nods, and says, “It’s worth the effort.”

By constructing egalitarian practices as a means to earn sex from their partners, the facilitators indirectly suggest that sex is the men’s prerogative, an act secured through the completion of housework. In another session, Carl illustrated how his use of egalitarian practices in his marriage has furthered his own interests and garnered him more respect from his wife. He presented his experiences as an example the men should emulate but also pointed to statistics that support his experience:
Carl says, “Guys, I have something to end on tonight. From personal experience, I can tell you this; I have been working on this stuff for about five or six years, and let me tell you, I am a very happy man. I have been doing a lot of the stuff that we have talked about in this class, and trust me when I say that my wife respects me better for it. I know you all are worried about losing respect, but that is not the case. We showed you the stats. Gender equality is good for men, and if you use this stuff, you will get more out of the relationships with your family.”

Further, in sessions surrounding nonviolent parenting practices, in order to discourage program enrollees from using corporal punishment on their children, both facilitators routinely cited the advice of childrearing experts who emphasize that spanking and hitting are not an effective means of parenting. In short, it is in men’s self-interest to avoid corporal punishment. In one session, facilitators utilized findings from the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) study to stress that corporal punishment produces long-term damage that persists throughout the life course. Pulling from this study, facilitators suggest that childhood trauma is quantifiable, where a higher ACE score leads to higher risk for a wide variety of health problems. By framing the psychological and emotional harms produced from abuse as something scientifically measurable and condemned by experts rather than appealing to moral or emotionally driven arguments, facilitators constructed spanking and hitting children as wrong, not because it is morally wrong, but because it is measurably damaging. In a sense, facilitators masculinized egalitarian and nonviolent practices by constructing them as rational, self-interested acts.

In this way and others, facilitators subjugated and silenced emotional and moral appeals for nonviolence and equality. While in some sessions facilitators did connect feelings with masculinity, they did so in ways that emphasized that showing certain non-masculine feelings, like sadness, does not need to undermine a man’s ability to exercise authority and make money to provide for his family.
Jacky says, “My brother is a very successful manly banker that grew up in an emotionally stunted home. He learned early that boys do not cry. But to this day he is not afraid to cry in front of his children. He still does very well in his job where he has to act tough all day in order to make money. He’s still the family provider, but when he comes home, he’s not afraid to open up.”

Here Jacky also asserts that emotions are something that men should (rationally) control, turning on and off according to the situation. In this way and others, facilitators constructed nonviolent and emotive practices as rational acts of self-interest rather than appealing to emotional or moral reasoning. They tried to entice the men to incorporate course material into their daily practices by stressing the personal benefits they would receive. In doing so, they reformed but did not fundamentally deconstruct manhood.

Although facilitators routinely presented men with evidence that nonviolence and egalitarian practices were in their self-interest, they often did so begrudgingly. That is to say, facilitators were aware of many of the problems in this construction, yet used these strategies anyway, as they attempted to minimize resistance by navigating through program material in a way they believed the men would find both relevant and appealing. In an informal interview after a session, Jacky and Carl lamented the techniques they felt they had to use in order to persuade the men into gender justice.

Jacky says, “Sometimes I just leave this class so defeated. I mean, why do I have to coax anyone into fairness? Why do I have to prove it is worth your while to share responsibly?” Carl nods his head enthusiastically and adds, “When there is so much research out there that shows that equality will make your life better, why do we still get so much resistance?”

As with other informal interviews I had with Carl and Jacky, this interaction suggests that Jacky was more critical of this approach than Carl. But it was Carl, as head facilitator, who largely set the agenda.
Affirming Men’s Status over Women

Finally, a central element in facilitators’ gender bargaining involved affirming men in their status over women and femininity. As illustrated above, this assurance was often achieved indirectly. For example, Carl often implied that his wife and other women he knew were insufficiently in control of their emotions and that his rational, less overly invested masculine personality was often necessary to maintain calm and keep the peace. On a few occasions, facilitators engaged in overt statements that elevated men above women. For example, in a session in which Jacky was not present, Carl encouraged an enrollee to avoid feelings of anger and frustration that might lead to violence by reminding himself that he is “better than” a young, woman coworker.

Chet cuts in, and ask if he might get Carl’s advice on something. This is a pretty rare event, and Carl appears somewhat taken aback, but he nonetheless encourages Chet to share what is on his mind. Chet says that he has been working at a bar on and off for about nine years. He says, “This other girl has been there for about a month, and ever since I came back she has been on this power trip. You know, telling me to do this, or do that. She is the type of person that is a Debbie Downer. And you know, me, I’m the opposite, I’m high energy. Because of this, I have become her target. Like, she thinks ‘How dare he be happy.’ The day before yesterday, she said something to me along the lines of, ‘Do your effin work,’ and let me tell you, that hit me man, that hit me hard. I had been dealing with her mouth up until then, but that just got to me. I said back to her, ‘Do not fucking talk to me that way’ and she blew up right back at me, saying ‘F you’ and ‘f that.’ Now she’s nineteen, and I’m thirty-seven. I said three times, do not talk to me that way, and let me tell you guys, I felt the rage in me, man. She told me ‘You need to walk away’ and I said, ‘No, you need to walk away,’ because I was straight up on fire.” Carl offers that in navigating situations such as these “you have to find a happy place.” He acknowledges that the advice is clichéd, but he still finds it effective. Carl goes on to advise Chet to disregard his coworker, as she is “just a nineteen year old girl.” He continues, “She’s nineteen. Why are you going to argue with a nineteen-year-old girl? She’s immature.” Carl ends the discussion by saying, “Just keep in mind, it’s a nineteen-year-old girl. Think to yourself ‘I’m better than that’ and just walk away.”

Rather than guiding Chet to reflect upon what it was about the situation that really upset him, perhaps being instructed by a young woman to do his work, Carl instead offered to Chet a
narrative of superiority. In this view, men need not resort to physical displays of power in order to capture a patriarchal dividend; rather, they need only mentally reassure themselves that they are better. Here and in many other instances, facilitators assuaged men’s concerns that engaging in nonviolent egalitarian practices might strip them of the power, authority, and privileges they may be accustomed to within the dominant gender order. They encouraged men to respond in ways that demonstrate their superiority, by being rational, self-contained, and above the fray, and promised them that personal benefits will be their reward. These strategies proved consequential for Jacky, who found her insights “as a woman” belittled throughout sessions. Moreover, by asserting men’s status over women, Carl compromised crucial feminist goals central to the program.

CONCLUSION

This analysis contributes to research and debates around batterer intervention programs and also literature on obstacles in communicating and achieving gender equality. Analyzing the interactional processes and discursive strategies by which people advocate for gender justice while simultaneously upholding tenets of gender inequality further complicates our understanding of the reproduction of inequality. I find that in attempts to reform violent men’s understanding of their manhood, facilitators of a batterer intervention program engaged in practices that affirmed the dominant notion of innate gender differences and men’s status over women and constructed the men as victims of masculinity and nonviolence as rational and in the men’s self-interest.
However, I argue that facilitators are not “duped” into these compromises, but rather engaged in gender bargaining cognizant of the pitfalls. This consideration indicates both the agency these facilitators employed in developing and implementing their strategies as well as the resistance they faced in accomplishing program goals. Moreover, this consideration highlights the importance of interpreting the conditions under which gender bargaining occurs and the meanings given to gender to better understand the elements of this bargaining. The BIP I observed struggled to stay financially afloat and, within 10 weeks of what I had hoped would be a much longer observation period, closed down due to a lack of funding. To date, it has not restarted. At times, the facilitators and I outnumbered program participants and, although there were strict rules about attendance, the head facilitator, Carl, often made exceptions to avoid losing a participant altogether.

I was not privy to the program manuals, but previous research suggests that Duluth-model BIP course material psychologizes masculinity (Schrock and Padavic 2007), thus laying the groundwork for some of the lessons I observed in which facilitators failed to address institutional connections, and instead individualized the men and manhood more broadly. Moreover, facilitators’ identity investments in reforming the men (Schrock 2002) perhaps underlay some of the practices I observed. That is to say, in order to establish and maintain an understanding of themselves as effective and honorable advocates of the program material, the facilitators needed to maintain a dialogue with the men. To subvert this dialogue and the facilitators’ corresponding identity investments, the men simply needed to stay quiet. To keep the men attentive, interested, and active in program sessions, and thereby affirm their identities
as agents of change, facilitators undertook practices of gender bargaining that compromised program goals.

Nevertheless, I propose that gender bargaining is not a practice unique to this case, but rather a generic process extendable to other sites where individuals strive to promote gender justice in the face of challenges to these lessons. Thus, this analysis has implications beyond the scope of domestic violence intervention. Future research should consider how gender bargains might be accomplished in other contexts with different or related strategies. As this analysis lacks a sufficient investigation of the meanings program enrollees give to the facilitators’ efforts, further research is also needed to assess how the intended audience understands and relates to gender bargains. In my observations, program enrollees generally supported the gender bargains facilitators struck but at times they resisted them. This analysis contributes to feminist scholarship on the interactional processes, difficulties, and pitfalls commonly encountered in facilitating a more just and equal gender order, especially when these efforts are aimed at those with a vested interest in maintaining the dominant gender order. Expanding our knowledge of these issues and obstacles is vital to confronting men who use violence against women and, correspondingly, to disrupting the gender hierarchy.
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