

## Reflection

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It seemed like a simple task. I get an email from Jeff Edleson asking if I would be willing to write a short reflective piece on a book chapter I wrote 18 years ago. A few days later the chapter arrived in the mail. As I read it I was flooded with memories and feelings. It was a description of how a small group of activists had organized the Duluth Domestic Abuse Intervention Project (DAIP). The chapter was written to discuss how such efforts either collude with or confront men's violence toward women. As I read it I was surprised at how direct I was about batterers, men, gender. Back then I didn't use the words offenders, victims, perpetrators—an ideological shift I've made over the years that I must rethink. Looking back I am awed by the impact we had in the United States and even globally. At the same time I know that had we done some things differently we could have, perhaps, helped to avoid some of the negative consequences of criminal justice reform efforts.

I wrote the article when people were just starting to come to Duluth to check out this so-called Coordinated Community Response. Our project was at its most exciting and energetic period. A lot of agency administrators had taken a chance on the changes we had proposed—from the police chief to the court clerks, roles were changed. Many battered women risked retribution by actively participating in planning meetings and open community evaluation sessions. The women's shelter had turned its programming upside down to accommodate our notion that most of the women who need help would never enter their doors. Neighborhood educational groups replaced in-house support groups and an advocacy program was organized for women seeking protection orders who would never move into the shelter. Every groundbreaking project has a period like this, when resistance to change starts to give way to a spirit of cooperation.

In just five years we had gone from a police and court system response that literally turned its back on women to one that turned its scrutiny and powerful control mechanisms toward the batterer. When we started, those men who had hospitalized or killed their partners were arrested and jailed. Men who were arrested for less violent attacks were almost all poor men and men of color. We created a dual track civil and criminal approach that women could count on for at least some basic protections: enforcement of protection orders, consequences for repeat assaults, mandated rehabilitation programs, and an immediate response to calls for help. Basic, but for some women, life saving. It was a response that included businessmen, doctors, and teachers who batter; for the first time they were not excluded from the grasp of state intervention.

Many things that we did were new and groundbreaking. We introduced the power and control wheel and its accompanying theoretical framework, which tried to shift away from seeing violence against women as the problem of a few psychologically distorted men and lots of bad marriages, by linking men's violence toward their partners to other forms of domination—class, race, gender, and colonization. We built on the work of previous projects that held individual agencies responsible to protect women and proposed a fairly bold notion of linking agencies together and forming a community-based advocacy program. We took the lead at the negotiating table. Policy makers had never had to deal so directly with

a public group asking questions, reading documents, and watching cases grind through a system not designed with battered women in mind. We had established a tracking system that focused as much attention on tracking practitioners' compliance with agreed on practices as it did on individual men's compliance with court orders. We moved the collective agenda of the battered women's movement a big step forward because we showed that the strategy worked for women, for children, for men, and for the system.

But for every breakthrough we were able to accomplish, we also planted the seeds of new practices that reactive forces would eventually grab onto and use to undermine our vision of a legal system that promotes a woman's safety, acknowledges that her children's destinies are inextricably linked to hers, and subverts one of the pillars of men's historic ability to dominate women in marriage—the ability to use physical and sexual violence without consequence. Scarce space reduces me to listing some hindsights that I would love to explain.

First, we had incomplete thinking about how legal interventions individualize the social and require individual women to stop the violence men use against them. I guess we were thinking something like this: "Look, we created him; it's our responsibility to stop his use of violence." But we still saw as our goal stopping an individual man's violence against his individual partner. We saw violence harming women and their relationships with their children, but we were less clear on how the violence harmed us as a society. And so we held men accountable to individual women rather than to their community. To date we have failed to articulate the social nature of men's violence and the impact of that violence on our entire community.

Second, although we acknowledged that turning to the criminal justice system to protect women was a limited strategy, we focused all of our skills, analysis, resources, and energy on changing that one institutional response. This approach may not have been such a problem had we not simultaneously entered the Reagan and post-Reagan era. The DAIP reached its programmatic high just as conservatives were using the criminal justice system to cover up the evidence of an unjust economic order. To our surprise, Ronald Reagan was not a four-year accident. By the end of the decade his presidency ushered in, there was a 700 percent increase in the rate of imprisonment for poor men, mainly men of color; a shift in the wealth in this country unparalleled during any other presidency; and a fundamental erosion of social programs and economic protections that most battered women depended on for economic autonomy from their abusers. Although the battered women's movement had a far larger vision for community protection of women and children than reforming the police and court responses, it was unable to even come close to reaching that vision. The DAIP was in too many ways compatible with the conservative view that social problems are due to a criminal element in society and that its offenders were products of dysfunctional families and neighborhoods. The call to criminalize batterers came at a time when the newly empowered right wing found it an acceptable, fundable, tolerable feminist project.

Third, as organizers of what we thought would be a model for institutional advocacy in Minnesota, our work became a standard against which others measured effective interventions. We were unprepared in many ways for such a role. First, our community was predominantly white working class and Native American. We were a small, urban town. While I wouldn't paint us as pollyannaish about the repressive nature of the criminal justice

system, we did organize the project in a community with a police and sheriff's department that has relatively few complaints against them for brutality, at a time when the bench was quite progressive, and there was agreement that jail, prisons, and punishment were really last resorts when other forms of intervention failed. The local conditions that made our approach work in Duluth did not always exist in other communities that took up the "model." Nor did we know how to insist on or encourage a reinvention of that model for each community in which it would be considered. Many who came to observe and learn the approach did in fact reinvent it. But for too many, that was not the case. I have personally been to dozens of communities that use the "Duluth model," but I rarely recognize its essential elements. It so often seems off to me. Rather than teaching about what we accomplished, we needed to teach about how we organized locally and carved out a role for activists in public policies.

Yet in other places I see the Duluth model tailored for the community. In Hamilton, New Zealand, for example, the leadership of the Maori domestic violence community reinvented our educational curriculum and our concepts of cultural adaptation. In Guam, the link between the batterer's program and the court system resulted in a tracking system far superior to ours. In San Diego, the leadership of the City Attorney's office created a prosecution project we cannot match. In many places, projects have developed the skills of their men's and women's group facilitators far deeper than our project. In London, Ontario, the inclusion of educational, medical, and child protection agencies in their community response, and in Chicago, the inclusion of neighborhood groups in their response, comes closer to our original vision of community than our own project's configuration.

In the end I think the DAIP's greatest contribution was its demonstration of how a local advocacy group could reshape institutional responses to male violence. In our case, that meant that we were able to create new boundaries around acceptable interventions to protect women and children. It redefined police action, it integrated women's safety into all court interventions, it created a way to focus rehabilitation on the abuser instead of the relationship, it demonstrated how to create interventions based on different levels of dangerousness and the context of the violence, it insisted on a system that intervened beyond the incident and understood the whole context of the violence, and finally it showed a way for activists and their allies in the system to work together. We made gender visible in a justice system that purported to be blind to all of the privileges it so routinely maintained.