



The Complexities of Gendered Frameworks in the Anti-Violence Movement

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Male sexual assault survivors have many barriers to accessing mainstream rape crisis center and dual program services and are vastly underserved. I have seen the amount of men doing advocacy work increase, but not the men who walk through the doors of local programs. If “women” is in our organizational name, if we refer to all victims as “she” and we distribute pink brochures or host websites featuring sad lady stock photos, we alienate not only male survivors but also youth, elders, the trans* community, and many others. Those are barriers that are easy to fix, fairly affordable, and not very time consuming. So, why do they often feel so challenging?

I worked with and was mentored by women who have dedicated their lives to this work, who put this movement together, and who survived rape at a time when the police were less than responsive. I worked for programs that were very proud of their “herstory.” I have spent eleven years bearing witness to brutal male violence through direct service advocacy. I have survived sexual assault and violence. I continue to survive sexism and rape culture. I carry these experiences with me and they inform how I view the world. I also carry with me the biases formed by my experiences. Deeper than the simple aesthetic symbolism we can employ in our outreach strategies is the unpacking of vicarious and direct trauma as we make space for all survivors in services and in service to survivors.

As we unpack, we are bound to uncover many questions. These are some thoughts as I have begun to do my own unpacking:

- Accessibility of programming is a crucial topic for our movement and we recognize the many power disparities. We know that populations that have been historically marginalized -- People of Color, immigrants, the Deaf population, and children—are at a higher risk of sexual assault and are less likely to access services. We also know that, particularly, Women of Color are less likely to hold positions of leadership in our movement. How does the population who holds more institutional power (men) than us (women) fit in to our conversations on underserved populations?
- We do not need to abandon a gendered framework to sexual violence—we can make it more complex. How do we maintain a gendered analysis of sexual assault that is also inclusive of male survivors? Can we address it through a power analysis inclusive of gender inequity? When we approach a more complex analysis we can make it more accessible to transgender and gender nonconforming survivors too. A power analysis can

help us identify the many gaps and power disparities experienced by survivors in many systems, including the anti-sexual assault movement.

- How do we begin to reconcile the years we have spent bearing witness to male violence while living in a sexist society?
- How do we hold to our deeply sentimental roots while letting go of what no longer works for survivors?

Only when we start to unpack our trauma can we begin to address the problematic complexities of this framework we've worked under for so long.