

NEGOTIATING HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY IN A BATTERER INTERVENTION PROGRAM

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Domestic violence represents a crucial underpinning of women's continued subordination, which is why much scholarly and activist energy has been expended in designing, implementing, and evaluating programs to reduce it. On the basis of three years of fieldwork, the authors analyze the interactional processes through which masculinity was constructed in one such program. They find that facilitators had success in getting the men to agree to take responsibility, use egalitarian language, control anger, and choose nonviolence, but the men were successful in resisting taking victims' perspectives, deflecting facilitators' overtures to be emotionally vulnerable, and defining themselves as hardworking men entitled to a patriarchal dividend. The authors' analysis contributes to understandings of how hegemonic masculinity is interactionally constituted, and it adds evidence to the debate about such programs' effectiveness by raising the issue of how well the program met its goal of transforming masculinity.

Keywords: *hegemonic masculinity; batterer intervention program; intimate partner violence; social interaction*

As shelter workers in the 1970s became familiar and increasingly frustrated with men who repeatedly battered the same or different women, they and pro-feminist men created the first batterer intervention programs, or BIPs (National Institutes of Justice 2003). On the basis of their knowledge of battered women's experiences, they understood men's violence as a way to maintain power and control over women, and they designed programs to change batterers' masculinity. As states responded to activist pressure by arresting batterers (Mirchandani 2006), courts

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increasingly required convicted batterers to participate in BIPs rather than serve extended jail sentences—even though there was little evidence that such programs were effective.

The most widely used BIP curriculum is the Duluth model (<http://www.duluth-model.org/>), which aims to transform men into nonthreatening, nonjudgmental listeners who are empathetic, honest, accountable, and egalitarian in their parenting, housework, and familial decision making. The internal goal is thus to change men from patriarchal authoritarians bent on controlling women into pro-feminist men. Doing so, the program philosophy assumes, will mitigate participants' violence. Many programs relying on the Duluth model also incorporate anger-management and skill-building approaches, focusing on improved communication, assertiveness training, and conflict management (Healey, Smith, and O'Sullivan 1998). Yet increasingly sophisticated statistical analyses cast doubt on these programs' effectiveness in stopping men's violence.

Our study examines how group facilitators and participants in one Duluth-based BIP negotiated a dominant version of masculinity. We aim to contribute to sociologists' understanding of the interactional constitution of hegemonic masculinity as well as evaluate the program on its internal goal of transforming masculinity. An unpublished evaluation¹ of the program we studied found that, according to victim reports, graduates were as likely as dropouts to continue their violence. Despite similar rates of rebattery, graduates were far *less* likely than dropouts to be recharged (11 percent vs. 42 percent) and far *more* likely to be living with their victims (42 percent vs. 14 percent). By examining the negotiation of masculinity inside this BIP, we can shed light on why it and perhaps other BIPs fail to stop men's violence.

Evaluating Batterer Intervention Programs

Studies assessing whether men's participation in BIPs decreases their violence have proliferated in the past 25 years. Research from the 1980s typically reported success, although these early studies lacked control groups and relied on arrest reports rather than victim reports (Hamberger and Hastings 1993). These were followed by research using "quasi-experimental" designs comparing program completers to dropouts or to other control groups and, more recently, experimental designs comparing convicted batterers randomly assigned to BIPs to those assigned to community service/probation. Although researchers continue to debate methodological issues (Gondolf 2001), and some programs may work better than others, Feder and Wilson's (2005) meta-analysis of the most rigorous

studies found that, according to victims, program completion failed to reduce the likelihood of continued violence.

Such programs may, in fact, worsen the problem by offering women false hope about transformed partners, thereby putting them at risk for rebattery. Feder and Wilson's (2005) meta-analysis found that convicted batterers randomly assigned to BIPs were less likely to be charged when they continued their violence than were the convicted batterers randomly assigned to probation or community service. BIPs thus appeared to reduce the likelihood that victims would call the police or press charges in the face of continued violence. Other research has shown that victims felt "enhanced safety" (Austin and Dankwort 1999) and were more likely to return to their abusers (Fisher and Gondolf 1988) when the abusers had received treatment. Such evidence offers support for shelter workers' and victim advocates' fear that BIPs give victims unfounded hope that batterers will change, thereby encouraging them to stay in dangerous relationships (Holtzworth-Munroe, Beatty, and Anglin 1995).

What might explain BIP ineffectiveness? Some prominent researchers have claimed that the problem is the feminist philosophy that underlies them (Cavanaugh and Gelles 2005; Dutton and Corvo 2006; Dutton and Nicholls 2005). They based this contention on 30 years of research using the Conflict Tactics Scale, which consistently has found men and women equally likely to be perpetrators and victims of domestic violence (see Archer's 2000 meta-analysis).² Their assumption was that if sex is not implicated in domestic violence, then feminist researchers were merely "promoting a political ideology" (Dutton and Nicholls 2005, 708) and "substituting advocacy for science" (Cavanaugh and Gelles 2005, 157), which they argued has led to the proliferation of ineffective pro-feminist BIPs.

Kristin Anderson's (2005) critique of the assumptions behind the "gender symmetry" model pointed to the usefulness of taking an interactionist approach to investigating BIP ineffectiveness. She noted that scholarship reporting "gender" symmetry in violence conflates sex category with gender, conceptualizing gender as a dichotomous independent variable (i.e., sex category) that should, if important, predict violence. Treating gender as a binary variable, she argued, ignores theory and research that conceptualizes gender as an interactionally constructed element of social structure (see Messner 2000; Ridgeway and Smith-Lovin 1999; Thorne 1993; West and Zimmerman 1987; Yancey Martin 2003). Rather than expecting sex to predict violence, violence is a means by which gender is constructed (Hearn 1998; Messerschmidt 2000). Before concluding that feminists have undermined efforts to end men's violence, it is thus important to examine how gender is interactionally constructed inside BIPs.

We know relatively little, however, about what actually transpires in these programs. An exception is Miller, Gregory, and Iovanni's (2005) comparative qualitative analysis of a men's and a women's Duluth-based BIP. Although not focusing on gender construction per se, they reported that men participants viewed the program as punishment and—because the facilitators did not confront them about it—tended to minimize responsibility, although they often “talked the talk.” Our analysis supports their finding that men often resist, and we additionally unpack the interactional processes by which facilitators and participants coconstructed the group's dominant form of masculinity. We can thus evaluate whether the constructions of masculinity the group created are consistent with the pro-feminist aims of the curriculum.

Masculinity and Violence

Understanding how masculinity is constructed in BIPs is particularly important because much research shows how masculinity—men's identities, subjectivities, and interactional practices (Connell 1995)—is implicated in battering. Qualitative and quantitative research has shown that men who harm women often do so when their sense of traditional manhood—such as being a breadwinner or having women meet their often-unspoken needs—is threatened (Anderson and Umberson 2001; Atkinson, Greenstein, and Lang 2005; Dobash and Dobash 1998). Drawing on cultural notions of manhood as superior to womanhood, many men believe they are entitled to receive male privilege and to control women in their lives, and such expectations are psychological preconditions for choosing violence (see, e.g., Dobash and Dobash 1979).

Men's emotional inexpressiveness is central to their physical battery of women. Research has shown that violent men are more likely than nonviolent ones to repress their emotions (Umberson et al. 2003). Unexpressed feelings of shame or embarrassment—which are acute when men feel their masculinity (i.e., authority and control) is threatened—can be transformed into rage against women (Retzinger 1991). This process is further facilitated by the cultural acceptance of anger as a justification for violent acts (Averill 1993) and men's suppression of empathy with women (Goodrum, Umberson, and Anderson 2001; King 2003; Scully 1988).

The literature on the relationship between masculinity and violence points to the importance of examining *how* masculinity is constructed in BIP programs. As Loseke (1989, 218) observed, although quantitative “impact evaluations can demonstrate the fact of program outcomes, qualitative data are needed to show the practical activities leading to outcomes.” If the

program promotes emotional invulnerability, bolsters traditional gender ideology and identities, and reinforces men's presumed right to control women, then we can conclude that it promotes rather than subverts a masculinity that research has linked to violence.

Hegemonic Masculinity

Hegemonic masculinity refers to “the most honored way of being a man” and can be analyzed as a *cultural* ideal or as a *local* construction created “in the arenas of face-to-face interaction of families, organizations, and immediate communities” (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, 849). Most research has emphasized hegemonic masculinity as a cultural ideal. One line of research in this vein has examined media representations, and reveals, for example, that capitalism and consumption (Messner and de Oca 2005), the gay liberation movement (Demetriou 2001), and state politics and policies (Anahita and Mix 2006) have shaped cultural ideas of manhood over time, often blending various elements of masculinities in a process called “hybridization” (Demetriou 2001). Another line has revealed how men grapple with cultural ideals, showing, for example, how men's actions can both subvert and support the dominant form of masculinity (E. Anderson 2002; Bird 1996; Chen 1999; Hennen 2005; Yeung, Stompler, and Wharton 2006) and how the class dimensions of hegemonic masculinity can shape men's life trajectories (Messner 1989). Such studies of hegemonic masculinity as a cultural ideal have invigorated masculinities research.

Equally important—but less plentiful—is research examining how local forms of hegemonic masculinity are constructed via face-to-face interactions (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). Viewing hegemonic masculinity as constituted at the local level brings up the possibility that “the most honored” way of being men (or boys) differs from group to group (see Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, 849; Dellinger 2004). Dellinger (2004), for example, found that a group of men accountants in an organization where masculinity was “embattled”—a woman-owned and -run feminist magazine—defiantly opposed feminist principles, as least in interviews. In contrast, in an organizational culture in which masculinity was “safe”—a heterosexual pornographic magazine—men accountants rhetorically distanced themselves from the working-class “slimeball” readers rather than from feminism. In an analysis that similarly compared two groups, Skelton (1997) showed how schoolboys in a poor community honored a masculinity that targeted girls for aggression and harassment, whereas boys in a middle-class community honored doing well at soccer.

These studies point to key elements (organizational philosophy and class context, respectively) that shape the version of masculinity that became locally hegemonic. They also point to the importance of social interaction, although they did not examine how interactions *unfolded* to raise one version of masculinity above others. We take up the call put forth by Dellinger (2004, 564) for scholars to conduct research about “how hegemonic masculinities are actively constructed in different contexts,” as it may provide a “more dynamic understanding of how systems of gender inequality are perpetuated and [can be] challenged.”

We take an interactionist approach to examining the local construction of hegemonic masculinity. Drawing on Goffman (1959, 1967), we conceptualize the most honored way of being a man as constituted through interaction rituals that can be cooperative or competitive. Also key to our approach are the interactionist assumptions that people’s emotions and identities are at stake in interaction; people act under conditions that constrain and enable interaction; people interactionally employ various symbolic resources; and people’s joint actions have consequences, often unintended, for inequality reproduction (Schwalbe et al. 2000). From this perspective, the meanings and practices of masculinity that are locally hegemonic consist of men’s self-presentations that consistently elicit others’ deference. Following Goffman (1967), we categorize social acts as deferential when they protect others’ self-presentations, whether through passive displays of tact or active compliments and affirmations.

Our analysis makes three contributions. While most research emphasizes hegemonic masculinity as a cultural ideal, we unpack the interactional processes through which the most honored way to be a man is locally constituted. Doing so sheds light on the importance of analyses of masculinity at the interactional level. Examining how interactions create the local version of hegemonic masculinity also enables us to evaluate the BIP with regard to its internal goal of changing participants’ masculinity. Finally, our analysis may have implications for why BIPs are so often found to be ineffective at stopping men’s violence.

SETTING AND METHOD

The program we studied was housed in a family-services center of a midsize southeastern city. Participants (all of whom were men) had been convicted of a domestic violence-related crime and had the choice of attending the six-month program or serving 30 to 45 days in jail.³ Program participants paid to attend meetings (\$20 a session), and missing more

than 3 of the 26 two-hour weekly meetings constituted a probation violation that could remand them to jail. Meetings began with “check-ins,” a forum for participants to introduce themselves, to take responsibility for their violence, and to informally discuss their past week. After check-in, meetings became more formal, with facilitator-led exercises and discussions.

The key goal of the Duluth-based program was to undermine violent masculinity by teaching men how to be egalitarian partners who took responsibility, used egalitarian language, and acknowledged their own and others’ emotions. Drawing on a facilitator handbook that outlined the program’s goals, strategies for achieving them, and common pitfalls, facilitators were supposed to guide participants to give up their desire to control women, which was defined as the root cause of men’s verbal and physical abuse. As revealed in the facilitator handbook, group facilitators were not supposed to allow men to be derailed from these tasks (e.g., by focusing on life events unrelated to abuse).

I (the first author), a white man, was in my late 20s during the study and attended more than 100 weekly meetings over a three-year period.⁴ Since I attended the session that ran on the same night every week, staff members were constant, but participants varied as new men entered the program and others “graduated.” Each group comprised 10 to 18 men and two facilitators. About half the participants appeared to be African American, 40 percent white, and 10 percent Latino. About three-fourths held jobs that required no college degree (e.g., roofer, store clerk), and so I classified them as working class. Facilitators were paid \$50 for leading a session. Bev, who cofacilitated the group I observed, had a master’s degree in social work and had worked for the program for almost a decade. She was joined by Bill, Frank, or Art, who held advanced degrees in divinity or social work and had worked there for an average of a year apiece.

Research involved two phases. I observed meetings through a one-way mirror from an adjoining room for the first eight months because the director feared my presence might make participants uncomfortable. This had the advantage of enabling me to take notes continuously, using idiosyncratic shorthand, which allowed me to capture detailed interactional exchanges. But the setup hid the facial expressions of men with their backs to the mirror, and it deprived me of pre- and postmeeting interactions. When agency staff needed the observation room for evening counseling sessions, the director allowed me to sit in the group meetings on a trial basis, which she and facilitators later made permanent. At each check-in, I reminded the men that I was doing research, that I would use pseudonyms and would not identify the BIP, and that I would honor

requests not to use information (no such request was ever made). There was no evidence that my presence affected group interactions: Participants acted similarly when I was behind the one-way mirror and when I was sitting in the circle. Participants included me in premeeting chit-chat (I arrived 15 minutes early to engage in such informal interactions), and I always walked out with the men at the end of sessions, hoping to allay any potential concerns I was colluding with the facilitators. While in the circle, I attempted to capture dialogue verbatim only when it seemed particularly important because I worried that continuous scribbling would make participants uncomfortable.

Data analysis ran concurrently with data collection, following traditional ethnographic methods (Lofland and Lofland 1984). As soon as fieldwork began, I began writing memos to explore emerging themes and developed hypotheses for further exploration. As fieldwork continued, I wrote more memos and cut and pasted field note excerpts into files representing different forms of interaction. The facilitator handbook was another source of data, as it revealed the program's internal goals and the strategies facilitators were supposed to use to achieve them, allowing me to analyze whether facilitators followed through on the handbook's directives.

I initially approached data for this manuscript with the question, "How does the interactional process through which participants construct manhood unfold?" Using principles of grounded theory (see Charmaz 2006), I generated a typology of micropolitical tactics that facilitators and men employed to gain deference. When the second author joined as coauthor, we posed another question, "What images of masculinity are being negotiated?" We then went back through the data and examined both the meanings of masculinity and interactional practices.⁵ We found patterns surrounding the tactics actors used to construct particular meanings of manhood and created labels to capture both the practices and meanings: enforcing pseudo responsibility and egalitarianism, resisting vulnerability and empathy, affirming breadwinning, and submitting to rational control.

FINDINGS

Connell and Messerschmidt (2005, 853) imagine the possibility that people can "establish as hegemonic . . . a version of masculinity open to equality with women." The Duluth curriculum was designed to foster such a pro-feminist masculinity: It emphasizes empathy, emotional expression, and egalitarian relations with women. What follows is an analysis of the cooperative and competitive interaction rituals through which some

presentations of masculinity routinely elicited deference, in effect constituting the program's hegemonic masculinity.

Enforcing Pseudo Responsibility and Egalitarianism

Reflecting the curriculum's emphasis on taking responsibility and being egalitarian, participants were required to adhere to official rules specifying how to refer to their violence and their victims. When checking in, each man had to name his victim, rather than referring to her by status or stereotype (e.g., "Peg" rather than "my woman" or "my bitch"). Each man also had to name the specific acts of violence he had been found guilty of committing. They were not allowed to say, for example, "we fought" or "I assaulted Peg" ("assault on a female" is a formal criminal conviction rather than acknowledgment of a specific act) but instead had to utter some variation of "I'm here for hitting and kicking Peg." When a man deviated from the script, a facilitator, most often Bev, took the lead in shaming him. Such policing led participants to take pseudo responsibility and to signify pseudo egalitarianism during every observed check-in, securing these elements as part of the hegemonic masculinity the group constructed in this local context.

When a man resisted "talking the talk," Bev typically embarrassed him into complying. "I'm Marlon. I'm here because I had a physical fight with my wife," said one man during check-in. Bev responded with a high pitched: "What?!" Everyone laughed. "You've been going to these groups too long not to know not to say that," she added. Marlon then deferentially volunteered, "I'm here for grabbing my wife's breast to make her mad." Although he still referred to his victim as "my wife" rather than by name, Bev affirmed with, "That's better." Her use of joking to embarrass him into complying was gentle compared to other methods.

She also commonly policed the check-in script by threatening humiliation. At one meeting, a man said he was there for "assaulting my girlfriend," and the next quickly said he was there "because my wife said I did something I didn't do." Bev reminded them of the script. But the men protested. "I'm just telling you like it is," said one. Bev left and returned with their file folders. After she offered to remind them what their victims had said and what they themselves had admitted during intake interviews, one said, "You don't have to do that." When Bev again suggested they check in "the right way," they complied.

No argument was brooked. When men used the culturally available ideology of "free speech" to defend script violators, Bev secured formal compliance to the notion that the men took responsibility. For example, when

Derek introduced himself at his first meeting, he said, "I'm here for assaulting my wife." "No, no, no! You're not here for assaulting your wife!" replied Bev. Derek smirked and said, "I'm not?" "No, we don't say that here," said Bev. Coming to his defense, Ralph broke in to say, "Wait a minute, you're censoring him. That's not right." Bev looked at Ralph, rolled her eyes, and sarcastically said, "Well, excuuuuse me! We're having a discussion over here." Ralph's face reddened, but refusing to defer, he raised his voice and repeated, "But you're censoring what he's saying!" Bev pointedly turned her back on him and began calmly speaking to Derek. Ralph said loudly, "I don't have to sit here and take this shit." He grabbed his cigarettes and cell phone and stomped toward the exit, mumbling "bitch" as he slammed the door behind him. Bev, the only person not watching Ralph, continued to explain the reasoning behind the check-in script. The message was clear: Participants must present themselves during check-in as men who rhetorically take responsibility.

Ralph returned after twenty minutes but was silent for the rest of the meeting. I later joined him outside where he complained that Bev had been rude, and he went on to explain how she had previously censored him for not using egalitarian rhetoric: "It's just like a while back when she got on my case about saying 'my lady.' She *was* my lady. I know I didn't own her or anything. But I loved her and she was my lady."

In that episode, Ralph had jumped into a conversation with, "My woman—," but Bev interrupted with, "What did you say?! Did I hear you say *my woman*?" "What's the big deal? What's wrong with saying 'my woman'?" responded Ralph. "Tonya always calls me 'my man.'" "[It's] like saying 'my bitch,'" said Bev, who added, "I'd much rather you call her by her name." Ralph said, "I think this is just silly. I'm trying to talk about things that I usually wouldn't talk about, and you're worried about how I'm saying things more than what I'm saying! It's like I can't just talk naturally." Facilitator Frank replied in a rational tone, "One thing about saying 'my woman' is that it's like saying 'my car,' 'my house,' 'my dog.' I mean, just think of the word 'my.' What kind of word is it?" Lester dutifully answered, "A possessive." "That's exactly right," said Frank. "When you say 'my woman,' it's like saying she's a possession, like you own her. Now, even if that's not your intention, it comes across that way." Ralph finally deferred, "Well, you know, when you put it like that, it sort of makes sense. I guess I can see that it comes off that way." Rather than driving home the lesson, Frank evoked laughter with a joke that—regardless of his intention—undermined the egalitarian lesson Bev had initiated: "Now I don't care what you call each other in private; you can call each

other ‘Shnookums’ for all I care.” Evoking more laughter, Ralph replied, “How do you know that’s what she calls me? Does she call you that, too?”

These and other similar interactional exchanges enshrined “talking the talk” in regard to taking responsibility and egalitarianism while failing to ensure any deeper commitment. In this instance, Bev did most of the work by teasing, embarrassing, and shaming, while Frank’s joking reduced the lesson’s effectiveness, helping ensure that men’s commitment was only superficial. More generally, rhetorically taking responsibility and espousing egalitarianism were kinds of self-presentations that elicited facilitator deference—constituting them as elements of the hegemonic masculinity in this local context.⁶

Resisting Vulnerability and Empathy

Facilitators attempted to persuade participants to present themselves as emotionally vulnerable during almost every meeting.⁷ They usually gently guided participants to talk about their own and their victims’ feelings, which provided opportunities for men to present a version of masculinity consistent with the program’s pro-feminist aims. Typically, however, participants successfully countered with their most powerful tactics: disengagement and diversion. Such tactics also threw a wrench in facilitators’ more aggressive attempts to pry the men open. With few exceptions, these interactions affirmed self-presentations characterized by emotional inexpressiveness.

Participants most commonly shielded themselves from vulnerability by falling silent. For example, when Tony described pushing his wife down, Art, the facilitator asked, “How do you feel about what you did?” Tony started talking about his wife. Art interrupted to repeat, “How do *you* feel?” Tony said nothing. Art gave up, saying, “Regardless of that, which is something you need to think about, we are all happy that you’re here tonight and welcome you to the group.” Tony’s disengagement not only enabled him to signify emotional invulnerability but to practice it, as well. Men’s resistant self-presentations often took the form of such inexpressiveness, which can emerge “as an intentional manipulation of a situation when threats to the male position occur” (Sattel 1976, 474).

Diversion as a tactic entailed changing the topic when facilitators encouraged men to talk about feelings. At one meeting, Ron said that just before class, he had yelled at his wife.

I was upset with my wife. I asked if she could fold the laundry by today . . . and things weren’t done yet. She also just threw a steak on the burner and forgot about it and it burnt up. . . . When I sit down to eat, I expect to see a

fork, plate, dishes, a drink. But there was nothing ready. I told her to get her head out of her ass and to do it right. Then she was crying and stuff, all upset. . . . I mean, if I can't say what I feel once in a while! I just have to. I can't hold everything in. I thought she was blowing me off, not taking me seriously.

Rather than questioning Ron's assumption that his wife should serve him, facilitator Frank asked, "I was wondering if you told her you were frustrated?" Ron ignored the question and continued his blaming trajectory, but Frank interrupted with, "How did it make you feel, what you told her?" In lieu of answering, Ron offered a concession: "I guess I could have folded [the laundry] myself." Ron was more willing to consider doing housework than talking about his feelings. Mike ended with a diversionary joke, saying, "I think she was just trying to test your [BIP] training," which garnered laughs. In this case as in others, facilitators ultimately deferred to men's diversionary tactics, in effect honoring emotionally inexpressive self-presentations as hegemonic. Regardless of intentions, facilitators' deference simultaneously affirmed men's sense of entitlement to women's subservience, counter to the curriculum's aims.

Participants often disengaged and diverted to resist being empathic. The director, Donna (who was generally more confrontational than were facilitators), interrupted a session to tell Alan that his wife had called to say she had the flu and wanted him home. Alan exclaimed, "I don't get it! She makes me come here, and then she tells me not to come? I'd rather not be here, believe me." Donna tried to get Alan to take his wife's perspective: "Think about when you've had the flu. How does that feel?" Silence. "What you need to think about is what *she* is going through." Alan made no reply. She continued more forcefully, "You have to understand how she is feeling. It's not fun to throw up and stuff. You need to take her into consideration and—" Alan interrupted this attempt to get him to empathize by diverting the conversational focus: "But, I had to be here tonight! I told her I had to come. We got in a big fight about it when I left. She didn't want me to go. When I drove off, she threw a glass at the car, and it barely missed. I mean, Jesus Christ, there was glass all over the parking lot!"

Donna responded by telling him that he could stay or go home, "That is *your* choice." He ended up leaving but gave no indication that he did so out of empathy. Rather, he disengaged, diverted, and worked up a bit of righteous anger, raising the question of how much empathy he was likely to show his wife when he arrived home. While this exchange was rather confrontational, it was typical in that the participant neither acquiesced nor espoused empathy.

There were a few exceptions. During the three years of fieldwork, two men regularly opened up about their relationships and feelings. One talked frequently about wanting to get back with his wife and feeling powerless to make it happen, and the other, the group's only non-court-ordered member, often expressed empathy for his wife, whom he described as a mentally unstable, unfaithful alcoholic. The facilitators sometimes drew these two into 20- to 30-minute conversations, which gave other participants some breathing room. The other men sat quietly during such discussions, although a few occasionally contributed smirks and sarcastic comments, suggesting that they viewed the speakers as dupes (see also Miller, Gregory, and Iovanni 2005). Such reactions, combined with the fact that these two participants did not participate in the premeeting joking, subtly marginalized them, helping maintain emotional invulnerability as a hegemonic element of masculinity.

An important contradiction in the program lay in its approach to handling men who felt emotionally overwhelmed. Although men were encouraged to open up, the program did not allow facilitators to "do therapy" because doing so fell outside the program's mandate. Indeed, as others have pointed out (Miller 2005), many states certify BIPs only if they proscribe therapy. Thus, on the rare occasions when men did become emotionally overwhelmed, as happened a few times when newcomers introduced themselves or, as in the following example, when one participant revealed painful childhood experiences, the facilitators joined participants in diverting the conversation into safe areas.

During a discussion of disciplining children, Bev turned to Stanley and asked why he did not believe in spanking. Stanley responded with a shaky voice, his eyes glued to the floor:

My mother was an alcoholic. She abused us all. She told us not to climb this one fence. Well, we were playing Frisbee in the backyard, and it went over the fence, and I got it. My mother saw us, and she was drunk and started whupping me good. I was 14 at the time. I got so mad, I threw a kitchen chair at her. Another time, she said, "When your father comes home, I don't want to hear anything come out of your mouths." Well, I have a retarded younger brother, and when Pa came home, well, he was real happy to see him and said "Hi!" Mother slapped the back of his head real hard, and his face went into a plate of spaghetti, and that sauce was boiling hot. I mean, now, I just would *tell* my kids what they did wrong. I don't see how [hitting kids] is any good.

There was complete silence. No participant had ever talked about witnessing or being the victim of child abuse before (and facilitators never

asked). Facilitator Bill broke the silence, saying, "I want to get back to talking about what's different nowadays." Aiding and abetting, Reggie jumped in: "Now they got gangs." Bev added, "I just think there are so many factors. The value system has changed; sometimes children are raising children." The conversation never returned to Stanley's story. Men who talked about painful issues would be left alone to suffer, and moreover, to do so in front of a group of men. Witnessing just one such instance would likely be enough to silence heartfelt expressions in the rest.

Overall, men's diversionary tactics in response to facilitators' guiding questions about their emotions and men's reactions to participants who did open up worked together to construct emotional invulnerability as central to hegemonic masculinity in this setting. All facilitators tried to get the men to talk about their feelings or to empathize with their partners' feelings during virtually every meeting, and all but a few participants disengaged and diverted, which amounted to practicing as well as interactionally honoring emotional inexpressiveness and lack of empathy. The few men who did openly talk about their emotions in intimate relationships were marginalized, and the few men who revealed suffering were neglected by participants and facilitators alike, creating an environment not conducive to changing men.

Asserting Breadwinning

The facilitator handbook warned that check-ins can become "time-consuming disclosures" about issues unrelated to men's violence, such as being "angry at work," and that check-ins "can become a strategic avoidance that is indirectly condoned by facilitators." Nonetheless, participants talked about work during at least two-thirds of the meetings. Unlike the above interactional processes, negotiating breadwinning as part of the local version of hegemonic masculinity was relatively cooperative.

Check-in stories alluding to rags-to-riches perseverance, high earnings, promotions, and workplace authority were common. Sam asserted his moral worthiness by announcing a promotion and received congratulations and the question, "Where do you work?" which allowed him to puff up even more: He was now the manager of an upscale auto repair shop where "we work on Porches, BMWs and Jaguars." Two weeks later Sam again played up his work status by spending about 10 minutes portraying a shop mechanic who worked for him as lazy, concluding, "You can't find good help nowadays."

Don, a telemarketer, also bolstered his masculine pride by telling long, drawn-out stories about work success, as illustrated by the following field

note excerpt: “Don said, ‘I was in a position to turn down a job offer last night and it was real powerful for me. . . .’ Larry said, ‘It probably helps since you passed that insurance licensee exam, too.’ Don replied, ‘You bet. It puts me in a position where I have something they want and they are willing to pay for it. . . . And it was real nice to be in a position where I wasn’t forced into taking it, you know.’” Sam’s and Don’s work success stories were typical of others in that they elicited facilitators’ and participants’ deference (no work story was ever challenged) and secured traditional breadwinning as locally hegemonic.

Participants also painted themselves as being hardworking men who deserved respect and sympathy because of work overload. At check-ins, middle-class men made comments such as: “This has been a frustrating week; the IRS is doing an audit,” and “It’s been a tough week; I’ve been in our Los Angeles office trying to work out computer problems, and I just flew in about an hour ago.” Working-class men could be heard saying: “It’s been a tough week at work; we’ve been building a house out-of-town, and I have to get up a couple hours early and get home a couple hours late,” or “All the rain this week has been really messing up our cement work.” Such claims were invariably met with deference.

Presenting themselves as sacrificial breadwinners also involved talking about being exploited. For example, during one check-in Troy vented about his boss: “At Kroger’s, they were giving me a bunch of crap, saying that I wasn’t working hard enough. But that’s mainly B.S. because I’ve been checking it out, and I do my carts just as fast as the other guys. . . . The night manager said that they were even talking about firing me if I didn’t work harder. Well, I ain’t going to bust my butt more than the other guys for five bucks an hour! I can’t believe this guy!”

A few minutes later, Randy described a recent job at a gas station where the boss didn’t let him punch a time clock, leading to Randy’s suspicion that his pay was being unfairly docked. “One morning,” Randy went on, “I got to work about 10 minutes early. I went across the street and got a Coke and a doughnut. When I got back, the boss started telling me that I shouldn’t leave the lot without his permission. This was before I was even supposed to start working.” Several men responded sympathetically: “What?!” “What a jerk,” and “Reminds me of *my* boss.” Randy continued, “Then he started using a few, or more than a few, choice words. He was pretty much yelling in my face, calling me all sorts of things. But I didn’t say anything to him, although I really wanted to. I just turned around and walked away. I’m never going back there.” “I don’t blame you,” replied Sam. Facilitator Bill concluded, “It sounds like your boss was on some sort of power trip. But I think you chose to do the right thing by walking away.”

Rather than adopting the curriculum's shame-inducing portrayal of participants as abusers, the men preferred to present themselves as successful and sacrificial breadwinners. Contradicting the facilitators' handbook, facilitators tactfully deferred to such presentations, interactionally confirming the cultural ideal of "the good provider role" (Bernard 1981) as an element of the program's hegemonic masculinity. Facilitators said they allowed work talk because they believed such conversations enabled the men to vent frustration; perhaps it also kept the men talking rather than disengaging. But such talk not only took up valuable time; it also diverted participants from addressing why the targets of their violence were women, not employers.

Submitting to Rational Control

Either voluntarily or via coercion, participants presented themselves as rational choice makers at virtually all meetings. Newcomers were often resistant to the notion that they could control their anger, probably because it was tantamount to admitting their aggression was inappropriate, which could evoke shame. Facilitators and other participants, however, worked to convince them that controlling their emotions had benefits: It kept them out of jail and, possibly, their wives or girlfriends under their control. Facilitators thus used a middle-class model of manhood that emphasized the importance of rationality along with an implicit promise of a patriarchal dividend as resources to gain compliance. Men's self-presentations as rational, self-controlled beings thus elicited others' deference, constituting such presentations as locally hegemonic.

The primary resource facilitators used to persuade participants to present themselves as self-controlled was the power of reason, a central tenet of managerial masculinity (Collinson and Hearn 1994). When newcomer Bryan first checked in, he said, "It started by she was always beating on me, biting me and stuff. . . . One day I just snapped and hit her back." Facilitator Frank initiated a challenge by offering some gendered bait: "Does she have control over you?" Saying yes would entail admitting submission to a woman in front of a roomful of men, but answering no would suggest he was responsible. "No, but I get upset," said Bryan, affirming his manhood while implicitly justifying his actions by blaming uncontrollable emotions. Undeterred, Frank took over with a tutorial about choice, the hallmark of masculine autonomy: "Another person can make you angry, but there are lots of choices. There's probably a hundred different ways you can choose to deal with that anger." Bev concluded by telling Bryan what choice the facilitators would advocate: "What you'll learn in

the group is how to control your anger.” Thus, facilitators offered an option: Rather than being authoritarians attached to dominance, men could be rationalists in control of their anger.

Advocating a cost-benefit analysis was particularly effective. A rational man, facilitators implied, would choose a strategy that maximized his self-interest. During one meeting, Facilitator Bill said, “Rather than getting emotional, if you think you are getting into a situation where you might be aggressive, you need to stop and ask yourself three questions.” “First, ‘How important is this to me?’ Second, ‘How is this going to make the other person feel?’ Third, ‘How much is this going to cost me?’” Before he could continue, several men jumped in: “That’s the one!” “Number three, number three!” and “He’s on to something with that one.” Bill’s next question: “Is violence worth the price?” was met with a chorus of “No!” Tapping into the resentment caused by jail time, court appearances, and having to pay for and attend the program, Bill easily won converts to the school of rational masculinity.

Facilitators and participants also convinced newcomers that maintaining self-control could efficiently maximize relationship dividends. For example, after Lawrence told the group about yelling and cursing at his wife for not having dinner ready before the meeting, Barry asked, “What would be a good thing to say to her tonight?” Lawrence did not respond. Ron volunteered an answer: “I’d say, ‘I would appreciate it if you cook something the next time I have to go to the meetings, or at least have something I could heat up in the microwave.’” Instead of suggesting Lawrence consider apologizing or making his own dinner, Art, the facilitator, commented, “So you would have a practical answer.” Ron then added, “Don’t say, ‘You better have it ready next time, or I’m going to bop you one,’ because that would get you another 26 weeks here!” Four or five men laughed, and Barry offered another strategy aimed at gaining subservience: “You could say, ‘I’m going to the program for you. Maybe next time, you could have something ready for me.’” Everyone deferred.

The facilitators did not point out that this advice involved trying to make his wife feel guilty about not making dinner for him, a practice the curriculum defines as “using emotional abuse” and “using male privilege” to maintain dominance. They also did not point out that virtually all the men’s accounts of their domestic violence indicated that they became angry because women were not acting sufficiently subservient. Facilitators’ deferential avoidance thus affirmed elements of masculinity that contradicted the program’s pro-feminist aims.

Later in the conversation, Facilitator Art took a more active role in convincing Lawrence to adopt gentler methods of securing subservience. He

began by trying to get Lawrence to agree that he could choose not to be verbally abusive: "But let's assume you had a legitimate gripe. . . . The issue is how you can handle it. You can react in a respectful way or an abusive way." Refusing to defer, Lawrence replied, "If she don't respect me, I don't respect her." Instead of questioning what he meant by "respect," Art asked Lawrence to think rationally about whether his tactics would be effective: "Do you think you are more likely or less likely to have things the way you want next time by calling her names?" Lawrence didn't respond, but he appeared to get the point. He explained at the following week's meeting that he had apologized to his wife, and at his last meeting, his "graduation night," he produced the proof: several dishes of food his wife had prepared for the potluck.

Some men told stories that suggested they were putting into practice methods of rational control in their relationships. Ken, whose wife left him after he almost choked her to death, had been trying to get back together with her for months, and he sometimes spoke of being upset if she didn't return his calls or if he suspected she talked about him to her coworkers. Finally, she and their children came over for dinner and a Disney video: "Although we had a good time, she seemed to be testing me. She was trying to push my buttons by bringing up some sore spots with me, but I never even reacted. Instead, I just went in and washed the dishes. I washed the *hell* out of those dishes, though. But I never raised my voice to her or showed her in any way that I was starting to get upset." Facilitator Art responded, "Abuse often makes women afraid to trust you again. All you can do is be respectful over time, and even then, they might not want you back. But Ken seems to be on the right track." Although Ken did not talk to his wife about his feelings and implicitly constructed his wife as blameworthy, Art credited him with being on the "right track." Why? He presented himself as exhibiting and desiring self-control and agreed that such control was key to persuading his wife and children to move back in.

Despite men's initial resistance, facilitators used the cultural ideal of rational masculinity as a resource to cajole participants into presenting themselves as self-controlled. The facilitators and some participants also used the notion that rational self-control could enable men to control women in relationships—that is, they could more efficiently receive a patriarchal dividend. Such negotiations established rational control as central to the program's hegemonic masculinity, although it contradicted the curriculum's assumption that defining and acting toward women as equals is key to stopping violence.

DISCUSSION

Most hegemonic masculinity research investigates how the media produce it as a cultural ideal or how individual men symbolically position themselves vis-à-vis the ideal. Such research has invigorated—theoretically and empirically—the sociology of masculinity, but it leaves unexplored what Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) term the construction of hegemonic masculinity at the “local level.” While Skelton (1997) and Dellinger (2004) importantly show how organizational and community context shape the most honored form of masculinity at the group level, they reveal little about the interactional processes that constitute it. We have drawn on Goffman (1959, 1967) to reconceptualize hegemonic masculinity as constructed via cooperative and contested interactional processes. Specifically, the elements of masculinity that are locally hegemonic are those self-presentations that consistently elicit others’ deference.

This interactional process played out in our study in the following ways. Men were shamed into taking rhetorical responsibility and using egalitarian language, but they gave little indication of truly acknowledging responsibility for their acts or respect for their partners. The men’s use of disengagement and diversionary tactics deflected facilitators’ attempts to get them to talk about their own or their victims’ feelings, thereby confirming and enacting the cultural ideal of masculine invulnerability. Participants also secured facilitators’ deference when they used valuable meeting time to hijack the curriculum and present themselves as diligent and long-suffering workers, culturally respected masculine attributes. Finally, facilitators and participants, regardless of intentions, together persuaded newcomers to present themselves as men who could use rationality to control not only their anger but also their partners’ actions.

Our study has implications for understanding this program’s ineffectiveness. While some “sex symmetry” researchers believe the problem lies in the pro-feminist curriculum (Cavanaugh and Gelles 2005; Dutton and Corvo 2006; Dutton and Nicholls 2005), our results suggest the problem instead lies in implementation. First, our findings clearly show that the program failed to achieve its internal goals of having participants take full responsibility, adopt a pro-feminist masculinity, and focus on their relationships and violence. Second, the version of manhood most honored in the program—emotionally inexpressive sacrificial breadwinners entitled to women’s deference—consists of qualities that research has linked to men’s violence, which may help explain why the above-mentioned evaluation study of this program found completers to be equally as likely as

dropouts to continue battering women.⁸ Third, we found that participants honed their rhetorical skills in presenting themselves as egalitarians who take responsibility for past harms and who are committed to anger control and nonviolence. While victims often have economic incentives to stay with their abusers (K. L. Anderson 2007) and not press charges, our study suggests that these egalitarian self-presentations may also help explain why victims of this program's graduates were more likely than victims of dropouts to continue living with their batterers and less likely to press charges when they were battered again. BIPs' ineffectiveness thus lies not in their emphasis on transforming men into egalitarian partners (Cavanaugh and Gelles 2005; Dutton and Corvo 2006; Dutton and Nicholls 2005) but in their inability to do exactly that.

What recommendations for change do our findings imply? The subject of masculinity is "the elephant in the living room" in these groups, and until groups take it up directly, it will assert itself insidiously and undermine the program. Just as it is in interaction that people "do" gender, interaction can also transform or "undo" gender (Deutsch 2007). Facilitators could be trained to recognize and point out when participants are reproducing meanings and practices of masculinity that have been linked to violence against women. Doing so in a way that does not merely shame or embarrass participants, but instead encourages them to reflect on why they value such qualities; where such notions come from; who they benefit; and how acting on them harms themselves, their partners, and their children, might be effective. Our analysis, unfortunately, provides no clear answer to the question of how facilitators might accomplish this undertaking, although it outlines the behaviors facilitators should look out for, thus reducing the chances that resistance tactics will catch them unawares. Future research that compares the negotiation of masculinity in effective and ineffective programs could better suggest a repertoire of practices to more effectively counter men's resistance. Such comparative research might also enable researchers to point to structural changes (e.g., in curriculum, staffing, or monitoring) that would improve effectiveness.

Unpacking how hegemonic masculinity is negotiated is also important for sociologists of gender. Our understanding of hegemonic masculinity as a local compilation of men's self-presentations that consistently elicits deference can be applied more broadly. As a "sensitizing concept" (Blumer 1969), this understanding might also be usefully applied to other settings where masculinity is interactionally constructed, such as families, schools, work, political or military organizations, and leisure groups. It is necessarily in these arenas of everyday life that men carry out and prime

themselves for perpetuating or undermining patriarchy and other, intertwined forms of domination. It is also within such arenas that change is possible, but as the feminist movement has proven time and again, such change requires a great deal of pressure from outside the system.

NOTES

1. The study, conducted by a psychiatrist affiliated with a psychiatric hospital and a research university, used victim interviews and court records to compare graduates' and dropouts' reabuse patterns over a three-year period.

2. Sociologists have pointed to many methodological inadequacies of the Conflict Tactics Scale, including its failure to measure injury, emotional consequences, sexual assault, violence by ex-partners, or the meanings and motivations of violent acts (see, e.g., Dobash et al. 1992; Kimmel 2002). Although a revised scale takes into account some of these criticisms (Straus et al. 1996), and additional scales have addressed others, findings of sex symmetry remain. But the methodological debate continues (Miller 2005, chap. 2).

3. Judges decided which men were eligible based on the advice of the court victims' advocate, a representative of the batterer intervention program (BIP), and the district attorney.

4. The first author's research proposal was approved by the program's Board of Directors and his university's Institutional Review Board, and all program participants signed waivers allowing themselves to be observed. Data for the larger project include interviews with staff and participants along with observations of monthly staff meetings, domestic violence court, and intake interviews with new participants and—on a few occasions—with their victims.

5. While we expected to find racial dynamics at play, as they shaped the construction of blameworthy victims and joking culture, our analysis failed to find them here.

6. The question arises as to whether this difference in facilitator behaviors was gendered. Whereas men facilitators often presented themselves as rational teachers, Bev did most of the rules enforcement by shaming or embarrassing participants. Such tactics were not planned in advance. While we cannot ascertain the reasons, she might have used these tactics because she, unlike men facilitators, was unable to elicit deference using the rational teacher tactic (see Ridgeway 2001, 648, on men's resistance to women's authority). Alternatively, since the male facilitators did not play an equal role in enforcing rule compliance, the burden fell to Bev. Whatever the reason, her tactics unintentionally reinforced a stereotype of an assertive woman, "the bitch" (see Prokos and Padavic 2002), possibly allowing men to discount her contributions.

7. The only times facilitators did not guide participants to talk about their own or their victim's feelings was when the meetings were given over to other agendas:

when a local group put on a play about domestic violence, when a domestic violence film was shown, or when work talk took up the entire meeting.

8. If the mostly working-class participants were to try to control women through the nonviolent manipulation the program taught, their lack of the economic resources or status that make such tactics relatively effective for middle-class men (Pyke 1996) might set the stage for violence.

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