

Identity constructions, discursive processes and therapeutic strategies in the treatment group for male perpetrators

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Jyväskylä model for preventing and treating domestic violence

- In Jyväskylä a multi-professional co-operation in preventing and treating domestic violence started in 1995
 - Social and welfare agencies
 - Police
- A programme for male offenders was created in the crisis centre “Mobile” in collaboration with the Psychotherapy Training and Research Centre of the University of Jyväskylä
 - Own programme for survivors and eye-witnesses but closely connected and monitored to men’s programmes

Programme for men who have act violently in close relationships

**Individual treatment
at the Mobile crises
center**



**Group treatment at
the Psychotherapy
research and training
center at the
university**



Group treatment

- Open-ended group. Refilled regularly.
- Once a week 1.5 hour's session.
- Max. 7 participants.
- Conducted by two therapists (male and female).
- Men commit for at least 15 sessions.
- No explicit schedule, structure.
- No psychodrama, homework, lectures: Only discussions focussing on violence and it's context.

Feedback system

- Women partners are met in the beginning and in the end of the group by the therapy clinic worker.
- Two years follow-up interviews for both the men and the women



The discourse analytic study of the group treatment

■ Data:

- The study is based on recorded and transcribed data, obtained from the conversations in these treatment groups for men.

■ The groups can be looked upon as arenas for **culturally determined identity work**.

■ The identity work is characterised by a simultaneous presence of multiple positionings/identities.

■ The negotiation process is a complex one, but affords the possibility of a construction of new kind of non-violent masculine identities.

- For example how gender or fatherhood is constructed



Gender difference as justification

- Traditional masculinity identity is constructed as difference to femininity
- Discursive constructions of women (Kapanen, 2005)
 1. Women as provocative persons
 - Agitate the man on purpose
 - Co-responsible for the violent incidents
 2. Women as undependable
 - Leaves the man with a constant fear of being abandoned
 - Violence is understood as stemming from this uncertainty and fear



Discursive constructions of women

3. Women as mysterious creatures

- man can never fully understand women
- Refers to biological understandings, e.g. shifts in mood connected to the menstrual cycle

4. Powerful woman

- Verbal superiority which the women use over the man.
- The man's verbal inferiority excuses the use of violence as 'weapons' in the power struggle



Focus in narrowing the gender gap

- Gender difference is used as justification for abusive behavior by the men
- Thus, it is important to focus on narrowing the gender gap in perpetrator programs

- Positioning of the female therapist in group conversations (Päivinen & Holma, 2012)

Positioning of the female therapist

- Positioning as the discursive process in which people are given parts or they take up such positions spontaneously in the local discourse.
 - “as a man...”, “as a therapist...”
- Positions are flexible and changing
 - Possibility to reposition oneself
- Gendered positions reflect cultural expectations for men and women



Gendered positioning of the therapist

- Three categories of gendered positioning were constructed:
 1. Representing women in general
 - Expectation for viewpoint of “all women”
 2. Representing woman as partner
 - Often taken up by the female therapist
 3. She as a woman personally
 - Reflecting cultural discourses like weaker gender, object of charming



Challenging the gender gap

- By repositioning herself the therapist was able to challenge men's constructions about women and the traditional masculine identity.
 - Challenging generalizations
 - Taking up the partner's viewpoint
- Gendered positioning may work as a tool for diminishing the difference between men and women that is used as justification for violence



Discussions of fatherhood in male batterer treatment group

(Veteläinen, Grönholm, & Holma, 2013).

- In several studies, the parenting style of men who have perpetrated violence towards their partners has been noted to be of the type known as traditional, i.e. authoritarian and controlling.
- IPV men's utterances about fatherhood reflected both beliefs learned from past generations, i.e. **traditional fatherhood**, and modern cultural views, i.e. the **new fatherhood** (Lahti, 2001; Ruckenstein, 2004)

Traditional fatherhood

- When talking about acts of disobedience by their children, **some of the men constructed an authoritarian and disciplinary position.**
- **Independence as men, or male entitlement, was considered more important** compared to their duties as a father.

New fatherhood was constructed

- The men **described fatherhood as a positive, delightful and active part of life.**
- They had also evaluated their earlier fatherhood, and **were now actively searching for ways to improve and achieve their new fatherhood ideals** which were in contradiction with their ideas of manhood, fatherhood and masculinity.
- The men **compared their fathers' and their own positions:** They were not going to repeat their fathers' mistakes and were making efforts to be better than their fathers



- Through seeing themselves **as a child with a violent father**, they were sometimes able to gain a better understanding of their own children's situation and experiences.
- Becoming a father may also trigger a change away from violent behavior or the children may act as motivators in the process of becoming a better (non-violent) father, spouse or, even, person.



Different strategies with different men

- It was noted that when the counselors made attempts to **switch the discussion to a more abstract level** – for example, when they tried to move from a description of a concrete situation to a more abstract analysis of a person's feelings – **the poor-outcome clients would often not follow the invitation** (Räsänen et al., 2012a)
- With the **poor-outcome clients** the counselors were observed to use more **monological tools** such as stopping, correction and education.
- In **good-outcome** cases, **besides affirmative and reflective approaches**, the counselors were occasionally observed to employ also more direct conversation tools of confrontation, **challenging and offering alternative viewpoints**, especially in the later sessions after getting to know the client. (Räsänen et al. 2014)

Different strategies for different topics

- **Confrontational and challenging** types of talk were used especially when conversations dealt **with violent incidents**. More **supportive, and relationship-focused approach** incorporating empathy with the client men was used, for example when the discussion dealt with **clients' difficult and traumatic experiences** (Räsänen et al. 2012b)



Conclusions

- Focus in construction of masculine identity in perpetrator programs.
 - Deconstructing traditional masculinity that is based on gender difference
 - Towards new, non-violent masculinity, including fatherhood
- Focus on individual needs of the group participants.
 - Different strategies for different men and different topics

Thank you!

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