

BUILDING BRIDGES BETWEEN HEALTHY MARRIAGE, RESPONSIBLE FATHERHOOD, AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE PROGRAMS



*By Theodora Ooms, Jacqueline Boggess, Anne Menard, Mary Myrick,
Paula Roberts, Jack Tweedie, and Pamela Wilson*

DECEMBER 2006



CIASP
CENTER FOR LAW AND SOCIAL POLICY

A PRELIMINARY GUIDE

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The Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP) is a national non-profit that works to improve the lives of low-income people. CLASP's mission is to improve the economic security, educational and workforce prospects, and family stability of low-income parents, children, and youth and to secure equal justice for all.

The National Conference of State Legislatures is a bipartisan organization that serves the legislators and staffs of the nation's 50 states, its commonwealths and territories. NCSL provides research, technical assistance and opportunities for policymakers to exchange ideas on the most pressing state issues. NCSL is an effective and respected advocate for the interests of state governments before Congress and federal agencies.



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BACKGROUND

The roots of the Building Bridges Between Healthy Marriage, Responsible Fatherhood, and Domestic Violence Fields Conference go back several years. In 2003, the National Conference of State Legislators sponsored a meeting to discuss state healthy marriage initiatives. At this meeting, several participants noted that, with a few significant exceptions, people working in the fields of domestic violence (DV), healthy marriage (HM), and responsible fatherhood (RF) have had very little to do with one another.

Typically, they serve different populations and have a limited understanding of the experiences of each other's clients. They are largely unaware of each other's perspectives, philosophies, values, breadth of activities, and/or areas of expertise. This lack of interaction has led to misunderstandings and stereotyping. Sometimes, it has led to outright antagonism between the fields, resulting in clashes at the policy level, clashes fueled further by competition for funding.

However, it was also noted that programs in these fields have several underlying goals in common—such as fostering safe and healthy intimate partner and parent-child relationships—which strongly suggests that they would benefit from working together. Indeed, in a handful of communities and states, RF programs, DV advocates, and HM initiatives have worked hard to get to know each other and create successful partnerships. The good results of these efforts demonstrate that the tensions and barriers can be overcome.

At the 2003 meeting, several people suggested launching a dialogue among the three fields, to explore current tensions and find areas of common ground. As a first step, the Center for Law and Social Policy, with the support of the

Box 1

BUILDING BRIDGES BETWEEN HEALTHY MARRIAGE, RESPONSIBLE FATHERHOOD, AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE FIELDS CONFERENCE

May 1-3, 2006 at the
Wingspread Conference Center, Racine, Wisconsin

Co-sponsors:
the National Conference of State Legislatures
and the Center for Law and Social Policy

Goals

The goals of this invitational conference included:

- Opening a dialogue between leading representatives from these three fields
- Discussing current tensions and misunderstandings
- Exploring areas of common ground
- Identifying possible avenues for cooperation, collaboration, and joint action

This was the first time leaders from all three fields came together, although the meeting built on three national dialogues between two of the three fields and many local conversations and activities.

Participants

Selection of the 30 participants was informed by a desire for professional, ideological, racial/ethnic, and religious diversity. Most participants had worked at the practitioner level but were now more involved in community, state, and national leadership positions. At the conference, it became clear that personal and family experiences were also very diverse. (The group included a few survivors of domestic violence.) All were invited because of their strong interest in working across fields, and some already had some success in doing so (see list of participants on page 21).

Agenda and dialogue process

The idea for the conference took shape through conversations and consultations held over a period of two years. Because the issues were so divisive, the Public Conversations Project (PCP) was brought in to help design the agenda and facilitate the discussion (see www.publicconversations.org). The agenda included a combination of structured and informal conversations and exercises, held in plenary and small working groups. There was also one formal panel of research and program presentations.

Funders

On site meeting costs were provided by The Johnson Foundation of Racine, Wisconsin. Additional funding was provided by The Argosy Foundation, Brico Fund, The Annie E. Casey Foundation, Davis Family Fund, and the Institute for Community Healthy Marriage Initiatives.



National Conference of State Legislators, took the lead in planning, organizing, and seeking funding for the Building Bridges conference, which was held three years later.

This guide draws mostly on the concerns, ideas, and experiences of the 30 individuals—representing the HM, DV, and RF fields—who participated in this later conference, which was held at the Johnson Foundation's Wingspread Conference Center in Racine, Wisconsin on May 1-3, 2006 (see Box 1: BB conference).

The attendees came from diverse local, state, and national backgrounds. They came because they wanted to learn how to build bridges with programs in the other fields and knew that this was a challenging task.

The federal requirement that all ACF HM and RF grantees consult with DV experts in the development of their programs added some urgency to the conference goals. However, the desire to build bridges predates and goes beyond these federal mandates. It arises from a growing conviction that increased cooperation and collaboration will result in better outcomes.

We call this document a “preliminary guide” because this bridge-building effort is new and will evolve. There is no blueprint for these types of partnerships. Programs are learning many new ways of working together and, in the process, are discovering new unresolved issues. At this important juncture—when so many new programs have been funded—we decided it would be useful to publish and disseminate a set of promising ideas and practices that were discussed at the conference. Written publications such as this one are just a beginning. Technical assistance is also needed to assist programs in using this guide and in working with other tools that will be developed in the future.

PURPOSE OF THIS GUIDE

This guide has three overarching goals.

First, it aims to help HM and RF programs work with DV programs and experts in their own communities. All HM and RF programs that receive grants from the Administration for Children and Families are now required to consult with DV experts in developing their programs and activities. Working with DV professionals and advocates will be, for many of these programs, a very new experience.

Second, it aims to help practitioners in the DV, HM, and RF fields learn more about each other, understand the benefits of working together, and consider some specific ways of doing so.

Third, we hope this guide will have a broader audience as well. Continuing interest in these three fields means that it is important that public officials, advocates, and community leaders learn more about the interaction of the issues and how to address them.

More specifically, this guide is intended to help readers:

- Develop a better understanding of the perspectives and resources of each of the three fields, so as to create the necessary foundation for working together;
- Appreciate the value of working together with programs in the other fields;
- Discover ways to build trusting relationships with colleagues in other programs and to find areas of common ground, without losing sight of the distinctive mission and focus of their own fields; and
- Learn specific strategies for working together to achieve the goals all three fields have in common—fostering safe and healthy intimate partner relationships and parent-child relationships.

This guide summarizes key lessons that emerged from the Wingspread conference discussions. Companion text boxes, inserted throughout, explain and illustrate some points in greater detail. For further information, see the references and resources that were shared at the conference (pages 17 and 18).

KEY LESSONS LEARNED AT THE BUILDING BRIDGES CONFERENCE

LESSON 1. THESE THREE FIELDS DO NOT KNOW EACH OTHER.

There are several reasons why the fields do not know each other:

- Each field has very different historical origins, funding sources, and professional and advocacy bases. As a consequence, they have had little contact with each other.
- Each field focuses on addressing the interests and experience of its own group of clients (couples, fathers, or women). Each has a central mission that may seem to conflict with the missions of the other fields.
- The human service world is full of program “silos” (programs that operate independently of each other). This is partly because the structure of both government and foundation funding typically supports targeted activities within each field but seldom collaborative activities across silos.

LESSON 2. MISUNDERSTANDING AND STEREOTYPING OF EACH FIELD ARE COMMON.

None of these fields is homogenous. There exist within each several different strands and many ideologies and viewpoints. However, too often



the statements or actions of one or two people are wrongly assumed to represent the whole field. Examples of existing stereotypes identified at the conference include:

- Marriage proponents are against divorce in all circumstances. They believe that men should be the family decision makers and that women should stay in the kitchen, where they belong.
- Members of the DV movement believe that all men are batterers (or potential batterers), don't believe that men can change, and focus all their efforts on helping women leave their husbands.
- RF proponents make excuses for bad-acting dads, have patriarchal attitudes, and are only interested in fathers' rights. They serve only white, middle-class dads. Or, they only serve African American and Latino non-custodial fathers.

False stereotypes such as these can lead to unwarranted fears, concerns, and confusion. But, when the facts about these fields are revealed and understood, stereotypes usually diminish or disappear (see **Box 2: Healthy marriage**; **Box 3: Responsible fatherhood**, p. 8; and **Box 4: Domestic violence**, p. 9).

LESSON 3. THE TERMS AND DEFINITIONS USED BY EACH FIELD ARE NOT WELL KNOWN TO THE OTHER FIELDS OR TO THE GENERAL PUBLIC.

- The terms “domestic violence,” “healthy marriage,” and “responsible fatherhood” are not well understood (see **Box 5: Defining HM**, p. 10; **Box 6: Defining RF**, p. 10; and **Box 7: Defining DV**, p. 11).
- Each field is currently in the process of clarifying and refining its basic definitions and terms, in order to reflect emerging concerns, new research, and the need to serve increasingly diverse populations.

Box 2

HEALTHY MARRIAGE FIELD—WHO ARE WE?

History and origins

In terms of public recognition and government funding, the HM field is “the new kid on the block” (Ooms, 2005). However, its roots in marriage and relationships research and education programs go back to the ‘50s and ‘60s. The field then grew, in response to rising concern about the negative economic and psychological effects—on children and adults alike—of the increasing rates of divorce and out-of-wedlock childrearing. Existing counseling and therapy services offered to distressed couples provided too little help, too late. A more preventive, educational approach was needed.

The belief, supported by new research, was that individuals and couples could learn the knowledge, attitudes, and skills needed to have a healthy and happy relationship, make wise marital choices, and stay successfully married. Traditionally, the programs were offered to participants for a fee or for free as part of a church ministry or military program. Now that many programs are funded with state and federal funds, they are generally provided at no cost. In 1996, the U.S. Congress enacted welfare reform, which was the first federal law to establish promotion of marriage and reduction of out-of-wedlock childbearing as federal policy goals. The law encouraged states to spend funds from the new Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program (TANF) on pursuing these goals. In 2001, the federal government began for the first time to fund marriage education programs around the country.

People and programs

Until recently, most providers of marriage and relationships education were mental health professionals, pastoral counselors, military chaplains, family life extension educators, and community volunteers. Programs were few and far between.

Nowadays, new programs are continually being created—but no national standards or credentials yet exist. A handful of best-practice programs and curricula have emerged and received national recognition and public funding. These flagship programs and curricula are evidence-based (i.e. the concepts and skills taught are grounded in research) and secular in content. They conduct standardized training programs using teaching manuals, and most have been evaluated.

In response to increased interest and government funding, a much wider group of professionals and community, faith, and lay individuals are now being trained to offer these programs to increased num-

bers and more diverse populations in a wider variety of settings (including TANF, child welfare, newborn home visiting programs, prisons, refugee and migrant programs, and faith communities).

Activities

Marriage and relationship education (MRE) can be provided to the general public through media campaigns, Web sites, brochures, self-help books, self-guided internet courses, etc. Most often, MRE is provided in structured workshops, classes, or seminars offered to couples on a voluntary basis in the community, on campuses, in churches and schools, and on military bases.

The curricula are generally taught in group settings, with information presented and skills taught through a mixture of lectures, structured discussion, videotapes, interactive exercises, and homework tasks. Programs have been customized for high school students, individual adults, engaged couples, married couples seeking enrichment, highly distressed couples, and remarried/stepparent couples.

Constituency

MRE programs have traditionally been offered to committed couples, whether engaged or married, and largely to white, middle-income populations. This is changing rapidly. Programs are now being offered to individuals and unmarried partners, and to populations from more diverse economic, racial, ethnic, cultural, and religious backgrounds.

Current trends

As the field expands and reaches out to serve more diverse populations, several trends are emerging:

- Curricula are being designed for and adapted to the specific needs of more diverse populations and settings.
- There is a greater focus on defining and measuring the term “healthy” in relationships and marriage, and greater awareness of the need to better understand and respond to issues of domestic violence.
- Community-wide HM initiatives and coalitions are mobilizing awareness and are organizing and expanding resources for strengthening marriage activities.
- State government agencies and programs are getting involved in sponsoring and designing MRE activities, often integrating them into existing state services.



- Each field is also struggling with what might be the most appropriate and useful measures to evaluate how successful its efforts are in reducing domestic violence and encouraging and supporting healthy marriage and responsible fatherhood.

LESSON 4. THERE ARE SOME GENUINE CONCERNS AND FEARS THAT KEEP THESE FIELDS APART.

Some of the core concerns, circulating in each field, that were voiced at the Wingspread discussions include:

- Many in the DV community are concerned that the implementation of HM and RF programs may threaten the lives and safety of women and their children, by inadvertently ignoring the risk of domestic violence among program participants. They also fear that women in abusive relationships will be encouraged to marry, stay married, or remain with a cohabiting partner. They also fear that participation in HM and RF programs will not be truly voluntary if it is linked to other services and benefits.
- Fatherhood representatives voice the concern that DV programs often stereotype men and treat them all the same, do not acknowledge some of the systemic and economic problems that contribute to battering, and ignore the fact that men are sometimes the victims of domestic violence. Similarly, they fear that HM programs may underplay the economic and other barriers that can contribute to fathers avoiding marriage.
- A concern expressed by members of the HM community is that the DV and RF fields do not acknowledge the importance of strengthening marriage, and that they ignore the fact that a healthy marriage is what most people

Box 3

RESPONSIBLE FATHERHOOD FIELD—WHO ARE WE?

History and origins

Government interest in promoting fatherhood has waxed and waned since the '80s. The federal government's interest began in the early '80s, when researchers highlighted the problems of "father absence," namely, that too many fathers—whether married, separated, divorced, or never married—were not fulfilling their financial, social, or moral responsibilities to their children. At the same time, other studies emphasized the important positive role that fathers play in their children's lives.

Community-based demonstration programs were established in the '70s and early '80s with substantial private foundation funds and only later with modest federal and state government funding. These programs aimed to help connect or reconnect teen fathers and unwed fathers to their children (Young Unwed Fathers Pilot Program), to help non-custodial dads pay child support (Parents Fair Share Demonstration), and to promote "father involvement" in numerous program settings such as Head Start. National organizations were also founded to promote attention to fathers more generally.

In the early '90s, Vice President Gore launched a cross-agency federal fatherhood initiative stimulating increased research on fathers and new program development. A handful of states launched fatherhood initiatives. In the late '90s, there was strong bipartisan congressional support for legislation (Fathers Count) designed to help low-income fathers fulfill their economic responsibilities, but this was never enacted. Public and private funding for fatherhood programs declined dramatically in the '90s. However, responsible fatherhood became one of the key new initiatives of the Bush administration, and the reauthorization of TANF in 2006 provided new federal funds for RF programs.

Programs and constituencies

There are currently four distinct yet overlapping strands within the fatherhood field, strands that sometimes get confused with each other:

- Promoting fatherhood. A broadly focused effort to help all fathers become engaged, committed, and responsible. This effort is led by a handful of national and state organizations that conduct media campaigns, public education, program training and technical assistance, and provide information to fathers themselves.

- Responsible fatherhood. A more targeted effort to provide comprehensive services to low-income, non-custodial, and non-resident fathers—primarily urban African American and Latino fathers. Services include job training and referral, parent education, support groups, and help with child support obligations.
- Father/male involvement. A growing number of innovative programs are designed to work with employers and with early childhood and child welfare professionals and teachers to reach out to men and fathers to help them become more involved with their children. In addition, some reproductive health programs focus on helping young men avoid becoming fathers "too soon."
- Fathers' rights groups. These are the oldest, most vocal, and perhaps best financed fatherhood organizations. They are concerned primarily with divorced and separated fathers' rights and needs. Fathers' rights groups offer information and advocacy to these fathers, especially with respect to child support and visitation, and work vigorously for legal changes (e.g. joint custody). These groups are not being funded by the new federal RF program.

Current trends

Emerging trends in the fatherhood field include:

- The development of materials and activities that address issues of intimate partner violence and of services for men who batter
- Designing materials and activities intended to improve co-parenting relationships and, when appropriate, encourage marriage
- Reaching out to provide information and assistance to incarcerated dads and to support them when they re-enter the community



want for themselves and their children. Some HM representatives also worry that instituting procedures to screen out potential program participants involved in abusive situations may prevent some individuals or couples from learning that they are in unhealthy relationships and taking steps to leave. At the same time, screening-out procedures may also exclude other couples who could benefit from staying in the program and learning how to manage their anger and avoid dangerous negative interactions in the future.

LESSON 5. THERE ARE MANY GOOD REASONS TO LEARN TO WORK TOGETHER.

The best way to allay these fears and concerns is to work together to find ways of resolving them collectively, usually within a local community. Conference participants also mentioned additional reasons to work together:

- When the fields operate in silos, they reduce their effectiveness and may sometimes, inadvertently, do serious harm. They may also miss opportunities to do good. For example: *A young couple attends a premarital education program that does not include information about domestic violence. As a result, the woman does not recognize the early warning signs of what eventually turns out to be an abusive marriage.*
- Those who have learned to work together know that when they do so they are each more effective, and everyone wins—especially the children. For example: *A non-custodial father becomes more positively involved with his children after he attends a relationships and marriage education course with their mother, at which they learn how to parent cooperatively and seriously consider marriage.*

Box 4

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE FIELD—WHO ARE WE?

History and origins

The DV movement is the oldest of the three fields. It dates back to the '70s, when the first shelters and battered women's programs were set up and grassroots activists worked hard to get critical legal protections in place, educate police, and increase public awareness. Congress passed legislation in 1981 to create a federal funding stream for core DV services throughout the country. The Violence Against Women's Act (VAWA), passed in 1994, was the first federal legislation to acknowledge domestic violence and sexual assault as crimes and provide federal resources to encourage community-coordinated approaches to combating violence.

Since the mid-'70s, more than 2,000 community-based DV programs have been organized throughout the U.S. In addition, state, tribal, and territorial coalitions have been established; comprehensive training and technical assistance networks have been developed; and collaborative efforts to enhance health care, criminal justice, social service, and community responses to domestic violence have been initiated. These programs and services are funded through many different state, federal, and private foundation funding sources.

Activities

DV programs typically provide 24-hour crisis hotlines, individual and group support and counseling, legal and medical advocacy, support groups for adults and children, and other specialized services. A major emphasis of these services is safety planning with DV victims. More than half of these programs also provide emergency shelter to family members who are not safe in their own homes. Some large programs also provide employment services, respite care, and childcare programs; and some also offer batterer intervention programs, either directly or through a collaborative relationship.

Many programs are actively involved in community

education and awareness activities and conduct violence prevention activities (e.g., in schools). Although the network of DV services is now extensive across the U. S., there are too few programs available in rural communities and for Native American and migrant populations.

Constituency

Community-based programs serve a large and diverse population, reflecting the reality that domestic violence cuts across socioeconomic, racial and ethnic, religious, and geographic lines. The circumstances, resources, and needs of individual DV victims vary, as does the status of their relationship with an abusive partner.

The vast majority of victims reaching out for DV services are not seeking emergency shelter but rather other types of support services for themselves or their children. While not all DV victims are poor, poverty and domestic violence often exacerbate each other and increase the need for services and supports. Poor women often have a harder time escaping domestic violence; and abuse by an intimate partner, which often includes economic coercion and sabotage, can keep a victim in poverty or increase her economic risks.

Current trends

Current program trends include:

- The growing recognition of the co-occurrence of domestic violence and child abuse and the growing concern for children who witness domestic violence are leading to greater collaboration between DV and child abuse services.
- Men are more involved in efforts to engage youth and adult men in violence prevention activities.
- Looking ahead, the field is seeking to develop innovative prevention strategies to reduce the incidence of family violence.

- Practitioners of the three fields often are unaware that their programs are serving different members of the same families and may often be working toward cross-purposes. For example: *An RF program encourages a father to visit his son more frequently, while at the same time a DV advocate across*

town, aware of the father's abusive history, is working with the mother to restrict his visits to his son.

- Families and couples are complex, interdependent systems. A program generally cannot help one member of a family without



having effects on the other(s). For example: *A DV program is working with an abused mother who really wants to stay with her husband and keep her family together. She wants him to learn to stop hitting her; she also wants him to find a job. And she wants help for her troubled children. By itself, the DV program is unlikely to be able to help this woman achieve all her goals for her family.*

**LESSON 6. THE FIELDS DO SHARE
A LOT OF COMMON GROUND.**

The conference participants engaged in a process of open dialogue, in which they learned more about each other's missions and values and expressed their concerns and fears. They were then able to identify and agree on a set of basic goals and principles shared across the HM, RF, and DV fields—at least among those present. It was a rich and informative process, through which the group recognized that they were all committed to several overarching goals, albeit goals that they seldom made explicit:

- Ending family and intimate partner violence and supporting and encouraging healthy relationships, healthy marriages, and responsible fatherhood
- Promoting child well-being by ensuring that children grow up in a family environment that is free of violence and in which relationships are respectful, responsible, and healthy
- Ensuring safety for all family members
- Building cross-field cooperation and collaborations that are meaningful and respectful

Box 5

DEFINING HEALTHY MARRIAGE

In the last few years, researchers and marriage educators have been working to develop a consensus definition of a “healthy marriage.” Clearly, happy, long-lasting marriages come in all shapes and sizes. But can we identify some of the core characteristics that they have in common?

A comprehensive review of the research conducted by Child Trends (Moore et al., 2004) found that healthy marriages are those in which couples:

- Are committed to each other for the long haul
- Are satisfied overall with their marriage
- Have positive communication
- Can resolve disagreements and conflicts
- Never resort to violence or abuse
- Are sexually (and psychologically) faithful
- Spend positive, enjoyable time together
- Provide intimacy and emotional support
- Are mutually committed to any children they have

Scott Stanley and Howard Markman (Stanley, 2004) believe it is useful to think about healthy marriages as those which have three fundamental types of safety:

- Safety in interaction. Being able to talk openly and well (enough) about key issues without repeated negative interactions (escalation of conflict, criticism, put-downs, withdrawal, contempt, and so forth)
- Personal safety. Mutual respect and understanding, and freedom from fear of physical or emotional harm and intimidation
- Commitment safety. Security of mutual support both now and in the future.

Box 6

DEFINING RESPONSIBLE FATHERHOOD

The concept of responsible, involved fatherhood cuts across all the strands in the fatherhood movement. The definition most broadly accepted was initially provided in 1995 by James Levine and Edward Pitt. The following is an excerpt of this definition:

A man who behaves responsibly towards his child and family does the following:

- He waits to make a baby until he is prepared emotionally and financially to support his child.
- He establishes his legal paternity if and when he does make a baby.

- He actively shares with the child's mother in the continuing emotional and physical care of their child, from pregnancy onwards.
- He shares with the child's mother in the continuing financial support of their child, from pregnancy onwards (5-6).

Since then, two additional components of responsible fatherhood are gaining increasing acceptance in the field:

- He has a respectful, caring, non-violent, and committed relationship to his child's mother.
- He waits to make a baby until he finds a woman he wants to marry to be the mother.



LESSON 7. BEFORE ATTEMPTING TO WORK TOGETHER, DEVELOP STRATEGIC PLANS TO BUILD TRUST AND UNDERSTANDING.

When planning to collaborate across fields, it is important first to spend some time creating a trusting relationship. Without intentional and strategic action this might not happen. Meetings that do not include strategies to encourage open and constructive dialogue may only exacerbate misunderstandings and bad feelings. What is intended to be a productive discussion may turn into an acrid debate.

It was clear that the Wingspread conference brought together individuals and groups that were potentially polarized—and that passions might run high. The Public Conversations Project (PCP) was contracted to help design, prepare for, and conduct the Wingspread meeting, using a male/female team of facilitators trained in PCP's structured, well-tested dialogue process.

Some of the PCP processes and tools that were helpful at Wingspread included:

- Interviewing all participants in advance, to identify their hopes and fears for the meeting
- Agreeing on a set of ground rules designed to facilitate respectful listening and speaking and to prevent anyone from dominating the discussions
- Engaging in group exercises that asked participants to identify attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs commonly attributed to the other fields, in order to uncover stereotypes and examine misconceptions
- Providing a safe environment to openly share ideas and personal experiences and to ask questions without fear of being attacked

Box 7

DEFINING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

The traditional definition of domestic violence¹ most widely used and accepted within the DV field is some variation of the following:

Domestic violence is a pattern of coercive behavior in which one person attempts to control another through threats or actual use of physical violence, sexual assault, verbal and psychological abuse, and/or economic coercion.

This is the type of violence most often reported to the authorities; is characteristic of victims seeking legal, health, and social and support services; and is measured and tracked in agency data. It has been graphically portrayed in the widely used Duluth model Power and Control Wheel (www.duluth-model.org/wheels).

At the conference, Dr. Michael Johnson, a feminist family scholar and DV advocate, said that in the last decade researchers have been paying increased attention to identifying different types of violence within intimate relationships and different types of perpetrator behavior. Scholars are using new terminology to describe these differences, such as “intimate terrorism,” “situational couple violence,” “characterological violence,” and “violent resistance.”

For example, Johnson says that “intimate terrorism” is being used to refer to violence that is highly gendered and nearly always perpetrated by a man terrorizing a woman. It corresponds to the definition used broadly by the DV community (see above).

“Situational couple violence,” a term that Johnson coined, is when a disagreement turns into an angry, nasty, two-way argument that then escalates into violence—hitting, shoving, biting, or worse. “Although this type of violence is almost as likely to be perpetrated by women as by men, men do more serious damage and their violence is more likely to introduce fear into a relationship and get the authorities involved” (Johnson, 2006). He explained that it is very important that the marriage

field not underestimate the potential seriousness of this type of violence. “The violence can be mild or severe; and, although often an isolated incident, some couples have a recurring pattern of such violence that is extremely dangerous.”

Many of the DV conference participants expressed the view that it is premature to use these research distinctions without more in-depth discussion and debate. They are worried about how they may be misunderstood and misused by program practitioners. They are concerned that, in individual situations, we do not yet know how to accurately make these distinctions or whether and how situational violence may evolve into intimate terrorism. They fear that dangerously violent situations may be too easily dismissed as “simply situational” and thus not considered dangerous. At the same time, some of the marriage and fatherhood representatives at the conference expressed the concern that some situational couple conflicts may be incorrectly viewed and responded to as if they are situations of intimate terrorism.

It is clearly a very complex, sensitive, and troubling ongoing debate that surfaced at the Wingspread conference; and it was by no means resolved there. Everyone agreed, however, that meanwhile it is extremely important to educate HM and RF practitioners about red flags for domestic violence (as the movement defines it) and about how to respond and help a victim obtain the services available in a community.

A great deal more discussion, debate, and research are needed to explore two key questions:

- How do we best distinguish between domestic violence and others types of conflict and violent behavior that occur within intimate relationships?
- What are the implications of these definitions and distinctions for the policies and practices of HM and RF programs, particularly as they relate to recruitment, screening and assessment, and staff and volunteer training?

¹ The terms domestic violence, spouse abuse, battering, sexual assault, intimate partner/couple violence, intimate terrorism and so forth generally refer to physical or psychological violence that occurs between a male/ female couple who are married or sexually intimate, or a same-sex couple. Family violence is a broader term and includes child abuse and elder abuse as well.



- Moving toward action, by having participants identify concrete steps that all felt were promising

At the Wingspread conference, although the participants came from different starting points—some had virtually no experience working across fields, and others had quite a lot—all were interested in building bridges. They agreed, however, that their attitudes might not be typical. In many communities across America, there may be considerable distrust and reluctance to engage with one another. It is vitally important to spend the time and effort—preferably, in some kind of dialogue process—to get to know one another and overcome these barriers. But it's important also to acknowledge that in some communities people simply may not yet be ready to try to work together at all.

LESSON 8. EACH FIELD CONTINUES TO EVOLVE AND TO BROADEN ITS APPROACH TO DELIVERING SERVICES.

As each field reaches out to serve more diverse populations and/or respond to new challenges, there is a growing openness to modifying and expanding traditional approaches. These trends create new opportunities for learning from and working with the other fields.

- Historically, marriage education programs were designed largely by and for white, middle-class individuals and couples in committed relationships (married or engaged). With the advent of government interest and funding, the field is now adapting program designs and curricula to more effectively serve economically, racially, and ethnically diverse populations, as well as individuals and couples in a range of family situations.

- When the DV movement was launched over three decades ago, it succeeded in getting critical legal protections in place, educating the public, and developing services and shelters designed to protect battered women. Now, efforts in many communities also include helping abused women who choose to remain in their own homes do so safely, providing services for male batterers, and increasing focus on community education and outreach activities.

- A similar broadening of activities is underway in the fatherhood field. Community-based RF programs—which generally have served primarily low income, non-custodial dads—are appreciating the need to offer services to couples (such as co-parenting classes) and are learning how to help married dads. National and state fatherhood programs are seeking ways to reach specific groups of low-income dads, such as those who are incarcerated, and to tailor information to them.

LESSON 9. THERE ARE MANY WAYS TO WORK TOGETHER PRODUCTIVELY.

Wingspread Building Bridges participants identified many ways that programs in the three fields can work together at community, state, and national levels to give better services to individuals and families (**see Box 8: Working together for better outcomes, p. 13**). Some of these are activities already underway in a few communities; others are suggestions for activities that seem promising:

- Participate in common-ground dialogues or similar forums, in order to understand each other's perspectives, build trust, and plan joint actions
- Cross-train staff, to facilitate mutual understanding and cooperation

- Cooperate on developing protocols for sharing information and making referrals in ways that respect client confidentiality
- Contract with program staff from other fields to consult about new components (related to DV, HM, or RF) to be included in program design, curricula, and materials
- Co-locate staff and activities. For example: A DV advocate might have an office in a RF program, and a HM program could offer a relationships education class in a women's shelter.
- Reference the other fields' programs in organizational brochures, Web sites, and other materials as appropriate
- In public education and promotional materials, emphasize the goals shared with the other fields
- Collaborate on developing joint DV practice guidelines and/or protocols

LESSON 10. THE THREE GROUPS CAN AND SHOULD WORK TOGETHER ON PRIMARY PREVENTION.

The fields of RF, HM, and DV are each theoretically committed to working on primary prevention through the promotion of safe and healthy relationships. But their primary prevention efforts are often quite modest and disconnected from each other.

Consider the following hypothetical scenario of some prevention efforts targeting youth in a large urban area:

- *A DV program addresses dating violence prevention in area high schools by working closely with sports coaches in a program specifically designed to reach out to teen boys.*



- *In two of the high schools, as part of an elective marriage and family life course, a family life educator teaches tenth-grade students—mostly girls—how to have healthy, respectful relationships.*
- *In one of the high schools, 11th-grade boys are enrolled in a program, funded by the state child support office, that is designed to promote responsible fatherhood and includes a module on relationships.*
- *In a middle school, eighth graders learn how to be peer mediators and intervene in peer conflicts that erupt in the classroom (and can spillover into the neighborhood).*

None of the program staff have any contact or know about each other's materials or curricula, and parents and community leaders are largely unaware of these prevention efforts.

This example is hypothetical but plausible, as similar activities are scattered around the U.S. It strongly suggests that programs within these three fields can and should do more to combine their efforts on primary prevention activities in a particular community. Possible areas for collaboration include:

- Targeting community leaders, parents, and/or youth with jointly crafted public health/media campaign messages promoting safe and healthy relationships
- Developing joint strategies to counteract pervasive cultural/media messages that glorify violence of all kinds—and especially towards women—and target youth and young adults
- Working together on educational programs and curricula for youth in high schools and community programs
- Integrating healthy relationships material into other community-based prevention efforts, such as teen pregnancy and substance abuse prevention programs.

Box 8

WORKING TOGETHER FOR BETTER OUTCOMES

Once a relationship of trust has been established and the three types of programs have developed a better understanding of each others' perspective and their clients' experiences, what are some of the questions and issues on which they can work together? Most of the discussion to date has focused on how HM and RF programs can best respond to the concerns of the DV community. However, the relationships created by building bridges need to go in both directions. The DV community can learn and benefit from working with HM and RF programs, and the HM and RF communities can help each other do their jobs better as well.

Through creating ongoing opportunities for cross training staff, making referrals, and providing consultation to each other, programs in these three fields can better serve their clients/constituents. Here are some examples:

- *A young, low-income, newly married father participating in a HM program was referred to a local RF program to get some job counseling or training and to participate in a fathers' support group and a program to teach fathering skills.*
- *A young mother—who, as a child and adult, had survived several abusive relationships and had never seen a healthy male/female relationship—enrolled in a relationships skills program offered in a community battered women's shelter. These classes gave her the information and skills she needed to create and sustain a healthy relationship with her children and with any future partner.*

- *An HM program that was having trouble getting Latino men to attend the church-based marriage education program successfully consulted with the community RF program to learn effective ways of recruiting Latino men, which also involved making some changes in the program curriculum.*
- *An RF program that worked hard to connect African American nonresident fathers to their children found that a major barrier to overcome was the reluctance of many of the mothers, who were angry about their children's fathers' failure to pay regular child support. The RF program reached out to consult with the local HM program, and the result was the development of a curriculum exploring relationships, co-parenting, and marriage—which participants found to be very helpful.*
- *A young engaged woman learned in a premarital education program, sponsored by the Catholic Church, that it was not normal for her fiancé to beat her up every time he went drinking with his friends or to tell her that she had to stop visiting her friends because he didn't like them. Without telling him, she called the phone number of the local DV services, a number included in the program handout listing community resources. As a result, she got help in breaking her engagement safely.*

LESSON 11. THE BUILDING BRIDGES AGENDA REQUIRES CONTINUED STRUGGLE WITH SEVERAL TOUGH AND COMPLEX ISSUES.

By the end of the conference, there were several issues that remained unresolved. Participants agreed that much more collective exploration, discussion, and strategizing are needed. Two of the main issues are discussed below:

1. Respecting diversity and responding in culturally competent ways

The group agreed that there are important cultural, racial, religious, and geographic

differences in individuals' attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors related to marriage, fatherhood, and domestic violence. They also agreed that it is important to identify what these differences are before attempting to develop culturally relevant and appropriate programs. In doing so, it is important to avoid the dangers of stereotyping, since within specific racial, ethnic, and religious subgroups there are also many differences (see Box 9: Cultural issues, p. 14).



Box 9

CULTURAL ISSUES IN HEALTHY MARRIAGE, RESPONSIBLE FATHERHOOD, AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

The importance of recognizing that, in all three fields, many cultural factors affect program design and implementation was discussed at some length at the Building Bridges conference. Dr. Julia Perilla, a community psychologist and DV advocate, talked about her work identifying the cultural issues involved in working with Latino communities around domestic violence (see Perilla, 2006). Other participants talked about their growing awareness and understanding of the ways that racial, ethnic, religious, and socioeconomic factors influence and shape behavior and attitudes towards marriage and fatherhood, and whether and how different groups respond to services. A few of the themes of this rich and complex discussion—and some illustrative examples—are below:

- Generalizing about Latinos can be problematic due to their great diversity, based in part on country of origin, religion, and whether they are immigrants or second- or earlier-generation Americans of Latin American, Spanish, or Portuguese origin. Similarly, one should be wary about generalizing about Asian Americans, Native American Indians, Alaskan Natives, Pacific Islanders, and other broad ethnic or racial groups. Simplistic, cookbook approaches to any culture run the risk of fueling stereotypes and delivering ineffective services.
- Cultural factors need to be seen in context. In recent years, several meetings and conferences on African American Marriage have explored the interaction between historical factors (e.g., the decades of slavery), economic factors (e.g., high rates of poverty and male unemployment), and cultural factors (e.g., antagonistic gender relations) that together help contribute to the low rates of marriage among

African Americans in recent decades (Morehouse Research Institute, 2000; AAHMI, 2005). Hence relationships and marriage education programs tailored specifically to African Americans now frequently include Afro-centric themes and concepts, may have men and women meet in separate groups (at least in the beginning), and are usually linked with employment and other economic-related services.

- To understand the phenomenon of domestic violence in Latino and other immigrant communities, one needs to understand the historic, economic, cultural, and religious framework. For example Dr. Perilla noted that many of the violent Latino men she worked with have had horrendous experiences of war and violence in their childhood. This is also true of many refugee populations.
- In pre-colonial times, American Indian men held a place of honor in their tribes and their families. They played important roles as providers and protectors. More recently, Native American fathers have been marginalized from their communities and increasingly disconnected from stable family life and from their children. A handful of fatherhood organizations are helping these men reclaim their lives and empowering them to become good, caring, and responsible fathers. This is done through tapping into the deep spirituality of the Native American culture and teaching fathers that “fatherhood is sacred,” meaning that “to father a child is more than a biological act, or a social role to fulfill. To father a child is sacred work” (Brotherson, 2004).
- HM programs are currently working with refugees from over 30 different countries in

Eastern Europe, Africa, and Southeast Asia. In working with the leadership from these refugee groups to develop culturally appropriate programming, numerous challenges have been identified. For example, many refugee populations hold ideas about gender roles and relationships with extended family that are very different from those predominant in the U.S. They have different ideas about taboo conversation topics; tend to hold group-oriented values higher than individualistic ones; and communicate in a way governed by different rules, patterns, and expectations. For example, the concept of “active listening”—a core concept of many marriage education curricula—is not useful to the Sudanese, for whom repeating what you have just heard a partner say is seen as a clear sign of anger. Further, in many of these communities, the concept of adult education is quite unfamiliar, and men and women are never expected to be present in the same room (Fertelmeyster, 2006).

- The process of acculturation to U.S. ideas of gender equality has been largely embraced by Latinas and, to a lesser extent, by Asian and other groups of immigrant women. But it is often resisted by their partners, who fear the women will abandon their traditional roles of wife and mother. This can cause increasing tension and conflict among couples and may contribute to incidents of domestic violence or to family break-up. Perilla suggested that this is a primary reason that DV programs must work with the male partners of abused women, an undertaking that is generally most effective in groups. She also recommends working with the children of a family.

It was also agreed that it is critical that organizations providing services to particular cultural groups invite representatives of these groups to be at the table from the beginning to help design, implement, and evaluate the information and/or services. This is especially important at present, as the influx of new federal funding across the country is producing many new programs.

However, there are some tough questions on which there is as yet no consensus. What are the limits to respecting cultural diversity? Just as not all aspects of family life are positive, not all aspects of cultural traditions are benign. Sometimes a particular belief or custom conflicts with U.S. law or with the prevailing social norms and values of the majority. How and when can one acknowledge, respect, and even

tolerate these cultural differences without sanctioning or excusing something that is unacceptable in the larger U.S. culture? Some examples of situations in which these questions can arise:

- In some communities—especially in communities with high levels of economic stress and in refugee populations that come from war-torn areas—people may have



become inured to violence in intimate relationships, viewing it as normal, or at least as something to be tolerated.

- In some cultural and religious traditions, divorce is unacceptable—which may lead to tolerance of greater degrees of personal unhappiness, conflict, and mistreatment than are acceptable to most Americans.
- In some traditions, male infidelity is expected and accepted—whereas female infidelity is severely punished—and men but not women are free to divorce at will.

What is the appropriate programmatic response to these and other cultural norms and realities? Practitioners in all three fields will need to do a lot more thinking and discussion about when and how to acknowledge and respect these different aspects of cultural diversity.

2. Developing program guidelines for addressing domestic violence concerns.

As noted, the federal government now requires that all HM and RF grantees consult with DV experts in the development of their programs. While DV advocates support this requirement, they remain concerned that this “unfunded mandate” places additional responsibilities on already overtaxed DV programs. They hope that HM and RF programs receiving federal funds will fairly compensate DV programs for the expertise they bring to these initiatives.

For the past two years, the Lewin Group, in collaboration with the National Resource Center on Domestic Violence, has provided technical assistance to all HM grantees to help them develop site-specific DV guidelines, termed “protocols” (see Menard and Williams, 2006). However, we do not yet know how these guidelines are being implemented or what their results will be. **Box 10, Domestic violence guidelines**, suggests some questions and issues that need to be addressed in the process of developing the protocols.

Box 10

GUIDELINES FOR DEALING WITH DOMESTIC VIOLENCE CONCERNS

In the past two years, the federal government has provided technical assistance to healthy marriage program grantees to help them develop “domestic violence protocols.” These protocols include a set of written goals, expectations, and procedures laying out how the program will ensure that DV issues are identified and addressed appropriately within each program (see Menard and Williams, 2006).

No standard protocol is being recommended.

Protocols are designed to be site specific—tailored to the particular population, setting, and type of program being provided, which can vary a great deal. The experience of providing technical assistance on protocol development suggests that some of the questions and issues the HM and RF program protocol/guidelines need to address include:

- How and by whom will potential participants in HM activities be identified? Is the population being served at high risk for experiencing domestic violence (e.g., child welfare or TANF clients)?
- How will DV issues be explored with potential participants? By whom, and at what points of contact?
- What happens when disclosures of domestic violence occur? What types of training will staff need to respond to disclosures, whenever they occur?
- Should those who disclose violence in their relationship be excluded from participating in the program? What will be done to help them get the help they need? How will their confidentiality be ensured?
- How will DV disclosure information be shared among the project partners? How will the confidentiality and privacy of DV victims be maintained?
- How do the HM curricula and other program materials to be used in the project address DV issues, including distinguishing them from other types of conflict?
- What roles can local and state DV experts play in the design and implementation of marriage education activities to ensure that adequate supports and safeguards are in place?

We do know that much more needs to be learned about how to pursue the goals of safety in the context of HM and RF activities. Toward this end, conference participants agreed that at least three steps are necessary:

- Build—at national, state, and local levels—two-way relationships between these fields, relationships built on respect for each others’ missions and expertise
- Develop a common understanding of the different terms and definitions used to describe intimate partner violence and conflict, and agree on how these terms should be operationalized in practice

- Identify and describe strategies to address safety concerns raised by DV advocates while maximizing the opportunity to promote and teach healthy relationships. This will involve a range of approaches, tailored to different types of program settings and contexts. For example, the guidelines for a six-week relationship workshop offered in the community to any individual or couple who walks in the door will be very different from those developed for programs that require a structured intake process.



CONCLUSION: WHAT DID THE PARTICIPANTS GAIN FROM THE BUILDING BRIDGES CONFERENCE?

The Wingspread conference laid the groundwork for the important and challenging work of building bridges between the three fields. The participants learned a great deal of new information about each others' fields and developed valuable personal relationships across them.

They spoke frankly about their fears and concerns and were then able to talk together about constructive ways to work together in the future.

The participants urged that the lessons they had learned at this meeting needed to be summarized and widely disseminated to practitioners in each field. This guide is an effort to capture the valuable insights and lessons that were shared.

In the final wrap-up session, participants spoke about what the meeting had meant to them and what they had individually learned. Here are some of their comments:

- *I take away that...we are all really working towards healthy relationships, including healthy marriage, which is a different way of thinking about it for me.*
- *I learned that what we think is obvious about our work is not, and we need to be open to queries and make clear who we are and what we do. There's still a lot we need to talk about, and I hope we can continue to do so in the spirit of this meeting.*
- *Although our destination is the same, our trajectory is somewhat different; and the more we engage with one another the closer those trajectories come together.*
- *I really learned something new, started to feel something break away and opened my eyes... It reinforced for me how important it is that we learn about what "they" do.*
- *What has been great about this meeting is that it's really been a cross-cultural experience for me. And now that we've become comfortable with each other, we can even talk about our strange relatives!*
- *Although these are really complex issues...with enough time we can really work through them...with an open mind and heart. But I leave feeling that there's still some tension, some unfinished work to do, not really wrapped up.*
- *I return with more compassion for my colleagues from other fields who were not here... I can understand them better, their hesitations about what I am doing.*
- *I leave with greater confidence [that we can work across these fields]...knowing that we do have a shared set of values. The biggest thing is that we've modeled the beginning of a healthy relationship right here: communicating and really listening to the other person, avoiding harsh start-ups, thinking carefully about what to say so that it would be heard, taking risks, confronting conflict and then taking steps to resolve it.*
- *I especially appreciated the ideas we can take back to the communities where...the job is even harder... We need to help them have this kind of dialogue.*
- *I gained appreciation for different perspectives and for the passion that drives us all... This work is so important. I sensed there was cautious optimism on day one, now on day three there is optimistic caution as we go forth... All I can say is, "Charge!"*





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RESOURCES

Administration for Children and Families, DHHS

For information about the Administration for Children and Families initiatives, programs, and funding related to healthy marriage, responsible fatherhood, and domestic violence see www.acf.hhs.gov. This Web site also has information on ACF's African American Healthy Marriage Initiative, the Hispanic Healthy Marriage Initiative, and the Native American Healthy Marriage Initiative.

Healthy marriage

Center for Law and Social Policy (www.clasp.org)

Coalition on Marriage, Family and Couples Education (www.smartmarriages.com)

National Healthy Marriage Resource Center (www.healthymarriageinfo.org)

Fatherhood

Center on Fathers, Families, and Public Policy (www.cfpp.org)

Center on Fathers, Families and Workforce Development (www.cfdw.org)

Native American Fatherhood and Family Association (www.nativeamericanfathers.org)

National Center on Fathering (www.fathers.com)

National Fatherhood Initiative (www.fatherhood.org)

National Latino Fatherhood and Family Institute (www.nlffi.org)

Domestic violence

Faith Trust Institute (www.faithtrustinstitute.org)

Family Violence Prevention Fund (www.endabuse.org)

Institute on Domestic Violence in the African American Community (www.dvinstitute.org)

National Online Resource Center on Violence Against Women (www.vawnet.org)

National Resource Center on Domestic Violence (www.nrcdv.org)

Women of Color Network (<http://womenofcolornetwork.org>)

Organizations that promote “common ground” community dialogues

Public Conversations Project (www.publicconversations.org)

Study Circles Resource Center (www.studyircles.org)

National Issues Forums Institute (www.nifi.org)





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