

# “The Lightning Rod”: Reflections of a Female Facilitator of Men’s Groups

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**Abstract:** Framed by feminist theories, the Partner Assault Response (PAR) group offered by the John Howard Society (JHS) in Canada helps men understand the impacts of intimate partner violence and challenge underlying beliefs that perpetuate the cycle of violence toward women. This paper—drawing on my field journals and participant observation—narrates my unique experience as a female part of a facilitator duo and includes salient actions for supporting participants’ journeys. However, facilitating men’s groups is fraught with pitfalls for female facilitators. The paper also makes explicit the implications of my experiences for other social workers and helping professionals. The central implication rests on the usefulness of sociological, systemic, and structural lenses—including feminist theory, socialization theory, the developmental perspective, and social learning processes and group dynamics—to foster changes in the cognitive, emotional, motivational, and behavioral patterns of male perpetrators of violence and their interactions with women.

**Keywords:** group dynamics, female facilitator, men, partner assault, violence, patriarchy, growth

## Oh, the Places I Will Go

I did not set out initially to work with men; as a foreign-trained professional seeking a job where I could use my degrees and skills to make a difference, I encountered employers demanding the elusive Canadian experience or education. My multi-pronged approach of volunteering, seeking employment, and applying to go back to school culminated simultaneously in admission to a Master of Social Work program for the next academic session and a job as a youth counselor. I accepted both, planning to quit the job once school resumed. My employers hated to see me leave but, upon realizing I was leaving for a graduate program that included full time practicum placements, reluctantly accepted my resignation—but not before persuading me to consider taking a part-time position that only involved working a few hours a week. Due to changing norms and increased reporting of domestic violence, the number of partner assault groups offered by my organization were growing and female facilitators who could engage men were needed. The limited hours of the group facilitator role aligned well with my schooling and this marked my foray into facilitating men’s groups. Although I got other jobs upon graduating and never returned to my youth counselor job, I continued facilitating the men’s groups for many years and gained tremendous insights from this unplanned, challenging, but fulfilling opportunity.

I was often asked by friends and family why I worked with men who had been violent toward women, as many wondered how I could bear to support men given societal views about men in these programs. Finally, after years outside the facilitator role, I am intrigued by my longevity in the Partner Assault Response (PAR) program. Now, as a social work professor, I reflect on what my fellow facilitators and I did to meet the men at their varied levels of motivation or resistance, using eclectic approaches as dictated by the transtheoretical approach (Begun et al., 2003). The

most common intervention for men who have been abusive is the group format (Saunders, 2008) because it has the potential to connect men, provide shared accountability using the power of the group, and motivate men collectively. The use of paired male and female facilitators is an added feature of this group and, in this paper, I narrate the opportunities, triggers, lessons, and emotions of a most unlikely facilitator of men's groups, while noting that this is not meant to be an evaluation of the group's effectiveness (a separate forthcoming paper will focus on this).

### **“What's a Woman Doing Here?”**

Most of the men in our groups had committed offenses against women. Many individuals still refer to these men as “batterers attending batterers' groups” (Austin & Dankwort, 1999), which, not surprisingly, does not make men happy about having a woman lead their group. Labeled batterers by society and scholars, the men expected anger, revenge, and retribution from female facilitators, and they were quick to say things like “the pendulum has swung too far to the other side” and “women now have all the power.” They detested being in the PAR group, resented seeing a woman in power, and questioned the rationale for the state “interfering in private family matters.” The men fantasized about times past when “women knew their place and were to be seen and not heard,” and they wondered aloud what a woman was doing in the group. We female facilitators soon realized we had unwittingly become “lightning rods” for the men to vent their negative emotions, albeit in the safety of the group which we could provide.

John Howard Society (JHS), the organization I worked for, began offering these groups because the founder, John Howard, an 18th-century Englishman, dedicated his life to prison reforms after his own firsthand experience of prison when his ship was captured by French privateers in 1751 (JHS, n.d.). The JHS, therefore, offers extrajudicial psychoeducational interventions, such as the PAR groups, rather than incarceration (Price & Rosenbaum, 2007). Although PAR groups offer potential rehabilitation, they do not minimize the grave impacts of intimate partner violence but instead recognize the need for alternatives to punitive responses rooted in the criminal justice system, including arrests, charges, and jail terms (Birnbaum et al., 2017), especially for first time offences. As facilitators, we adopted a humane approach to challenging societal normalization of violence toward women but, because of perceived gender dynamics and personal challenges, some group members focused their angst on the female facilitator, the lightning rod. My challenge was to not absorb the negative currents and signals; instead, I redirected them to lessen the possibility of destruction. I heard the men bemoan the power women supposedly held to just call the cops. Having police cruisers show up, being led out in handcuffs, squatting with friends, moving back home, or having to spend time at the “Maplehurst Hilton”—a nickname for the provincial prison—were all incidents fraught with shame for the men I encountered. I saw men desperately try to hide their emotions about their experiences. The impact of years of socialization into the “Act Like a Man Box” (Kivel, 1992) which instills and propagates patriarchy was all too evident. And as I watched, I, too, could not help but wonder what in the world I was doing at the PAR group.

### **To the Abyss I Must Not Go**

The Act Like a Man Box puts unhealthy pressure on men through often unattainable prescriptions of what men can or cannot do, possess, and feel (or not feel), which invalidates

emotions other than anger and instills the necessity of stoicism and control (Kivel, 1992). This integral part of patriarchal male socialization is reinforced through physical, verbal, and emotional abuse, which shames men who do not conform (Jewkes et al., 2015; Posadas, 2017). The Act Like a Man Box condones violence, power, and control over women, children, and others. Men who do not conform are then shamed and pushed back into the box through feminine labels to perpetuate this cycle of violence. Men who are caring and sensitive are labeled “sissy,” “girlie,” “doll,” “woman,” “mama’s boy,” “cry baby,” etc. Men consider being likened to women to be the ultimate insult, and thus they are shamed back into rigid definitions of masculinity. Inferioritization and vilification of women also put men under pressure and do not bode well for relationships, as males who are taught women are worth less than men find it hard to honor them, and females who internalize such messages struggle to value themselves.

The “Act Like a Lady Box” (Kivel, 1992) also exists, forcing women to smile, be nice, and never express anger, which leads to assertive women being construed as angry. In a men’s group with a female facilitator, this could easily create unwanted tensions. To deal with their discomfort, some men justified their violent choices, saying, “She asked for it, she pushed my buttons; she made me lose it.” I needed restraint to avoid taking the bait or throwing myself into the abyss. Our group followed an open group format with new members joining each week; it was helpful that newcomers joined others who had been in PAR for weeks or months. The veterans, as we called them, often spoke up, saying, “I also used to be very angry when I joined PAR, but these people are the ones helping us; they are not the police or the prosecutors.” Interventions like these from fellow members resonated with newcomers to the group, and they listened, knowing their peers were in the group for similar reasons as themselves, which reduced defensiveness while promoting reflectivity. Promoting interactions among members, not just with the facilitators, calmed anxieties and contributed to everyone moving along the journey of change; it harnessed the power of the group to validate and empathize with each other, while correcting entrenched perceptions and ensuring growth in members and the facilitators.

Being female in a men’s group can feel like being thrown over the abyss. To avoid this feeling, as well as other self-sabotaging behaviors I found that staying anchored in my purpose was integral. Female facilitators, naturally, wanted to hold male group members accountable, but many were brought to tears and faced a revolving door. A dear friend with whom I worked in my regular full time child welfare job lasted only one week before deciding it was not for her. She asked me how, as a child welfare worker, I could bear to listen to the men “whining about child welfare workers,” but I believed the men’s comments were not to be taken personally. Furthermore, I did not disagree that child protective services can be oppressive, and I was open to learning from the men. I also learned what does not work when seeking to engage men. The group was transformative, but not the space for a female facilitator’s own unfinished business. Those who became conflated with the men’s female partners become fair game for attacks, and the potential for retraumatization from men made many of my female coworkers opt out of a role so fraught with transference. My heart broke to see them go, but it opened my eyes to landmines I might face if I was insecure/fixated on proving my legitimacy/inadvertently reinforcing defensive and undesirable behaviors. In those moments, I remembered a wise mentor’s warning that whenever I found myself working too hard to convince a client to change, I must interrogate my motives. Thinking we can fix anyone besides our own self is a slippery slope to misandry. I stayed the course by deciphering the places I would not go and, in lightning rod fashion, helped

men send their destructive energies out safely rather than into the bodies of significant others. I also had to ground myself to not take things personally or be damaged by the flow of negativity.

### **Awareness, Balance, and Connection (ABC): To the Basics We Go**

My self-awareness and realism were balanced with the knowledge that, my gender notwithstanding, I was just as qualified as any male group facilitator. My degrees in sociology and social work enabled me to acknowledge the macro-systems and dysfunctional patriarchal myths within which the men were situated. Interrogating my own self-defeating thoughts enhanced my empathy for the men as they made feeble attempts to hide their self-loathing. Balance required that I connect with each of them as a human who also struggles, and to meet them where they were. Their offense did not have to define them, and, as a lightning rod, my *raison d'être* included helping men feel safe to explore feelings they were socialized to deny. Knowing that upholding relational accountability ultimately helps the women and children in male perpetrators' lives was important motivation for the work I did and how I did it, and I was connected to and anchored in the JHS mission: “Effective, just, and humane responses to crime and its causes” (JHS, n.d.).

This awareness and balance were instrumental to gaining the trust of the group. As the participants recognized that I wasn't judging them, they were free to own their actions, because I was not warring with them. Even in holding them accountable for statements such as, “It just happened. I just lost it. I had no choice,” I used activities that communicated to the men that they were not puppets—they were capable adults with the ability to choose. This balance between promoting accountability for the harm the men had done—and could do again—and the need to engage them informed my refrain: If it “just happened,” it will surely just happen again. This compelled men to consider how to break the cycle of violence by ensuring violent incidents became less frequent, and time between episodes became longer. Such attainable baby steps encouraged them to learn new skills—taking time out, listening to their cues, and using active listening and communication techniques. Gaining these skills and being validated by the success they achieved reinforced the men's idea that they had “response-ability” to choose their thoughts about, and responses to, negative stimuli. This was key to breaking the cycle of habituated reactions, but it took some men several rounds of the sixteen weekly sessions because of self-limiting internalized beliefs about power and gender. This process demanded patience, but it was fulfilling to hear men say, “I get it now; I hated you and what you stood for, but how I misjudged you.” Each man was unique: I could not generalize based on education, status, or race. Relieved to be saved from incarceration by the “wake-up call,” some members arrived ready to implement change, while others had never contemplated the need to change. I relied on the group dynamics and witnessed men navigate the complexities of change, individually and collectively.

### **Back to the Larger Society, We Must Go**

We chose not to use the term “batterers' groups” or call the men “batterers,” as that labels the men as one thing and one thing only, even though these men comprised academics, business owners, mechanics, teachers, police officers, firefighters, security guards, students, truck drivers, and even social workers. The men's actions upon entering the group—pulling their caps over their faces, adopting macho swagger, taking the back seat, and avoiding eye

contact—demonstrated their own inner wrestlings but we did not judge them. Denying or minimizing a violent incident can be a strong predictor of recidivism (Grann & Wedin, 2002), but I understood these face-saving strategies to be informed by patriarchal, religious, and cultural norms which had left the men ill-equipped to handle the fallout of not having power over others. Supporting men to feel safe in the group helped them connect with emotions they would be mortified to express on the shop floor or in locker rooms; this promoted vulnerability and authenticity. Group members shared what brought them to the group. Suddenly, what the men had assumed were auto-responses were exposed as learned behaviors resulting from flawed societal messages and family patterns. The liberation of sharing and revealing inner bruises increased their empathy for those they had hurt, and this fostered discussions about choosing what kind of men they wanted to be and what they wanted to be known for. Being part of the “locker room herd” was no longer satisfying for them, as they saw male facilitators modeling healthy masculinity despite also growing up in a patriarchal society. Some of the men who were the angriest and seemingly most hostile when they started in the group confessed, they stopped contributing to sexist jokes after attending; one business owner even recommended that his staff attend the group voluntarily, and he reimbursed the cost to those who completed the sessions.

### **[S]mother Danger is a No-Go**

Intentionality in integrating men back into society also included recognizing that I was not their mother, and my role was not to coddle them; rather, I was to prioritize the safety of their partners and children (Vall et al., 2014, 2016, 2018). Remorse shown in the group would be tested in the larger ecosystem, so we followed up with the Partner Contact Worker who heard from their partners. Often what the men were reporting was corroborated by their partners but, at times, it was not. Men often cited good “make-up sex,” gifts, flowers, nice meals their partner cooked, and smiles as evidence that she was “over” the abuse, but we incorporated these issues into our group discussions.

We also used activities to illustrate the pay-offs and consequences of abuse. Perceived pay-offs, which included being feared or respected, having one’s way, gaining control, and experiencing a rush of adrenaline, were few in comparison to the costs. The men came up with jail time, legal fees, criminal records, and deportation, as well as the loss of their job, marriage, children, house, career, health, money, aspirations, reputation, and respect. They mentioned involvement with child welfare systems, loss of privacy, freedom, curfews, and restraining orders. The atmosphere became somber as they noted that the benefits were few and fleeting, while the costs were many, enduring, and sometimes fatal. The intentional trust-building and accountability paid off as the veil of conforming to rigid masculinity fell off.

The seriousness of the costs of domestic violence, such as murder-suicides, alerted me to the danger of smothering the men or minimizing the harm they had done. When a man could not appreciate the power dynamics that made children or partners recant their reports for fear of reprisals, he needed a facilitator that would hold him accountable, not one who would exacerbate the danger (George & Stith, 2014). I had to face my discomfort at seeing men cry, and I suppressed the urge I would often feel to rush and comfort them. I only saw my father cry a few times: when my mother was diagnosed with breast cancer and when he lost his two brothers. Growing up, I hardly saw other men cry either; therefore, my reaction to seeing grown men shed

tears was more about me than them. The myth that men don't cry can also affect facilitators, but these teachable moments when men released their repressed emotions or learned to sit with their pain were vital to the men's healing journeys. These moments were instructive for me, too, and I became adept at letting men cry, listening to them without theorizing their reasons, or smothering out the organic opportunities for far-reaching change.

### **Ego Tango: Together We Must Go**

I was not the only one who had to pay attention to my own inner processes; there was a grave danger of collusion in male PAR groups facilitated by a man and woman, considering the potential for normalizing and legitimizing masculine supremacy and harmful behaviors (Roy et al., 2013). My male co-facilitators were, for the most part, self-aware and wary of misogyny. They upheld the group mandate and intentionally modeled healthy masculinity. For instance, a colleague shared how, taking his cue from his father and older brothers, he never shed a tear when his mother died. Years later, he had to address years of pent-up emotions as he mourned the loss of his mother for the first time in a therapist's office. This self-disclosure humanized him, helping the group gain appreciation of manhood beyond anger, stoicism, and violence.

We were intentional in participating in the weekly *check-in*—a process whereby we and members shared stories about events of the preceding week, followed by an invitation to reflect on what to change in terms of responses to stimuli. At the end of each night, a similar process of *checking out* was followed, whereby members and facilitators articulated our goals for the coming week. I was intentional in sharing areas I was working on in my parenting, setting goals for myself that I would report on the next week. The three male co-facilitators I worked with over the years also shared failings, successes, goals, and challenges. Male facilitators modeled respect for the organization's mandate and receptivity to feedback. Occasionally, a male facilitator condoned paternalistic, patronizing beliefs and behaviors—laughing at, or even initiating, derogatory jokes about women. They appeared innocuous enough initially, but became concerning and behooved me to use respectful, yet clear, communication to redirect our focus to our clients' best interests. We discussed these and other topics during our debriefing time after dismissing the group and brought some issues up for clarification at team meetings.

The respectful partnering of male and female facilitators is critical to modeling egalitarian gendered relationships (Roy et al., 2013). We shared administrative tasks, including writing probation attestation letters, confirming attendance, authorizing absence, and issuing completion reports and court appearance letters. Men tended to direct such requests to the male facilitator, who had the task of deciding not to subvert the group's principles by taming his ego. At team meetings, we discussed the importance of being attuned to the typical cis- and hetero-normative gender roles, whereby males assign tasks like taking attendance, putting on the coffee, photocopying handouts, or washing dishes to the female facilitator. New co-facilitators who had yet to imbibe the JHS philosophy had to be reminded to redirect the group members and to ensure that reports, case notes, and letters were collaboratively written during our debriefing time.

Interestingly, some men preferred to approach the female facilitator flirtatiously or manipulatively; some simply believed the women facilitators had magical powers to fix their

female partners and/or their relationships. Unwanted, invasive personal questions were red flags and, with experience, I could distinguish genuine curiosity from manipulation. We used communication skills of reframing, redirecting, assertiveness, and limit-setting to develop boundaries at the onset, and we used the group guidelines to ensure our own continued mutual growth.

### **Growth to Go**

I helped men to be present in their own stories by consciously framing my work with feminist theory and recognizing power differentials in the relationships they described. For instance, to be yelled at by one's boss and displace the anger onto a partner behind closed doors underscored the element of choice in *where* and *when* abuse was used. Juxtaposing fear of repercussions at work with the absence of consequences in the home highlighted contradictions often pointed out by other men who had grown aware of the ways the cycle of abuse is perpetuated. Individual growth led to group progress, as men shared the ways in which their thoughts, actions, and outcomes shifted. A memorable example of this growth was when an older participant took a liking to a belligerent 24-year-old newcomer to the group. He told the young man that he had lived his entire life not questioning society's views about women, being a good but “emotionally amputated” breadwinner who abused his wife of many decades until, finally, his daughter called the police. Very emotional, he looked the young man in the eyes and said, “Don't be a fool. Do you want to be me at 82? Do you want to be sitting here learning how to treat the people you claim to love?” You could have heard a pin drop in the silence that followed, and I wondered how the young man would respond, only to see him kneel beside the older man and offer him Kleenex. He took a seat adjacent to the older man, and they both sat in silence almost oblivious to anyone. The young man latched onto him from that day and became more present and engaged in the group. Long before there was an after-care group for graduates from the PAR group, members had found ways to provide mutual support that extended to practical aid, which reduces isolation (Saunders, 2008). Group members who completed the program and came back for a refresher, or to ask questions in a safe space where they would not be judged, signaled to others that the group works, which corroborated our work and reinforced the importance of trusting the group process.

As the woman in the room, I learned through the years to be comfortable with silence and exercise restraint so members could find their voice, speak out, and grow. Often members expected a reaction from me and would look in my direction but, when I was not hasty, someone else in the group inevitably spoke up. If I was quick to confront, other members may never speak up, which would deprive us of their valuable perspectives. Instead, my restraint allowed members to challenge each other. They made asserting statements such as, “Initially, I was angry like you. These people did not put us here; our actions put us here, and they are the ones trying to help us.”

It was gratifying to see growth in the men, and I'd watch in amazement at how small changes they made had an impact on the outcomes they encountered. In one example, a member who was frustrated by his child welfare worker received feedback and suggestions which he heeded, and this earned him more visitation privileges. He shared that he changed his self-talk from: “She is out to get me” to “She is judging me based on my past, but I am not defined by it. I am growing

in empathy for my children who witnessed the violence. My focus is on them. I am the parent.” The group erupted in applause when he was allowed to go home after his court case was dismissed, and he brought in snacks and drinks for the group like so many did on their last day. Despite the serious issues we discussed, the group became a family.

I also used humor where possible to address the sensitive issues we discussed in the group. In this job, I could not take myself too seriously or take things personally. So we often had fun doing the job. My co-facilitator for most of my years with the JHS went by a nickname which, when combined with my name, produced a funny play on words. We began to write on the board in big bold letters: “Welcome to the Chip and Funky Show!” making the men smile in spite of themselves. We also joked that members who returned after they graduated could not get enough of our show. This humor set the tone for the group, helping everyone to relax as much as possible given the circumstances.

### **Men Can and Do Change**

Talking about their daughters was one way of helping men humanize women and girls. Men concerned about their “princesses” driving or dating were helped to transfer their feelings for their daughters to relationships with women. When the men talked about family of origin, the statement “I have become that which I hated” was heartbreaking for me to hear, but their love for their children brought increased receptiveness to new ways of living, being, and parenting. We also urged men to say the names of their children and partners to humanize them. Society’s unrealistic prescriptions deny the humanity of both men and women, leaving many broken and crushed inside, yet conforming to an acceptable exterior façade. Connecting with their sensitive side in the group, men lamented their losses and, for some, the opportunity to make things right was a great motivator.

Believing that men can and do change (Saunders, 2008), we provided handouts that men could share at home to explain the changes they were making without shifting the responsibility onto their family. Those who transitioned into individual or couples’ therapy also found it useful to show their therapists what they had learned in our group. The group process worked, and its success reinforced the idea that men can change. The work that we did in these groups followed what is called the mutual aid model of group work (Gitterman, 2004; Schwartz, 2005; Shulman, 1986, 2005; Tropp, 1965). This approach to group work, fundamentally, involves a group of people in a space that provides opportunities to work for a common end in interdependent relationships (Schwartz, 1961, 1971). It involves breaking down traditional group work dynamics by encouraging “shared control, shared power, and shared agenda” (Schwartz, 2005, p. 85). This model reinforces the need to trust in the process and its capacity for transformational change (Middleman & Wood, 1990).

I saw men return voluntarily after completing the program to seek advice for a new or existing relationship, because they believed the group had worked and were determined not to reoffend, or because they needed a refresher in the safety of a group where they knew they would be understood and not judged. Seeking help is hardly a topic men speak about in other spaces, but here the sensitive side emerged out of the tough exterior cocoon. This gruff, yet heartwarming, poem from a former client is a great reminder of why I did the work, and a proof that men can,



and do, change:

I had no use for this place, no, not me in a group of batterers  
And a woman counselor, well no woman is gonna run my life  
Me, forget the cruisers and handcuffs, in full glare of neighbours [sic]  
I swore, she would pay dearly, she doesn't know what she's done  
But, alas, what she did was right, gave me such a wake up call  
Mindless jerk that I was; she put up with me and so did you  
Sincerely, Miss, I can never thank you enough. (Anonymous, personal  
communication, 2006)

Moments such as these reinforced the importance of choosing my battles, embracing healthy norms, and building trust and connections while also trusting the group process to help men unlearn self-destructive beliefs. Many wished they had received this knowledge in high school before they internalized bullying and sexist jokes in the locker room as normal masculine traits. They discussed wanting the PAR group topics to be taught in high schools to avoid the next generation facing the repercussions of damaged relationships and harm to others and themselves. Members also gained appreciation for the role of female facilitators who bring nuanced perspectives to the men's groups, showing how patriarchal myths render women inferior to men and normalize violence toward them. Many men resolved to be ambassadors of healthy masculinity, rather than just letting society squeeze them into the Act Like a Man Box.

Men's resistance to female facilitators is not unconnected to underlying beliefs and messages that objectify women. Female facilitators bring unique perspectives (Blow et al., 2008; Päivinen & Holma, 2012); they also help to prevent collusion by holding both the male group members and the male facilitators accountable to the goals of the group (Boston, 2010; Tyagi, 2006). They also balance group discussions and can contribute a relational ability, using feminine insights to facilitate therapeutic alliances and broadened perspectives (Boston, 2010). Although a female facilitator—the perceived lightning rod—may evoke defensiveness from the group, if she succeeds in not joining the fray, her interjections can help men appreciate human complexities. I worked hard to gain men's trust and the credibility that made them listen intently to the perspectives I offered. I learned to ask the right questions, enhancing reflectivity in men not accustomed to connecting with emotions such as fear which they hid under the anger they felt allowed to show.

In the absence of specific services to help female facilitators with their unique needs, I maintained a network of supportive, balanced, critical thinking male and female friends inside and outside the organization who enriched my life and asked me pertinent questions. This served me well. I found the work exhilarating and I considered the men my teachers; it was an incredible privilege to learn from men who showed me things I never knew, but also gratifying to hear them state that they now realize they were not their true selves when they were conforming to gendered prescriptions. The greatest compliment and testimony was when the group members decided they wanted high school children to learn what we had taught them, because they believed it saved their lives and would help their children and grandchildren. Our approach to this group closely aligns with the model of mutual aid, as we held at the core of our work our commitment to strengths-driven, holistic, and anti-oppressive practice (Steinberg,

2010), and the benefits were reciprocal.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The JHS was started by a humanitarian reformer; its PAR program follows this legacy by helping people get back on track, mostly after coming to the attention of the police and/or child welfare authorities, but also voluntarily on the recommendation of friends, family, or coworkers. Restorative approaches lead to less or no jail time, promote rehabilitation, and foster new ways of thinking, living, and being in relationships and the larger society (JHS, n.d.).

Like any major shift, change cannot be one-dimensional; it occurs at the personal, interpersonal, group, and societal level. Learned ideologies are acted out in the family and reinforced by other agents of socialization and can therefore be unlearned in community. The group setting is a great opportunity for individuals to hear the perspectives of others, gain insights, and demystify normalized myths that inform social and cultural practices. Modeling new actions within a group setting illustrates what is possible, which is crucial to re-examining gendered patterns and assumptions along with building healthy communities.

As demonstrated in this paper, the strong sociological framing of the group disrupts notions of abuse as an individual phenomenon by implicating structures of patriarchy. If men believe that abuse is embedded in their genes or psyche, then they are helpless and cannot change. The group process, however, illuminates that abuse is not an individual problem, but a social, cultural, and political issue. Becoming self-aware and mirroring the group dynamics instills ownership of the change process; it was gratifying to see members advocating for the PAR group philosophy and pedagogy to be incorporated into the high school curriculum.

Upholding every person's dignity and value was at the core of my practice as a social worker/group facilitator seeking to break the cycle of violence; it continues in my teaching and community research as I see students and research participants as co-creators of knowledge. They infuse the shared space with valuable lived experiences keeping me grounded while growing in my capacity to address not only violence but also racism and other deeply engrained -isms with respect, sensitivity, and tenacity.

In conclusion, the gendered facilitator duo provides visual positive modeling and shows success with men who have perpetrated intimate partner violence, as it inherently challenges patriarchal notions of gender roles. Group work with men illuminates the power dynamics underlying intimate partner violence. As a result, years of patriarchal socialization evoked resistance from the men towards female facilitators. Collaborating with supportive male facilitators enabled us to create a transformative space where the men externalized their emotions. As the lightning rod, I had to resist passively absorbing negative energy from the men in group; rather, I actively challenged the men to replace negative emotions with new foundations for thinking, believing, and being—collectively and individually.

We witnessed many transformations, and believe this model—particularly the intentional use of a male-female facilitator pair—works and produces significant positive outcomes for men in PAR groups. However, we recommend further evaluation of this paired approach on recidivism

levels, the impact of partner contact evaluations of group work on men, as well as an examination of best practices to support women who work with men.

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\* The University's board of directors has voted to change the school's name over concerns about Egerton Ryerson's role as a primary architect of the residential school system. We—the faculty, staff, and students—have called for the removal of his statue and name change so the board's decision is a welcome development for all critical thinkers as a demonstration of the university's commitment to transcend performative acknowledgements of racism and colonization to implement the 22 recommendations made by the university's Standing Strong (Mash Koh Wee Kah Pooh Win) Task Force.