

Running Head: INTEGRATIVE PAPER

Integrative Paper Final

Janet Buchheit

University of Georgia

SOWK 6117: Social Work with Violent Families

Dr. David Kurtz

April 23, 2001

Power and Control. If I have come away with anything in this class it is the significance of those two words in relation to family violence. The power and control of the aggressor, the power and control of institutional and societal values and beliefs, the power and control of culture, the power and control of male privilege and the power and control of the media create a cultural tapestry in which women are discriminated against, violated, stereotyped, sensationalized and demeaned. Coming into this class this semester I walked in with what I would call a “surface knowledge” of family violence, much of what I learned from the media’s sensationalism. As the last 15 weeks have progressed my eyes have been opened to a new world as it relates to violence and my obligation to combat the social injustices embedded within our society that perpetuates such imbalances of power.

To be quite honest, I feel foolish that these realizations had not presented themselves to me before this. As this course as gone on I felt more and more of an urgency to act, but I also have berated myself for living with blinders on for so long, unable or perhaps unwilling to look at domestic violence from a larger scope. I lived for so long believing the media representation of the stereotypical “battered wife”, the heterosexual, married, working class mother who was physically abused. One of the articles this semester, taken from the book Leaving Abusive Partners, the author describes the draw of media to physical violence, much in the same way that horror film makers would seek to attract viewers. The media sensationalize the violence and invalidate the emotional aspect of abuse often portraying it in a humorous fashion in television sitcoms. This really made me reflect upon how much media influences our lives and how easily we accept the media’s perception as truth. This example was personified when Vanessa Robinson-Dooley lectured and brought in tapes of popular rap artists. Her assertion that violence in music permeates the culture of kids and “normalizes” violent acts as acceptable practice is

true. I believe there has been desensitization to violence in children today. Kids are bombarded with video games, music, television shows and movies that glorify violence against women, perpetuate stereotypes and embed the ideology of male supremacy. Furthermore, children see their favorite rap stars, movie personalities and sports stars in the news plead guilty to abuse charges and walk away without consequence. What message does that send out to this impressionable generation? It sends the same message to young boys that our society has been sending to men for decades, battering and abuse works. You will be able to overpower a girl, you have been socialized to believe it is your right and privilege to dominate them and you can get away with it.

That being said, it has become apparently clear to me through much of the classroom discussion, speakers and articles the magnitude in which women are oppressed. Through the decades we have seen increased economic growth world wide, the fall of repressive regimes and female leaders take offices, yet women are victims of abuse and discrimination just about everywhere. There is not one country that treats women equally to men. Does anyone wonder with all this progress over the decades why this is true? I do. In many cases progress and freedom has hurt women more than helped them because in a male dominated world the power differential must be maintained, and it seems in the cases where more freedoms could possibly exist for women, the reigns are pulled in tighter in order control it. Reading *The War Against Women* article in our packet astonished me with facts of how the fall of communism, the spread of democracy and the progression of science have all worked against women instead of helping them. Many of the articles I read this semester spoke of unequal power relationship on a global level. This made me wonder as our society advances, and women take on more opportunities for power, will there be a backlash in our society to control this revolution? Will it be that the more

power, freedom and privilege women are given the harder men will push to control? Will this be seen in the escalation of abuse? These questions have really plagued me the last few weeks and I have since set out researching to see if based on past events this hypothesis can be proven. I plan to continue this research once we break for the semester since I have become so passionate about this topic.

One quote that struck me as I read this semester was from an article written by Franklin Abbott who stated, “Although all men do not batter, all men benefit from battering.” When I first read this, my thoughts immediately flashed to my husband and I became angered by the implication, knowing my husband is an advocate for women. Once I thought through the quote it really stayed with me because I think it exemplifies the societal control of women. The fear of what *might* happen when I walk out my door puts my husband in control because it places me in a position to “depend” on him for protection and therefore sets up a power differential. These fears are perpetuated each day as crimes against women increase.

Along with the progression of our society has come the progression of diversity within our culture. For so long services for different ethnic and cultural groups have been judged and categorized in accordance to the mainstream white value orientation. As Julia Perilla, Father Joy and Vanessa Robinson-Dooley pointed out, understanding the cultural norms related to domestic violence and the varying perceptions about its occurrence is integral in serving these communities. Dr. Perilla’s lecture really illuminated me in regards to the Latin American culture and their views on domestic violence, the marianismo/machismo concept and faulty stereotypes. The activity in which she posed situations and had us place ourselves on the continuum really made me reflect upon how each of our beliefs and values determine our views. Although we were a group of people in similar professions, with each question we spanned the continuum.

Looking at this in a broader view, knowing how our beliefs and values determine how we think and react to certain situations, it emphasizes the importance of truly understanding the basis of your own belief and value system, but also understanding the worldviews of the clients you serve. Of equal importance is the understanding of how your beliefs and values may limit you in your work with diverse populations. Within my practicum placement, I have made a conscious effort to understand the basis of my reactions when I respond to a counseling situation. I have also involved myself in the community where my practicum site is located in order to learn not only about the different ethnic cultures, but community cultures that come into play with the students in which I work. This semester alone I have worked with 4 different students who have confided abuse situations to me. These women are from different ethnic backgrounds and I have made it a point to learn all I could about their culture and norms in their families in order to serve these children the best I can. This class has been a tremendous resource in that regard.

Although I enjoyed most of the topics covered this semester, I believe the session that disturbed me the most was the topic of elderly abuse. Again, I was viewing this topic through rose-colored glasses. When looking at the Wheel of Power & Control, I easily determined that the elderly would be targets for neglect, emotional abuse, intimidation and coercion but it was very difficult for me to think about physical and sexual abuse with the elderly. I literally felt a stone hit the center of my stomach when the topic of physical and sexual abuse and the elderly was brought into the discussion. My first instinct was to rush the thought out of my mind and that really struck me. I think the reason why I did not want to think about abuse of the elderly is that it is so connected to value-laden ideas such as home and family. I want to believe that within the environment of the family our greatest assets, our children and our elderly, will be protected. Dr. Nancy Kropf stated that the topic of physical and sexual abuse of the elderly is

uncomfortable for most people and I wondered if that sense of discomfort discourages people from reporting elderly abuse, covering elderly abuse in the media and even speaking of it. Just as child abuse has been viewed in the past, elderly abuse has long been treated as a “social problem” instead of a crime. I fear that by not addressing these problems of abuse, including violent mistreatment of the elderly it will become more common during the years ahead. I think of my Father and my Grandmother and it infuriates me to think that a caregiver might take advantage of them in any of these ways. To be honest the aging of my Father scares me. I worry that I will not be able to support him in the years ahead, financially, emotionally and proximally. I worry that the care my family and I might choose may abuse or neglect him in some way in which I am not aware and I will dishonor a great man. When processing the classroom discussion this is where my discomfort lies; the realization of the horrors many elderly face coupled with my Father’s impending age. How will I handle it? How do I ensure his protection?

As a counseling student the speakers, readings and lectures I have attended have been so helpful to me personally and professionally. As I mentioned earlier, I really feel as if I have experienced an awakening. I find myself applying the principles of power and control to my daily life. I work with the children and parents in my school much differently, considering not only their academic and emotional needs, but also their cultural and familial needs as well. I look to find community outreach resources for families in the hope that they will allow families to break the cycle of abuse. I have begun to look globally at the issue of violence. For every woman and child who has been helped, there are dozens out there who have not. If we attack this problem on a one-to-one basis are we not missing most of the people we want to help? Our current actions say that our work is about “fixing” women, as Cathy Barber and Carole Sousa state in their *Social Change Advocacy* article, as if they were the source of the problem and not

about changing the systems that create and protect abusers. For a long time I tended to think that I as one person could not make a difference, that some things were unchangeable. But what I have come to realize is that every rule, policy, agenda and social system is created by people with no more authority than me. Things change because people have the courage, determination and imagination to see the world differently and take action.

I feel like a fire has been lit in me this semester as I have dedicated myself to working for social change. Since starting this semester I have joined the Partnership on Domestic Violence as volunteer, as well started back at Georgia Council on Child Abuse where I hope to work with their Atlanta Outreach Center providing home visitation services for families, running support groups and parent education within shelters and the juvenile courts. I have participated in events such as Pinwheels for Prevention in honor of Child Abuse Prevention month, an event created to bring attention to the serious problem of child abuse and neglect and to encourage communities to focus on prevention. I have joined the Georgia Commission on Family Violence listserv and have followed pertinent bills in the legislature, participated in writing my representatives and lobbying for support of house bills and intend on attending their conference this summer at Callaway Gardens. Being part of these organizations has allowed me to get out there and connect with other advocates to see what they have done and are currently working on. It has also connected me to people who make the rules and influence the process. I really feel more alive than I have ever felt working towards social change and much of this inspiration came from this class. Hearing the guest speakers' stories, getting out to conferences and seeing the passion in which people speak became contagious.

What I have learned and experienced in this class went beyond what I have ever expected. Attending the lectures piqued my interest in certain topics. However, having the

opportunity to then go out and find “experiences” related to these topics was a wonderful way to get involved, as well as supplement and enhance what I had learned in the classroom. I plan on continuing with my social activism, as well my research in topics of interest with hopes of writing and publishing my findings. The more information that is out there, the more people are exposed to the realities of violence. I hope my findings will incense others the way it has me and more advocates for systematic change will be out there fighting.