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Chapter

Engaging College Men in Conversations and Activities Related to Dating and Domestic Violence

Laura Finley

Abstract

This chapter describes a unique effort to engage college men in discussion and activism about dating and domestic violence. Given that dating violence is one of the most frequently occurring forms of violence on college campuses, it is imperative that campuses provide education and programming about its scope, extent, and characteristics, as well as inform students how they can receive help. Even more, campuses have a responsibility to encourage students to take action to remedy social problems like dating violence. Yet engaging men in such efforts can be challenging, given that many still see dating and domestic violence as "women's issues" or do not feel welcome in such movements. The chapter describes an initiative called the College Brides Walk, which integrates experiential learning as a tactic for engaging men. It concludes with lessons learned and recommendations.

Keywords: dating violence, domestic violence, gender-based violence, engaging men, service-learning

1. Introduction

Dating and domestic violence remain among the world's most intractable social problems. In 2006, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan declared violence against women to be the most pervasive and "perhaps the most shameful human rights violation" on the globe, given that an estimated one-third of the world's women will endure an abusive relationship [1]. Research is clear that women are at greater risk in the home than anywhere else [2]. Despite decades of attention to the issue in the U.S., the U.S. Department of Justice has estimated that from one-quarter to one-third of women will be the victims of domestic violence during their lifetime.

The problem of domestic and dating violence is particularly acute on college campuses, both in the U.S. and globally. Although college students are subject to many types of violence, such as bullying and gang violence, domestic and sexual abuse are among the most pervasive [3]. Straus [4] found 17–45% of university students (31 colleges) in 16 countries had experienced physical abuse, while [5] found 21% of college students report experiencing abuse in a current relationship, and 32% in a previous relationship.

Despite these high numbers, dating abuse on college campuses remains significantly underreported. Data show that most victims do not tell any adults, about the abuse let alone authorities. College-aged victims are most likely to tell a friend about the abuse [6].

These are difficult subjects to address in college classrooms. This is in due to the general trend to teach students through passive methods and distrust that students can handle the material. As Giroux [7] explains, "Young people are increasingly devalued as knowledgeable, competent, and socially responsible, in spite of the fact that their generation will inevitably be the leaders of tomorrow" (p. 122). Professors often complain that students resist discussing controversial issues in the class, and many times blame students for being naïve or disinterested. Yet this dismissive attitude is part of the problem; perhaps, it is that students have not been asked their thoughts on what would be most effective in helping to solve problems and not, as students often assert, just subject to lectures that are depressive and uninspiring.

Because dating and domestic violence are so pervasive, discussion of these issues can be triggering for many who grew up in abusive homes or who have experienced it with a partner. As such, the topics are often avoided, or addressed in only a cursory fashion [8]. Furthermore, many educators are woefully unprepared to tackle such topics, and as such, often avoid the topics or address them poorly. Additionally, some insist that the classroom is a "neutral" place, although obviously it cannot. But the façade of neutrality means a limited, at best, discussion of the complexities of domestic and dating violence, patriarchy, gender inequality, and structural violence. Educators who address controversial issues run the risk of being labeled "too liberal" or extreme [9]. Yet another concern is how to teach about domestic and dating violence in a way that moves past the stereotype that these are "women's issues." Furthermore, educators must be careful to address the over-representation of males as perpetrators and the gender dynamics involved in many abusive relationships while not alienating male audiences.

This chapter focuses on innovative methods to address dating and domestic violence, in particular, with male students. It details a service-learning project that raises awareness about these issues and highlights the efforts taken to include males and how those have been received. The chapter concludes with recommendations for increased involvement of male college students in this type of social justice campaign.

2. Domestic and dating violence on campus

Dating violence is "the physical, sexual, psychological, or emotional violence within a dating relationship, including stalking. It can occur in person or electronically and might occur between a current or former dating partner" ([10], para 2). Studies have shown that while violent dating behavior typically begins when youth are in ages of 12–18, it often continues into adulthood [11]. Furthermore, while boys and girls are victimized by dating partners at fairly similar rates, boys tend to use physical forms of abuse that do greater bodily damage, whereas girls are more likely to use emotional and verbal forms [12]. Given the fact that both males and females are perpetrators, programs about dating and domestic violence on campus must address these gender dynamics. College students are at particular risk for experiencing abusive relationships. Leonard, Quigley, and Collins [13] found that 30-40% of college students had experienced some type of abuse from a dating partner. The 2006 International Dating Violence Study involving 9549 students from 36 universities in 19 nations found high rates of both minor and major assault perpetrated by men and women alike [4]. Some 43% of dating college women report experiencing violent and abusive dating behaviors, with 16% reporting sexual abuse by a dating partner [14]. More than half (57%) of college students who report experiencing an

abusive dating relationship say it happened during their college years [15]. Abuse also occurs in same-sex relationships at similar rates, and again, college students are particularly at risk [16]. Further, abuse on college campuses remains seriously under reported, with an estimated 5% of incidents reported to authorities [6].

Several factors increase the risk that someone will be involved in an abusive relationship, either as an abuser or as a perpetrator. Experiencing abuse as a child, teen use of alcohol and marijuana, early sexual activity, and involvement in a prior abusive relationship are all risk factors to experience abuse [17, 18]. Women who are in collegiate sororities are at greater risk for experiencing dating violence, in part because they often date men who are in fraternities. Alcohol is often involved in sorority and fraternity parties and is correlated with dating violence (see for example [19]). First-year students are at greatest risk of experiencing abusive relationships, as they are away from home and their normal support networks, and often new to intimate relationships [20]. The strain of college life has also been shown to increase the likelihood of abuse, in particular among students involved in longer relationships [21].

Similarly, there are several factors that are predictive for perpetrators. Gender, holding more positive attitudes toward the use of aggression (both in general and in relationships), exposure to childhood violence, anger, anxiety, depression, alcohol and drug abuse, sexual risk-taking, frequent dating relationships, and academic disengagement have all been identified as factors [22]. Certain collegiate men are at greater risk of being abusers [19, 23]. Male athletes, particularly those in what are called the "power and performance" sports, football, basketball, hockey, wrestling and boxing, are more likely to abuse their partners [23–27]. Men, who are involved with fraternities, as was noted, are also at greater risk for perpetration [19].

The scope of this problem clearly demonstrates the importance of educational programming to change beliefs and thus, hopefully, behaviors. Primary prevention programs are essential. Knowledge networks [15] reported that the majority of college students do not know how to identify dating violence, and 70% of college students who reported being in an abusive relationship say they were not aware it was abusive at the time. There are significant differences between males and females in terms of attitudes toward abuse, belief in misconceptions, and attribution of blame toward victims [28, 29], and younger college students appear more accepting of myths about abuse [29]. Primary prevention efforts "aim to circumvent violence in dating relationship before it occurs, often through either targeting the entire population within a school or utilizing data with regard to risk markers to present prevention programs to those individuals most likely to later become involved in violent intimate relationships" ([30], p. 366). Since most instances of dating violence are witnessed by or at least known by others, educational efforts must also target bystanders. Knowledge networks [15] reported that most college students do not know how to help a friend who is experiencing an abusive relationship. Primary prevention focuses on challenging gender-role norms and highlighting the social, political, cultural, and economic factors that underlie abuse [31]. Both the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the World Health Organization (WHO) emphasize that prevention programs should help draw connections between abuse and traditional gender role norms. As educational institutions, campuses should, ideally, be well situated to create primary prevention initiatives [32].

Many campuses remain ill equipped to address the scope, extent, and complexity of abuse [8, 33]. They still lack adequate policies, do not have ample resources for victims, and have weak, if nonexistent, prevention programming [3]. Whether it comes up in coursework is random, as students in certain majors—sociology, criminology, psychology, and social work, for instance—may learn about domestic and dating violence, students studying other areas are likely not exposed. Furthermore, most professors are not actively involved in advocacy or activism around issues of

abuse; hence, they can only address such topics from an academic perspective, rather than from experience working with victims or in prevention [8, 34–36]. As such, these issues are often presented using passive learning methods, or what Eisler [37] called dominator methodologies, which often bore students and fail to inspire them. Dominator methodologies typically involve the professor lecturing to students who are passive recipients of the information. In particular, these teaching strategies typically fail to leave participants with a sense that they can be leaders in the effort to end abuse [6]. Many universities address domestic and dating violence outside of the curriculum, often through one-time events featuring speakers or films. Although these are surely welcome, they are limited in their ability to reach students, not least of which is related to the voluntary nature of attendance. Oftentimes, these co-curricular events or activities reinforce victim blaming, as they focus on teaching women how "not" to be victims [38]. In essence, these efforts see the problem of domestic or dating violence as one of individual women and their relationships, not about gender role norms or social structures that reinforce violence as a means of solving problems and promote aggressive hypermasculinity [39–41].

One of the biggest issues relative to this concern is the role of men in the antidomestic and dating violence movement. Research has clearly documented the importance of recognizing that both females and males can be victims of abuse, and of involving males as partners in the efforts to end domestic and dating violence [25, 26, 42–44]. Yet still many men believe abuse is a problem for only women, and while they may be sympathetic, they often do not get involved. Others may want to be involved but do not feel invited or welcomed. Casey [42] noted the importance of getting dominant groups involved in efforts to end social injustices. Casey and Smith [45] interviewed 27 men who were recently involved in some type of activism against gender-based violence. Participants responded to posts on Listservs and invitations to meetings of activist groups. They were of ages 27–72, and all but one was white. Casey found that men who wanted to be involved in domestic violence advocacy found it difficult to gain access, which they did primarily through personal connections. Nonpersonalized approaches is often the biggest barrier to male involvement, as men report that generic flyers and marketing materials are not inviting, and men see these injustices as "women's issues." College men also report they connect with certain speakers more than others, with many saying they rejected antiviolence activists for being too "liberal" and "soft." A significant portion of respondents also disavowed overtly feminist messages, and most reported that negative messaging seemed to blame men for abuse and was off-putting.

In sum, men are more likely to be involved if they have personal experience with this type of violence [45, 46], if their peers are involved [46], if they have developed a social justice consciousness [47], and are invited to participate in a way that showcases precisely the importance of their contributions [45].

Many efforts to engage males rely on a bystander approach, which has shown great promise but has limitations. Carlson [48] interviewed 20 college-aged men (ages 18–19) who responded to questions regarding the degree to which they would be willing to do so after reading a variety of vignettes about women being attacked. The majority of the participants said they were hesitant to intervene, but were also very concerned about feeling or looking weak in front of other males if they did not intervene. These men showed conflicting attitudes about assisting a victim; they considered the traits of compassion and passivity weak but also indecisiveness, and they associated all traits with females. They also said they would be most likely to intervene physically, rather than verbally, but doing so would be contingent on their size and stature relevant to the assailing individual. Importantly, most respondents indicated their likelihood of getting involved was dependent on the degree to which they believed the victim had encouraged or "brought on" the attack. These

men seemed to hold many traditional gender role stereotypes that influenced their responses. Bystander intervention approaches, then, must also address these attitudes and beliefs but in a way that does not seem to be threatening to men [25–27, 43].

Another possible tool for engaging men and boys in discussion and action related to domestic violence is experiential learning. In response to calls from academics like Boyer [49], college campuses have increasingly utilized a variety of methods of experiential learning, both inside and outside of the classroom. Boyer [49] noted the importance of "scholars who not only skillfully explore the frontiers of knowledge, but also integrate ideas, connect thought to action, and inspire students. The aim of education is not only to prepare students for productive careers, but also to enable them to live lives of dignity and purpose" (p. A48). Although experiential learning takes many forms, one of the most popular is service-learning. Service-learning is an educational approach that asks students to complete service with a community partner that is intended to benefit all three groups involved—the community, the students, and the university. Some assert that an important part of service-learning is to create new ways of viewing the world, as it is intended to allow students to see the importance of taking action while also furthering their academic understanding [50, 51].

Research has shown a number of positive effects of service-learning for students [52–56]. It has been shown to improve the development of personal skills, increase self-worth, improve spiritual and moral development, enhance a sense of personal identity, improve interpersonal skills, better the ability to communicate with others, enhance cultural understanding, and increase leadership abilities [54, 55]. Studies with students show that most enjoy service-learning projects and that the projects enhance their interest in college, their courses, and learning in general, as well as improve their connections to faculty members, all of which increase the likelihood that they will persist toward graduation ([52], [55–59]). Service-learning also helps students find peers with similar interests, thereby reducing feelings of isolation [59, 60].

There are a number of concerns students may have about service-learning. Many say that time constraints make service difficult, and that transportation to service sites can be an issue [61]. Students sometimes complain about working in groups with other students who do not put in as much time, and some say that feel as though they are being used as unpaid labor [62, 63]. Furthermore, there is a tendency for service-learning to emphasize direct action more than social change initiatives. Gent [64] noted that less than 1% of service-learning projects are related to civic action or justice advocacy, and thus they may have more of a "band aid" effect than a transformative one [65].

Service-learning is beneficial to community organizations. The work students do with a group or agency helps meet a community need and can improve community-campus relationships. Nonprofit organizations, for instance, are often short-staffed, so having students there to assist can take the load off of employees. Yet there is also concern that students can be a burden, as they come and go frequently in what has been referred to as the "drive-by" model of service [66]. Furthermore, sometimes students who engage in service with oppressed or marginalized populations may see themselves as "liberal saviors" and, as such the service may actually reinforce existing perceptions [67].

One concern that has yet to be fully explored is gender differences in service. One study found that there are gender differences in volunteerism in general, with women 30% more likely to volunteer in their community than men [68]. The type of volunteerism varies by gender, as well. Women are more likely to volunteer with educational institutions and health-related organizations, while men are more likely to volunteer with civic organizations, sport groups, and public safety

initiatives [69]. Female college students also tend to volunteer more and are more likely to engage in other forms of service-learning like study abroad programs. These gender differences tend to become evident early on, usually during a student's first year of college, with female first-year students being more likely to volunteer in the community than their male counterparts [70].

Existing studies show that women are more likely to participate in a broad range of service-learning programs compared to men [55, 71]. Rykov and Taylor [63] found that females were over-represented in service-learning courses, and that females reported engaging in service-learning as more valuable, more exciting, more empowering, more impactful on their educational choices and career paths, and more useful for their social and professional development than did their male peers. Males frequently noted that service opportunities were not appealing to them; they wanted more service related to traditionally male-dominated fields, including math, science, politics, economics, research methods, kinesiology, and physical education [63].

The explanations for the gender gap in service-learning tend to focus on gender roles. Men have traditionally been expected to focus their attention on being "bread-winners," so paid employment is an important goal. Furthermore, recruiting materials for organizations seeking volunteers may be more directed to and therefore appealing to women, and many agencies seeking volunteers or students to serve are female dominated [39].

The following section describes a service-learning project designed to raise awareness about dating and domestic violence. It emphasizes efforts made to engage men and boys in the initiative.

3. The College Brides Walk, difficult discussions, and experiential learning

The College Brides Walk (CBW) was created in 2011 to raise awareness about dating and domestic violence. The idea was initiated when Josie Ashton, a South Florida activist, organized the first Brides March after she heard about the brutal murder of Gladys Ricart on September 26, 1999. Gladys Ricart was a Dominican woman who was killed in New Jersey by an abusive ex-boyfriend. The perpetrator, Agustin Garcia, gunned her down in front of her family as she posed in her wedding gown for photos of her wedding to another man that was supposed to take place that day. After obtaining permission from the Ricart family to walk in Gladys Ricart's memory, Ashton donned her own wedding dress and walked from the New Jersey home where Ricart was killed to Miami, Florida. Along the way, she stayed in 14 domestic violence shelters and visited 22 cities. Her trip has inspired annual Brides Marches in New York, Wisconsin, Washington, DC, and now Florida and the Dominican Republic. The idea is that the highly visible "spectacle" of people walking in wedding apparel prompts media attention and public dialog about this issue that is often still considered too taboo to discuss.

Given that many college students would not be able to attend such an event if it was held off campus, the organizers decided to host CBW on the campus of Barry University. The idea was to make it about more than just one campus, so outreach was conducted to other area campuses and groups. Rather than just a walk, organizers determined it was important to include additional educational opportunities. On February 11, 2011, the first CBW featured not just a walk but opening and closing speakers. Each year the co-organizers have met to assess how the event went, and have used input from student and community participants to make improvements. Elements have been added to the day, and the initiative has expanded to include

presentations to local school groups throughout the year and other programming on Barry's campus and on the partner campuses. By year 8, CBW had grown to reach more than 1200 people on the day of the event as well as thousands before and after through educational outreach. CBW now partners with seven areas colleges and universities as well as many clubs and organizations on campus and groups in the community. It now not only includes the walk and speakers but also workshops for high school and college students who choose not to walk, as well as passive programs that participants can sign, arts activities, and signs that share the stories of people who have been killed by domestic violence.

In addition to simply raising awareness about abuse, the goal of CBW is to correct misconceptions about dating and domestic violence. Furthermore, CBW aims to acknowledge the diversity of victims, the dynamics of abusive relationships, and explore why abuse happens. As such, many of the activities before and during CBW focus on the role of gender norms and patriarchy. CBW is intended to inspire students to get involved not only if they see or hear about abuse but in efforts to transform society so as to reduce or eliminate abuse. In order to achieve these goals, CBW must include both females and males.

Since 2009, students in Perspective Consciousness and Social Justice (SOC 200), Introduction to Theology (THE 201) and several other courses have been allowed to participate in CBW to earn the service hours required for course completion. At the conclusion of the service, these students are required to write a reflective paper to discuss their experience and to show how it connects to course content.

4. Using the CBW for social justice service-learning

Students in the above-listed courses are allowed to complete their required 10 hours of service-learning by assisting with and participating in CBW. SOC 200 is a required course for students whose majors are in the College of Arts and Sciences. The content of the course focuses on critiquing social systems, structures and institutions regarding inequalities. SOC 200 emphasizes the ways that inequality and injustices are structured into everyday life and provides students with a better understanding of activism to promote social justice. A significant part of the course focuses on gender inequalities. Similarly, THE 201 is a required general education course that emphasizes the role that many faiths play in the creation of a more socially just society, in regard to gender and other issues.

Students can accumulate 10 hours by providing assistance in advance of the event as well as on the day of the event. Before the event, students help to create banners and decorations highlighting statistics and catchy phrases related to identifying, responding to, and preventing abuse. Some students work in groups to research specific aspects of abuse and then create informative poster boards displayed at the event. Students also help to create public service announcements that are shown at the event and used during outreach sessions to local elementary, middle, and high school classes. With a trained adult, several college students go to community groups and schools to talk to young people about abuse and to engage them in artistic activities and reflective activities to enhance their knowledge about the topic. These groups are invited to participate in the event and they often do, either by attending or preparing PSAs or materials that can be used in it.

On the day of the event, students earn service hours by helping set up and clean up, assisting local organizations that are tabling at the event, promoting the event on campus, and participating in the walk. All are required to listen to the speakers before and after the event to hear the voices of victims. After the event, all service-learning students participate in a debriefing session in order to better understand

the ways that the issues of domestic and dating violence and their actual service with CBW advance the university's mission and core commitments and how they connect to course material.

5. Engaging men in the CBW

One of the most challenging issues in making sure this event successful is ensuring it is not a female-dominated initiative. Connections with women's mentoring organizations bring many female attendees, but organizers have not yet secured a similar relationship with a largely male group. Feedback from evaluations has informed us that males who participate value it greatly and want to see more male presence.

The coupling of this initiative with the service-learning requirement for SOC 200 and other courses has been helpful. Although the initiative itself attracts students who need to complete their service hours, part of the appeal is that it is on campus and the hours can occur over 1 week, thus students without transportation or with challenging schedules find it user-friendly. This includes a number of males. If they initially participated for the hours only, most service learners, including the males, describe in their reflection papers how rewarding the experience was [61].

Many service learners return in subsequent years, even though participation is no longer required. Kevin (a student whose name is changed to protect his identity) started in year 1 as a service learner. The event hit close to home, as his mother was nearly killed by an abuser. Not only did Kevin participate the next year but in the 2 years after that he helped his mother fly to South Florida from Chicago so she, too, could participate.

Another way CBW has worked to involve men and boys is through active outreach on Barry's campus to male-only or male-dominated organizations. Barry has only one fraternity, but CBW has generally had their involvement. There is a club called Men Achieving Leadership Excellence and Success (M.A.L.E.S) that partners with CBW every year as well. CBW has also attempted, although less successfully, to engage athletes, both male and female. Presentations to coaches meetings have found them to be generally supportive, but travel schedules and other variables seem to get in the way of extensive athletic involvement. A few athletes participate each year, but largely because they are taking a service-learning course, not so much because they are athletes. CBW organizers do believe that outreach to fraternities and athletes is very important, given the extensive research showing these groups are over-represented as abusers and as sexual assailants, and in some cases, as victims [24, 25, 72–75].

Another tactic that has been effective has been to employ the males that have already been engaged to reach out to their peers. This helps breaks down the idea that it is a "female" program, and lets these engaged males use the tactics they feel are most appropriate to involve other males. As an organizing team of almost all women, CBW organizers knows that it is not the best equipped at understanding what messaging that is most effective to and for a male audience. Men like Kevin, noted above, help bring dozens of males to the event each year. Similarly, organizers at the other campuses have done the same, with some success. In the past 4 years, orientations have been held for students seeking to earn service hours with CBW. During these sessions, organizers discuss the event, the scope, extent and dynamics of abuse, as well as gender role norms and patriarchy.

Organizers have also reached out to male faculty and staff members, asking for their support for the event. Most have been tremendous, and some even walk or otherwise attend. Others simply present it to their classes, or allow us to come present to them, so we can invite the participation of both men and women.

These sessions often include showing of a TED talk by Jackson Katz [76] or Michael Kimmel [77] in which they highlight the ways that men can help and showcase how ending abuse, and promoting gender equality, is good for both women and men. As has been previously written, faculty and staff play an important role in helping to end abuse and assault on campuses [32]. Providing introductory sessions for classes has also helped reach males on campus. In these sessions, organizers review the basic scope, extent, and dynamics of abuse and show how it connects to course content. Male students have reported that these classroom sessions are integral in their understanding of how gender inequality in general affects both females and males.

Additionally, CBW organizers have tried to diversify the ways that male students can participate. Knowing that some may not want to engage in the spectacle of the walk, organizers come up with a variety of research and preparatory tasks that may appeal.

Furthermore, the CBW team has researched and reached out to organizations of men in the area, again, with limited success. Although this is an excellent tactic, it is challenging "cold-calling" without a personal connection to an organization, but it has worked with several school groups and a few community organizations. One group that has supported the College Brides Walk financially and with people-power since it began is Amnesty International.

Asking community partners for help with engaging males is another tactic that organizers have employed. The nonprofit organizations with which CBW organizers work, often have access to male volunteers so they have been helpful in this regard.

Ensuring that the programming elevates male voices has been another tactic. The event always features a male speaker, whether it is a survivor, activist, performer, police officer, or a male in another role. Additionally, each year, some element of bystander intervention is included in the training, whether it is a workshop, via a speaker, or through video clips. Organizers also utilizing the literature ensure that the initiative tackles hegemonic masculinity, but in a way that is not threatening or blaming.

Finally, CBW organizers have worked hard to engage local media to promote the event. Barry University always issues a press release, and all the organizers reach out to any media contacts we have. In these interviews or spots, the importance of male involvement is highlighted. The CBW team has been fortunate to receive great press coverage each year, which not only promotes the event, but can also help debunk the idea that this is "women's work."

6. Conclusion

In sum, CBW has been a labor of love for the organizers. The team constantly seeks to improve its efforts, and one of the topics that most frequently comes up is the continued need to engage more men and boys. While organizers are proud of the efforts that have made, there is room for improvement in regard to reaching men and boys not only academically, but also emotionally. One thing being planned for the ninth Annual College Brides Walk is more involvement of law enforcement. CBW organizers have been fortunate to have police officers volunteer their time to support the walkers in safely navigating the roads, but given the research that indicates males are more likely to get involved with criminal justice-related efforts, this could attract more men and boys to our initiative. Furthermore, given research about abuse in the LGBT community, continued outreach to organizations in schools, like Gay Straight Alliances (GSAs), or on campuses, like Barry's PRIDE, and in the community, like Human Rights First, might also help attract committed males. As Katz [76] says in his TED talk, "Violence against women—it's a men's issue."

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Author details

Laura Finley Sociology and Criminology, Barry University, Miami Shores, FL, USA

*Address all correspondence to: lfinley@barry.edu

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