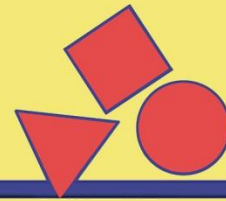


# National Sexual Assault Coalition Resource Sharing Project



## Let's Unpack That: Men's Access to Violence Against Women's Services

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In our Second Wave dash to address the epidemic of Violence Against Women, we fell short in considering needs of men and boys. Of course, we did. Though well intentioned, operating in crisis can lead to the creation of temporary, panicked fixes that become grant funded before we have fully considered outcomes evaluations or the development of service standards. We know that if “women” is in our organizational name, if we refer to all victims as “she,” or we distribute pink brochures and host websites featuring sad lady stock photos, we alienate not only male survivors but our youth, elders, the trans\*<sup>1</sup> community, and many others. Those are barriers that are easy to fix, fairly affordable, and not very time consuming. So, why do they often feel so challenging?

Like the last piece of vacation or any trip, unpacking is usually the least fun part. We're forced to look at where we've been, how we got there, and who we've become as a result. If we're lucky, we get to reminisce over the travel souvenirs collected, but much more common is the bag full of laundry waiting to be hauled down to the basement for a good washing. The latter may take more time and humility to fully unpack. Personally, I always like to put it off as long as possible.

As we unpack, we are bound to uncover many questions. These are some I have considered as I have begun to do my own unpacking:

**How does the population that holds the most institutional power fit in to our conversations on underserved populations?** Accessibility of programming is a crucial topic for our Movement as we recognize the many societal power disparities. We know that populations that have been historically marginalized -- People of Color, immigrants, the Deaf population, and children, for example—are at a higher risk of sexual assault and are less likely to access services. We also know that, particularly, Women of Color are less likely to hold positions of leadership in our Movement.

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<sup>1</sup> Trans\* is a term that covers all the ways that the word can be completed: i.e, transman, transwoman, transsexual, transgender, etc. It indicates one's gender identity moving away from one's gender assignment.

<b>Access to Power/Norm</b>	<b>Limited Access to Power<sup>2</sup>/Other</b>
Men	Women, Transgender and Intersex individuals
White people	People of Color and Indigenous Populations
Adults	Children, Youth and Elderly
Heterosexual	Lesbians, Gays, Bisexual individuals
Cisgender individuals	Transgender and gender nonconforming/non-binary individuals
Able-bodied individuals	Individuals with physical, behavioral, cognitive disabilities
Middle class and Wealthy	Working class, poor people
US Citizens	Immigrants, Refugees
Christians/Christian normative	Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Sikhs and many other non-Christian religions

<b>Access to Services at RCC<sup>3</sup>s/Norm</b>	<b>Limited Access to Services at RCCs/Other</b>
Women	Men, Transgender and Intersex individuals
White people	People of Color and Indigenous Populations
Adults	Children, Youth, and Elderly
Heterosexual	Lesbians, Gays, Bisexual individuals
Cisgender individuals	Transgender and gender nonconforming/non-binary individuals
Able-bodied individuals	Individuals with physical, behavioral, cognitive disabilities
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US Citizens	Immigrants, Refugees
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<sup>2</sup> Table based on FIERCE LGBTQ Youth of Color Organizing Summit, workshop curriculum (February, 2010). This is not an exhaustive list.

<sup>3</sup> Rape Crisis Center

In general, we see those with less access to societal power not accessing services to the extent equal to their group's victimization rate.

The two charts are almost identical with the exception of the top row. We find men wavering between membership in groups with access to the most power and membership in underserved populations. If our analysis of sexual assault depends on an anti-oppression framework, where do we go from here? Well, we must go deeper.

**How do we maintain a gendered analysis of sexual assault that is also inclusive of male survivors?** We do not need to abandon a gendered framework to analyze sexual violence—we can make it more complex. When we approach a more complex analysis we can make it more accessible to transgender and gender nonconforming survivors, too. An analysis of power can help us identify the many gaps and power disparities experienced by survivors in systems, including the Anti-Sexual Assault Movement.

Patriarchy makes it more difficult for all of us to become fully actualized human beings. Patriarchy and the culture of masculinity do not allow for male survivorship, male victims, gayness, trans\*ness, queerness, etc. So, when we devalue all things feminine, that means we devalue all the men who have any qualities that might be considered feminine and, even though it is absurd, sexual assault survivorship is something that is seen as a "woman's problem" by mainstream culture. In expanding the framework, you can see the ways patriarchy hurts men and women alike. It's not okay for a man to be a survivor for the same reason that it is not okay for a man to be gay: because it makes him like a woman. All of this, including barriers to male survivors seeking services, is rooted in a form of misogyny that limits everyone, but in terms of sexual assault services, it is a barrier for everyone except heterosexual cisgender<sup>4</sup> women. Inherent in this conversation is the question how men not being served is, at its roots, patriarchal oppression.

We don't have to sacrifice our paradigm to be more inclusive of men. We have to be willing to look into it little bit deeper and see how intimately sexism affects all people-- to give language to a breadth of experiences, so we can create healing spaces for all survivors. And that may mean that we are forced to acknowledge that when we are working with male survivors, we have to reflect their gendered experience. We have to create new language for men to understand the layered impact of assault. We need to see that male survivorship may look different because male identified individuals are facing different challenges but that survivorship is rooted in the same gender-valuing systems that house and support violence against queer people, trans\* people, women, and girls. It is, of course, also rooted in white supremacy, ableism, money/property-valuing (capitalism), and heteronormativity. Sexual assault is an exploitation of a sexual nature rooted in and/or furthered by a power disparity.

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<sup>4</sup> Cis is a term that means on the same side as/of (used in both chemistry and gender studies). As an opposite of trans\*, this term refers to one's gender assignment being "on the same side as" their gender identity.

Our analysis belongs squarely at multiple intersections of oppression, as well as, the multi-layered and valid experience of each individual survivor.

**Who's steering this AllyShip?** In an anti-oppression framework, we are directed to engage in allyship with marginalized populations as opposed to merely including them. White people must, each day, work to align themselves with People of Color, organizing against racism. This allyship is at the discretion of each Person of Color, each day. In order to be anti-racist white allies, white people must acknowledge and give up power. The AllyShip can feel like sailing some rough seas as people recognize their own power held and work to redistribute it in allyship

Allyship with male survivors, because of their placement in both underserved and access to power on the above charts, is differently complicated because both men and women have to give up power. Men's membership decreases in the access to power column as they are men with disabilities, gay men, Black men, undocumented men, and sexual assault victims. Male survivors must give up the power they receive from the Man Group as they shift from Norm to Other. And because men rely on their power for status, they will not claim survivorship. It is, in essence, feminine. This makes for a fragmented relationship between the Violence Against Women Movement and a movement for male survivor inclusion. VAW must give up their name and male survivors must give up their power. That sounds hard for everyone. And, in creating a complex analysis of oppression as roots of sexual violence, we can further encompass the experiences of colonized peoples and victims of war.

**How does vicarious and direct trauma play a part in men's access to services?** I worked with and was mentored by women who have dedicated their lives to this work, who put this Movement together, and who survived rape at a time when the police were less than responsive. I worked for programs that were very proud of their "Herstory." I have spent eleven years bearing witness to brutal male violence through direct service advocacy. I survive sexism and a culture of rape every day. I carry these experiences with me, and they inform how I view the world. I share this because I also carry with me the biases formed by these experiences. Deeper than the simple aesthetic symbolism we can employ in our outreach strategies is the unpacking of vicarious and direct trauma as we continue to reevaluate how we make space for all survivors in services and in service to all survivors.

Advocacy is about making and holding space for someone's autonomy. Sometimes doing that, as women, for men, can hurt a little when we are in vulnerable place or don't have a handle on our triggers. If we are not solid in our boundaries, it can feel like we are back doing emotional caretaking of men, which is not only harmful to everyone, it isn't advocacy. Agencies wanting to move towards serving more male survivors can benefit from facilitating a space for staff to work on their self-awareness around what may come up from advocating with male survivors, working on having really clear boundaries, feeling clear about why men deserve to access our services, and looking at how we can all benefit from emotionally present men working through their trauma.

It is important for me to uncover my roots in sexism. My trauma exposure response directly relates to my evaluation of gender inclusive service provision. I write this in the hopes that it may feel relevant to others seeking deeper analysis. My survivorship and thoughts about how services are accomplished are not all-encompassing. It is critical that we create a common understanding that no matter how well informed we are about gender and sexism and oppression, we are all engaged in the systems that perpetuate it. We still struggle for power and autonomy, and we do it by whatever means are presented to us. There is nothing wrong with us; we are behaving in perfectly logical ways inside a system that is not only illogical but ill-intentioned. And it's not enough to change our logo to blue or use gender neutral pronouns. We have to dig deeper for a more robust analysis of gender valuing in our society. The beauty of it is that we absolutely can. This is where I have started. Where will you start?

*For more reading and thinking visit-*

“The One Thing All Men Feel, But Never Admit”

<http://www.policymic.com/articles/54105/the-one-thing-all-men-feel-but-never-admit>

“Rethinking a Movement: A Conversation with Connie Burk” (p. 36-38)

<http://nwnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/3-Rethinking-a-Movement.pdf>

“The Myth of Shared Female Experience and How It Perpetuates Inequality”

<http://blackgirldangerous.org/new-blog/2013/5/13/the-myth-of-shared-female-experience>

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