

Considerations When Adapting the Power and Control Wheel^a

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The Domestic Abuse Intervention Project (DAIP) in Duluth, Minnesota designed the original *Power and Control Wheel* with a particular group of battered women.^b It was not intended as a universal description of battering behaviors.

The tactics ... are not inclusive of all controlling and abusive tactics. They were, however, almost universally experienced by the over 200 women interviewed in 1984 when the DAIP developed its twenty-six week educational rehabilitation course for men who batter.¹

In practice, advocates, trainers, and group facilitators regularly search for more effective methods to reach their audience. Training models, group exercises, handouts, and visual aids are constantly in motion. The Power and Control Wheel demonstrates this process of adaptation.

One of the things we're always trying to do is say that theory should come from the actual lived experiences of people who are trying to think about their lives. And you can build a framework around which people can start to put their experience and reshape it – it always has to be a little bit in motion. So you can't get overly attached to the Wheel as saying these are the behaviors that are in it. Women have to be able to put their own in. And we have wheels where they are blank inside and you fill in the blanks. ... We've tried to always kind of design things where it's not to say we have any theory going on, but very broad theories and then an individual, based on the place that they're coming from, as rural women or African American or Native American, they can take their life experience and put it in.²

Women's groups and practitioners, refusing to think in terms of a unidimensional victim, have created their own adaptations of the Wheel to explain the diverse ways in which women experience battering. Groups decide they need to adapt the Wheel as they recognize a breach between popular explanations of battering and their particular experience of oppression. Over twenty-five adaptations are known to be available – not including language translations. There is no one procedure survivors use to build their own Wheel. This paper offers group facilitators lessons from the DAIP experience, discussion topics, and examples from other adaptations.

Developing Educational Tools: Lessons from the DAIP

Process.

In 2006, it is difficult to understand the complex process involved in developing what are now accepted explanations of violence against women. But it took many players in Duluth three years of struggling with unresolved theoretic questions and disjointed concepts to design the training curricula that are so familiar today. Between 1983 and 1986, staff of the DAIP opened discussions with women's groups, men's groups, mental health professionals, and co-workers. They brought together experts who represented the vision and struggles of the battered women's movement and the pro-feminist men's movement. They told stories of women's experiences with battering and worked with the women's liberation groups to develop a description of battering behaviors. Meanwhile, the women's group was engaged in their own process of

questioning available theories of violence against women. Through an intensive period of dialogue with survivors, the purpose, intent, and effect of battering were clarified and articulated.

By 1986, Ellen Pence and Michael Paymar completed a carefully constructed curriculum for men’s groups built around a new framework for understanding battering. Since its creation, the curriculum and the Power and Control Wheel continue to be adapted. For instance, the Wheel that is used today was revised by the DAIP for the 1990 batterers’ educational curriculum. This revision involved opening discussions with survivors and working with the Battered Women’s Advisory Committee. For those women, sexual abuse was a type of physical abuse holding power to reinforce other tactics inside of the wheel. Moving sexual abuse to the outside rim of the wheel created space for another tactic inside. ‘Minimizing, Denying and Blaming’ was added as a common theme in stories women told of their experience.

How the DAIP creates and adapts educational tools that accurately depict how battering works can be found by exploring common threads in the evolution of their current practices. Four of the practices they use are summarized in this section: personal experiences and self-reflection, dialogue, question-posing, and critical thinking.

Personal experience serves as a reference point for understanding the experience of others and, in turn, the experience of others extends and challenges our own *self-reflection*. Self-reflection is a process of placing oneself in the position of knower and known, teacher and student. It helps make meaning of one’s experience in the world. In the DAIP, personal experience and self-reflection are interwoven in the questions, values, determination of truth, critiques, and analyses of their work. Meaningful *dialogue* requires one to put forth their experience, place that among the experiences of others, step back to find the commonalities, and consciously use that information to deepen an analysis of their own experience. Joining in dialogue with others to weave personal histories with political interpretations is an intellectual and emotional process. Frameworks that emerge from self-reflection help one grasp how different perspectives merge into a larger body of what is known; demystify how one can simultaneously be oppressed and privileged; clarify critique; encourage one to assume responsibility for change; and guide strategies for social transformation. It is an individual and group process.

Asking questions that come from self-reflection and exploring the conditions which surround one’s own experience promote dialogue and critical thinking. The DAIP poses specific questions that challenge theoretic, political, agenda building, and programmatic visions.

<i>Type of question</i>	<i>Purpose of question</i>
<i>Theoretic</i>	Specifies a social condition that requires action. Clarifies a movement critique.
<i>Political</i>	Clarifies movement struggle and places the task among strategies for change.
<i>Agenda Building</i>	Links individual and social change frameworks. Binds theory and practice.
<i>Programmatic</i>	Builds strategies for social change through the design of practice.

From this intensely personal process, explanatory frameworks are built. What is valued, then, is engaging in dialogue, listening to others, comparing interpretations of experiences,

identifying gaps that indicate what is still unknown, and opening those gaps to others. The result can be a critical consciousness that changes how we look and act in the world.

Facilitation.

The DAIP bases its approach to liberatory education on the work of Paulo Freire. He redefines the relationship between teacher and student by asking facilitators to become co-investigators with participants. Facilitation becomes an opportunity to personally engage as participating subjects in liberation. This new role as teacher *and* learner extends the traditional expectations of facilitation by raising a personal challenge to commit to one’s own process of liberation.

The insights and kernels of truth that spring from our collective effort to know can best be facilitated by a teacher who herself is working to expand her own knowledge, her own ability to think critically. The facilitator obviously brings experience and knowledge to a group. ... A facilitator becomes the best instrument of another person’s learning when she allows that person to experience her own searching. As we experience that seeking and searching together we become both the teacher and the student.³

The role of facilitator in this method is to guide the group in the discovery of connections between personal experiences and the social, institutional, and cultural conditions that frame that experience. At the same time, facilitators come to understand their own experience within the context of a culture of power.

The facilitator brings to the group experiences and knowledge which should neither be denied nor considered complete. Her obligations to the group are to constantly seek a theoretical basis for her work, to continue her own search for knowledge and to help the group keep the ‘big picture’ in mind.⁴

Posing questions about the conditions that surround one’s experience improves dialogue and critical thinking. The table below offers examples of questions facilitators might pose to assist groups as they adapt the Wheel.

<i>Type of question</i>	<i>Examples of questions facilitators might use to improve dialogue and critical thinking.</i>	<i>Purpose of question</i>
<i>Theoretic</i>	How is our experience different from that described by the women in Duluth? In our experience, what produces power?	Specifies a social condition that requires action. Clarifies a movement critique.
<i>Political</i>	What conditions unique to our experience support the power of the batterer? What conditions unique to our experience are barriers to women’s freedom?	Clarifies movement struggle and places the task among strategies for change.
<i>Agenda Building</i>	What behaviors or tactics are used by batterers? What is the rim of the wheel holding these behaviors in place?	Links individual and social change frameworks. Binds theory and practice.
<i>Programmatic</i>	What linguistic or cultural signifiers are important or necessary to describe our experience?	Builds strategies for social change through the design of practice.

Facilitators share their personal experience of discovery and struggle to support a “process of probing deeper, looking wider, bringing together the personal and the political.”⁵ Efforts to understand and act on discoveries that emerge from this process are the responsibility of the individual and the group. “Until I started letting go of the need to control the end point of the group, I didn’t realize that every group has its own truth to find and its own place to go.”⁶

Facilitators model an alternative way of being and interacting, demonstrating non-violent, egalitarian relationships. This is accomplished by creating an alternative environment for participants. The following chart, found in the manual for facilitators of the women’s liberation groups, defines the difference between an oppressive and a liberating environment.⁷

<i>Creating an Opposing Experience</i>	
<i>Oppressive Environment</i>	<i>Liberating Environment</i>
Debate is stifled.	Debate is encouraged.
Environment is stagnant.	Environment is open, restless and changing.
Pronouncements are made.	Participants engage in dialogue.
Knowledge is held by a few.	Knowledge is within all of us.
Information is hoarded.	Information is shared.
Process is rigidly structured, orderly.	Process is flowing, creative, noisy.
Action on behalf of self is punished.	Action on behalf of self is encouraged.
Action for self is defined by others.	Action for self is defined by self.
Language excludes some.	Language includes all.
Expertise limited.	Expertise limitless.
Diversity is ignored.	Diversity is recognized and appreciated.

Facilitators are also accountable to women who have been battered. They are asked to seek out women’s experience and truth, and to center the group understanding in the realities of women’s lives. Accountability to women who are battered includes a continual search for one’s own truth which adds clarity to the participant’s search for their truth. Expecting facilitators to engage in their own liberatory process redefines the focus of group facilitation.

Considerations for Discussion

How Do Oppressions Work?

The materials of the DAIP are presented generically without any cultural referents. Such an appearance of neutrality often signifies a white, middle class, heterosexual experience of the world. The interconnections of oppression are not absent from the written materials of the DAIP, but the Wheel itself is a gender specific description of battering. The DAIP leaves it to those who experience other types of oppression to articulate how multiple sites of power intersect their lives through the battering dynamic.^c

While feminists prioritize women’s oppression for social action, how oppression works – by class, gender, race or ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, and physical or mental ability – is understood to be interconnected and interlocking in nature.

The assumptions and tactics involved in battering are those made and used by all oppressor groups: the belief that one individual/group has the right to control

another individual/group, and to act in ways to insure that compliance is achieved and maintained.⁸

The battered women's movement has traditionally struggled with the multiple intersections of women's experiences with oppression.

Racism, classism, heterosexism, ableism, ageism, are all part of the pattern of violence related to battering. ... Battering cannot be eliminated in isolation from the effort to create social justice world wide, including the elimination of violence in all its forms. Our work to end battering cannot be separated from our efforts to end racism, heterosexism/homophobia, classism, or ageism.⁹

Using the framework of individual battering as entrée to grapple with oppression, the DAIP uses the *Relationship of Sexism to Other Forms of Oppression Chart* (Attachment A). This tool can broaden discussions of how oppression works; make connections between oppression at individual, group, and cultural levels; and support participants as they begin to "recognize how their own oppression and their participation in the oppression of others strengthens men's power over women."¹⁰ Understanding each site of oppression as interconnected and yet unique, those struggling for social justice or liberation gain insight into the complexity of the challenges they face. Strategies for change can then focus on the multitude of institutions, structures, and ideologies that form the system itself.

How Will You Know the Truth?

Because socially constructed belief systems come to be defined as truth, they are accepted as natural. The DAIP sees belief systems in a power based culture "as being neither the truth nor right but a culturally constructed justification to exploit others."¹¹ Feminists often hold competing perspectives about what is truth.

In the academic world, the production of knowledge is bound by established practices, structures, and power relations. The interest is in finding a universal truth through specifically regulated methods of science.

Each society has its regime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true.¹²

The "ruling class" of science has historically been male, leaving women's experiences unexplored and unarticulated.¹³ Some feminists argue that the current mechanisms required for the production of knowledge yield only partial truths. For those feminists, knowledge emerges from many locations including those outside of the institutions and structures assigned responsibility for producing what is called truth.

Some see that the traditions of science limit what truths can be known and leaves other truths marginalized and hidden.¹⁴ These "subjugated knowledges" represent ways of knowing that have been disqualified and "located low down on the hierarchy."¹⁵ Once they are exposed and brought forward, these knowledges offer different visions and different understandings of truth. The DAIP curricula emphasize that

while this country is overshadowed by a dominant culture, we do not all experience the messages and the realities of that culture in the same way. A white attorney and

a Hispanic migrant worker will bring very different experiences of culture, community, and family life to a batterers' group. The facilitator must not make the mistake of believing that his or her reality is somehow universal.¹⁶

Adaptations of the Wheel demonstrate the effort to use one's own knowledge, language, and method of expression to describe commonalities of experience and relocate that experience at the heart of their analysis. The process of clarifying, challenging, and reconstructing experiences from everyday lives leads "groups [to] create knowledge that fosters resistance."¹⁷ In the search for truth, a feminist method would move women's experience to the center and seek women's unrestrained interpretations of those experiences.

How Do You Understand Power?

The Wheel organizes behaviors around a center of power and control, meaning that the interactions of chosen behaviors create power and create control. As with perceptions of truth, there are many presentations of what that power is and how it works.

The DAIP curricula rely heavily on utilitarian presentations of power – power most often associated with coercion, force, domination, and control.^d Power is presented as a possession that can be owned, contracted, and exchanged. But the Wheel also implies alternative concepts of power that bear consideration if one uses this tool as a framework to explain their own experience. For feminists thinking about violence against women, a theory of power would explain a range of societal divisions and effects, apply to organizational structures and to individuals, to the physical and the non-physical. What power looks like in intimate relationships expands our understanding of what power looks like across society.

Michel Foucault argues that power in modern society cannot rely solely on coercive, compensatory, or conditioned power. In his explanation, power is internalized in cultural norms and practices: individuals monitor their own bodies, thoughts, and behaviors as they monitor each other. This power is no longer power-over, but power-through and power-within. It is the power of morality, guilt, and confession.

Foucault refers to the architectural design of a panopticon to illustrate this new vision of power. One might recognize the similarities of this design to the Wheel graphic. The panopticon is

a perimeter building in the form of a ring. At the centre of this, a tower, pierced by large windows opening on to the inner face of the ring. The outer building is divided into cells each of which traverses the whole thickness of the building. These cells have two windows, one opening onto the inside, facing the windows of the central tower, the other, outer one allowing daylight to pass through the whole cell. ... The back lighting enables one to pick out from the central tower the little captive silhouettes in the ring of cells. In short, the principle of the dungeon is reversed; daylight and the overseer's gaze capture the inmate more effectively than darkness.¹⁸

This design offers those at the center the capacity to see into each individual cell. Those in the cells, however, are isolated from each other, and cannot determine whether the tower is occupied or not. Power now becomes a

system of surveillance ... no need for arms, physical violence, material constraints. Just a gaze. An inspecting gaze, a gaze which each individual under its weight will end by interiorizing to the point that he is his own overseer, each individual thus

exercising this surveillance over, and against, himself. A superb formula: power exercised continuously and for what turns out to be a minimal cost.¹⁹ Foucault's concepts can challenge our thinking about how power works in the lives of women who have been battered. She is at "the point where power reaches into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies and inserts itself into their actions and attitudes, their discourses, learning processes and everyday lives."²⁰

Adaptations of the Power and Control Wheel

Adaptations of the Wheel can be understood as texts in which "ordinary knowledge" is written.²¹ These adaptations define how power and control work in women's lives; expand definitions of who or what is oppressive; demonstrate connections of battering to culture; explore commonalities of tactics; clarify the intersections of individuals and institutions; identify cultural characteristics that support battering; or offer visions of what healthy relationships look like. A variety of behavioral themes are found in adaptations of the Wheel.^e

Additional Tactics

- Using state mechanisms of control
- Spiritual or cultural abuse

Connections to other oppressions

- Vulnerabilities to external oppressors, isolation from supportive communities
- Historical relationships of domination
- Women's oppression: women's bodies, law, gender roles, economics

Intersections with cultural constructs

- Concepts of hierarchy, belief systems, patriarchy, objectification
- Cultural practices

Result of battering

- Destruction of relationships
- Destruction of self

Alternative relationships

- Positive relationships with self and others

The outcomes of these adaptations are wheels that bring clarity to the shifting, fluid, and unique nature of women's experience with violence in their relationships.

Conclusion

The original Power and Control Wheel serves as a conceptual frame that organizes a broad range of women's everyday, familiar, lived experiences at the moment in which battering and oppression intersect. The process of adapting the Wheel to organize battering behaviors is a unique opportunity to connect theory and practice, expand group understandings of how oppression works, and improve the ability to design responsive intervention strategies.

Endnotes

- ^a This paper is based on a content analysis of six written manuals produced by the DAIP (Pence, 1985, 1987, and 1996; Pence & Paymar, 1986, 1990, and 1993) and interviews with DAIP staff and consultants. For more information about the DAIP visit www.duluth-model.org
- ^b For a detailed explanation of the original Power and Control Wheel and tactics of control, see Pope and Ferraro (2006a).
- ^c Crenshaw (1994) and Smith (2003) offer powerful discussions of violence against women and communities of color.
- ^d For the DAIP definitions of power, see Pope and Ferraro (2006b), pages 6-8.
- ^e Samples of adaptations can be found at www.vawresources.org

Citations

- ¹ Asmus, Ritmeester, & Pence, 1991, p. 159.
- ² Ellen Pence Interview, 1998.
- ³ Pence, 1987, p. 19.
- ⁴ Ibid, p. 30.
- ⁵ Ibid, p. 10.
- ⁶ Ibid, p. 20.
- ⁷ Ibid, p. 30.
- ⁸ Battered/Formerly Battered Women's Task Force, 1992, p. 5.
- ⁹ Ibid, p. 15.
- ¹⁰ Pence, 1987, p. 56.
- ¹¹ Ibid.
- ¹² Foucault, 1980, p. 131.
- ¹³ Smith, 1979, p. 14. See also Smith, 1990.
- ¹⁴ Gordon, 1991; Smith, 1979.
- ¹⁵ Foucault, 1980, p. 82.
- ¹⁶ Pence and Paymar, 1990, p. 183. See also Pence & Paymar, 1993, p. 85.
- ¹⁷ Hill-Collins, 1990, p. 207.
- ¹⁸ Foucault, 1980, p. 147.
- ¹⁹ Ibid, 1980, p. 155.
- ²⁰ Ibid, 1980, p. 39.
- ²¹ Smith, 1990, p. 164.

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Attachment A: Relationship of Sexism to Other Forms of Oppression Chart

<i>Tactic of Control</i>	<i>People of Color</i>	<i>Old People & Children</i>	<i>Poor People</i>	<i>Gays Lesbians</i>	<i>Jewish People</i>	<i>Women</i>
<i>Isolation</i>	Red-lining. Lack of police and social services response to minorities. Gentrification.	High rises become ghettos. Separate medical care.	Housing projects. No access to transportation.	Forced to stay closeted. Some neighborhoods unsafe.	Excluded from clubs and communities. Quota systems define which occupations were allowed.	Need a man for protection. Women out alone are whores.
<i>Emotional Abuse</i>	Racist language. Called lazy. Whites deny worth of other cultures. Ridicule other languages.	Ignored. Ideas not listened to. Talked about while present as though they aren't in the room. Patronized	Blamed for their poverty. Considered lazy.	Viewed as sexual perverts. Public taunting.	Stereotyped. Anti-Semitic remarks.	Called names. Treated as sex objects. Called dumb.
<i>Economic Abuse</i>	Last hired. Poor paying jobs. First laid off.	Low priority for government funding. Mail fraud schemes aimed at old people.	Welfare regulations keep them down. Use fact that they need money to invade their lives.	Discrimination in employment.	Corporate environment is anti-Jewish.	Low-paying jobs, paid less than a man for the same work.
<i>Sexual Abuse</i>	Pornography racist. No protection from rape. Seen as sex machines.	High incidence in care facilities for old and young people. Children exploited in pornography. Adults take advantage of children's trusting natures.	Less police protection.	Accused of child molestation. Ridiculed as not being real men or women.	Male attitudes toward Jewish girls as prime to be used sexually.	Rape, incest, marital rape, pornography.
<i>Privilege of Status</i>	Access to school and job. Assumption that	Non-income producing, thus, nonproductive,	Middle-class values seen as most important.		Non-recognition of Jewish holidays and religious days-	Subservient to men. Bible used as a tool to keep women in

	white culture is the only one that exists.	thus, not a part of the mainstream.				assumption of Christianity.	their place.
<i>Threats</i>	Police brutality.	Threat of violence. Complaints not taken seriously.	Social workers threaten to terminate benefits.	Police harassment.	Swastikas painted on Synagogues.		
<i>Using Children</i>	Less investigation needed to terminate parental rights.		Welfare threatens to take children to gain compliance.	Taken away in custody battled.		Economic security bargained away in divorce or custody.	
<i>Intimidation</i>	Police stops and checks. More arrests.	Elderly fear being out at night. Easy targets.	Court system works differently for those who can't afford attorneys.	Homophobia rarely challenged publicly. AIDS-homosexual disease.		Police don't protect women.	
<i>Violence</i>	Genocide, lynchings, Trail of Tears, police brutality.	Spanking. Mugging-seniors. Sexually abusing kids.	Hospitals won't admit the critically ill. Slum buildings burn, killing people.	Gay bashing. Gay killings.	Burn Synagogues. Destroy Jewish property. "Night of the Broken Glass"	Battering. Rape.	

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Note: Group participants focus on filling in the cells on this chart. Several cells are left blank indicating its use as a tool for group dialogue and process.

