

A Guide to Critical Reflection

Understanding and Using a Feminist Anti-Oppression Framework



Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses
2010

Prepared by Angie Rupra of New Wave Consulting
For OAITH ©

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	3
Acknowledgements	4
Who is this manual for?	5
Why was this Manual Created?	5
What is the Purpose of the Manual?	7
Suggested Ways to use the Manual	7
A Note on Critical Self-reflection	8
An Introduction to a Feminist Anti-Oppression Framework	13
Part 1: Case Studies	
<i>Advocacy</i>	19
<i>Parenting</i>	25
<i>Supporting Differences</i>	29
<i>Food</i>	32
<i>Spirituality</i>	34
<i>Reframing Anger</i>	36
<i>Facilitated Referrals</i>	39
Part 2: Worker and Agency Philosophy	
<i>Power of Language</i>	42
<i>Flexible Hierarchy</i>	44
<i>Women's Personal Power</i>	47
<i>Women's Political Power</i>	48

INTRODUCTION

Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses (OAITH) is a provincial coalition founded by women's shelter advocates in 1977. Membership includes primarily first stage emergency shelters for abused women and their children, as well as some second stage housing programs and community-based women's service organizations.

The Association works with member agencies to educate and promote change in all areas that abused women and their children identify as important to their freedom from violence.

OAITH operates from an integrated, feminist, anti-racist/ anti-oppression perspective on violence against women. We recognize that violence and abuse against women and children occurs as a result of unequal power and status of women and children in society. We also recognize that all racism and oppression of women is a form of violence.



We are committed to:

- Removing barriers to equality for all women and children.
- Ensuring the voices and experiences of all abused women are heard when working for social change.
- Increasing awareness through education, public advocacy and empowerment for OAITH member agencies.
- Assisting shelters in offering support and services to women.
- Offering training to OAITH member shelters.
- Working with our equity-seeking allies in the community to end all forms of violence and oppression of women.

*“What I am proud of, what seems so simply clear,
is that feminism is a way to fight for justice, always in short supply.”
-Barbara Strickland*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This manual would not have been possible without the efforts and resources of the diverse stakeholders who helped shape its development.

Special thanks are owed to the following persons:

OAITH Membership Education and Training Committee: Chair -Lee-Anne Lee, for their support in the development of the manual.

Natalia Maharaj, OAITH's Project Administrative Assistant, for her administrative and coordination support.

Margaret Alexander, OAITH's Project Coordinator, for sharing her vision and practical suggestions on how a feminist anti-oppression framework can be applied to the daily experiences of anti-violence feminist workers.

Louisa Kalimeris, freelance editor, who copy-edited this guide.

Yoon-Hee Park who formatted and designed the layout of this guide.

And finally, to the feminist anti-violence workers across Ontario who took the time to share their experiences and challenges in supporting women and children, which helped shape the content of this manual.

A Guide to Critical Reflection: Understanding and Using a Feminist Anti-Oppression Framework was written by Angie Rupra of New Wave Consulting. Angie is an activist in the area of violence against women, issues affecting immigrant and refugee communities, and pet loss bereavement. Angie identifies as a young woman of colour. Her lived experiences and experience in supporting women and children have impacted her approach to understanding and addressing violence against women.

WHO IS THIS MANUAL FOR?

This manual is written for feminist, anti-violence workers who support women through first-stage emergency shelters for abused women and their children, second-stage housing programs, and community-based women's service organizations. The term 'feminist, anti-violence workers' will be used because it describes *what* we do (work against and to end violence) and *how* we do it (based on feminist principles and a gender-based analysis).

WHY WAS THIS MANUAL CREATED?

This manual was created to help illustrate ways in which a feminist anti-oppression framework can be applied to our work on a daily basis. While we may each understand and interpret what a feminist anti-oppression framework is in our own way, it can be a challenging process to understand how this theory applies to our everyday practice; that is, it can be difficult to know how to use a feminist anti-oppression framework.

While we were developing the content for this manual, we faced similar struggles in making an anti-oppression framework come to 'life'. We endeavoured to create as practical and functional a manual as possible; for it to be a go-to guide, and referenced often.

We wanted to create a manual that sparked interest and, more importantly, raised consciousness about the structural nature of oppression and how it affected how people viewed their work.

While creating this manual, we kept as our focus the premise of our work and our goals in working with women and children who have experienced violence. As anti-violence feminist workers, we recognize that women's lived experiences are impacted by *sociopolitical contexts*. Sociopolitical context refers to social and political power that is not equally or equitably divided, resulting in some people being disproportionately disadvantaged by this unequal division of power. As feminist anti-violence workers, we work to challenge and change this oppressive division of power, to create more equitable conditions for women.

Increasing the understanding and awareness of violence against women as a social and global issue has led to much needed improvements in several areas. The emergence of shelters for abused women coincided with the rise of the feminist movement's focus on politicizing the issue of violence against women.

As awareness of the issue has grown, so too has the depth of social supports available to women and children, including emergency and second-stage housing.

We also reminded ourselves of the importance of raising women's consciousnesses to the social and political contexts of our lived realities. As anti-feminist anti-violence workers, we understand the agency and autonomy that women hold in their lives, meaning the strengths and courage each woman holds that lead her to being the one who knows her lived reality best.

Finally, we reminded ourselves of the importance of doing everything possible to not reinforce oppression in our own work with women. Furthermore, we understand our commitment to working toward eradicating all forms of oppression so that people can live their lives in the true meaning of dignity and self-worth.

As we started writing about what anti-oppression is and how it is used in our work, a natural theme began to emerge, which was the importance of the *self-reflection* process to an anti-oppression framework; that is:

- Being able to identify how our values, beliefs, thoughts, attitudes, assumptions, preconceptions, and biases can impact our attitudes and behaviours.
- Remaining open to having our values, beliefs, thoughts, attitudes, assumptions, preconceptions, and biases be challenged.
- Being able to 'check' our values, beliefs, thoughts, attitudes, assumptions, preconceptions, and biases regularly to ensure they are not negatively impacting the support we provide women and children.
- Understanding how our values, beliefs, thoughts, attitudes, assumptions, preconceptions, and biases are influenced by the systems and institutions we live and work in.

By engaging in a self-reflection process, we increase our understanding of the complexity of women's lives and ensure the support we provide women is grounded in anti-oppressive principles.

Although an anti-oppression framework requires us to understand and respond to oppression faced by the women who come to our agencies for support, it also requires us to understand and respond to power that we may hold as individuals and workers. Because there may be times when we feel powerless in our work, we may not realize the potential power we can hold by virtue of our role.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS MANUAL?

The purpose of this manual is not to offer any definitive answers, but rather facilitate a process whereby anti-violence feminist workers can engage in critical self-reflection while integrating theory from a feminist anti-oppression framework.

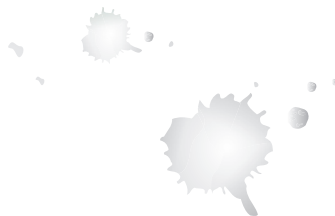
As this manual was developed, we acknowledged that not all parts could work for all feminist anti-violence workers. Just as we use a feminist anti-oppression framework to better understand the realities of the women we work with, we must also use this lens when reflecting on ourselves. Different people will necessarily have different needs.

Regardless of what you take from it, remember that our thoughts, perceptions, and approaches to supporting women are never ‘theory-free’. Theory influences the ways in which we approach our work, as it represents working from a particular knowledge base. The ‘theory-base’ of this manual will be a feminist anti-oppression framework. Throughout the manual we will attempt to demystify the complexities surrounding anti-oppression theory to make it as useful a tool as possible.

SUGGESTED WAYS TO USE THIS MANUAL

This manual is meant to be user-friendly, one that you can pick up, read, and use as it fits with your work. Because of the reflective nature of the manual, our hope is that the different activities suggested throughout will be used through both individual and group processes. A practical way to engage in group reflective processes is at team meetings and staff professional development opportunities.

Please note that this manual does not directly correspond to any in-person trainings; however, it does compliment the “Working Together: Supporting Women Who Have Experienced Violence” training videos produced by OAITH.



A NOTE ON CRITICAL SELF-REFLECTION

Much of our work in supporting women and children who have been impacted by abuse is focused on action, in other words, *doing*. We work with women to help them gain access to safe shelter, housing, and income support. We connect with women when providing them with services such as counselling, support groups, and community accompaniments.

While action is a necessary and critical component of our work, an equally important component is often more difficult to practice – the ability to critically self-reflect on our thoughts, beliefs, values, and approaches to working with women. This makes sense given the various pressures placed on us as feminist, anti-violence workers.

Working with women who have experienced violence involves working in the midst of crises. Shifts can be long and tiring, and the efforts of staff are often focusing on reacting to crises instead of preventing them. This can be exhaustive work. It is easy to get caught up in responding to crises because they demand and warrant our attention. The difficulty arises when so much of our energy and resources are spent attending to crises that remembering to self-reflect becomes easier to forget. However, an important component of a feminist anti-oppression framework is the need for critical self-reflection.

“Self-reflection is defined in terms of becoming awake to present realities, noticing one’s surroundings, and being able to name one’s perceptions, feelings and nuances of behaviours”¹. This is a very personal process, one that must be built into daily living and daily practice. Because self-reflection is a very personal process, it has been undermined as not being a ‘professional’ enough approach to practice. We live in a world where we are taught that there are ‘right’ ways to do things and those ‘right’ ways are often associated with quick responses and fast results. The faster we can help a woman secure housing, the faster she will leave the shelter which will open up space for another woman to enter. The faster we work, the more women we serve. Due to funders’ reliance on quantifying our results, the more women we serve translates into greater ‘efficiency’.

We must remind ourselves that operating within a structured organization can pose constraints on our work. We must also remind ourselves that staying in touch with our values, beliefs, and commitment to anti-oppressive practice is vital to effectively supporting women and children.

¹ Kondrat, M.E., (December 1999). Who is the ‘self’ in self-aware: Professional self-awareness from a critical theory perspective. *Social Service Review*, 73(4), 451 – 477.

Paulo Freire reminds us of the importance of reflection through his concept of *praxis*². Praxis refers to the following:

Reflection plus Action = Change

What this important concept reminds us is that any action that we take, must be *informed action*. Our actions are guided by our values, thoughts, and beliefs. We must work to ensure that our actions reflect values, thoughts and beliefs that are aligned with a feminist anti-oppression framework.

On a personal level, critical reflection means:

- Being able to identify our values and beliefs, as they can impact our attitudes and behaviours.
- Remaining open to having our values, beliefs, thoughts, attitudes and behaviours be challenged.
- Being able to 'check' our assumptions, preconceptions and biases and make changes as necessary to eliminate any harm these may cause.

The following set of questions prepared by Mary Ellen Kondrat³ can be used as a tool to spark critical self-reflection:

- What assumptions do I make and what values do I hold about my social world and its structures, including structures of systematic domination and inequality?
- What is my understanding about how to act in relation to someone who belongs to a different class, race, status and so forth? And from what sources have I learned these social lessons?
- Which of these structural arrangements have I internalized? How do I rationalize them? How do my actions reflect or repudiate these beliefs and values?

² Glass, R.D. (2001, March). *On Paulo Freire's philosophy of praxis and the foundations of liberation education*. Retrieved from http://www.aera.net/uploadedFiles/Journals_and_Publications/Journals/Educational_Researcher/3002/AERA3002_Glass.pdf

³ Kondrat, M.E., (December 1999). Who is the 'self' in self-aware: Professional self-awareness from a critical theory perspective. *Social Service Review*, 73(4), 451 – 477.

- To what extent do I accept (or accept uncritically) the values, beliefs, assumptions, and prescriptions I have received as a result of my socialization into particular communities?
- To what extent do I accept the structures of my society as unproblematic, especially structures related to power and privilege? To what extent am I able or willing to raise questions about them?
- Are there inconsistencies or distortions between my received beliefs/assumptions and the concrete conditions of individuals and group life? How do I account for these contradictions?

It is these types of questions that allow us to get to the root cause of our thoughts and actions. By identifying and articulating our feelings, attitudes and perceptions regarding diverse communities and social issues, this may raise issues that we want to address and change.

If we can combine this internal reflection with dialogue, the growth can go even further. Engaging in dialogue with others about our thoughts, values, and beliefs can lead to consciousness-raising, so that we better understand issues of systemic oppression and how these conditions have contributed to marginalized ways of living. While this deepened understanding of people's lived realities is important, Paulo Freire argued the goal of taking informed action is not just to deepen our understanding but also to contributing to changing the world through social justice.

We are not separate from the various systems and institutions that operate in society, like the government, media, education, criminal justice, and even the social service sector. We cannot escape involving ourselves with these systems. Therefore, critical self-reflection involves examining how these systems and institutions affect us in terms of our immediate values, beliefs, and relationships.

On a structural level, critical reflection means remaining open to understanding how systems and institutions perpetuate privilege and oppression, and how they create marginalized ways of living.

Critical reflection is a process of questioning, learning, unlearning and wanting to grow.



The following set of questions prepared by Mary Ellen Kondrat⁴ can be used as a tool to link the structural level with one's personal self:

- What are the structures of my society, in particular, those structures related to power, inequality, and marginalization?
- On what basis are these structures rationalized by members of society?
- What is my location in relation to each of these structures?
- Who benefits from structural arrangements and who loses? How do I benefit or lose?
- In what ways do my assumptions and activities contribute to the maintenance or transformation of such social structures?

The growth that can occur within us as feminist anti-violence workers is important in that it increases our effectiveness in supporting women and children, and this growth can be both liberating and transformational. This individual growth can ignite our commitment to achieving change at a larger level by challenging the systems and institutions that continue to perpetuate oppression.

For example, one may examine their feelings, attitudes, and perceptions regarding working with racialized women. In other words, they engage in a self-reflection process and consciously work to eliminate racist biases in their work. While this transformation is an important part of the change process, it does not eliminate racism (or any other form of oppression). Systems and institutions in society, including the organizations we work with, reinforce oppression. Therefore, reflection is not only needed on oneself, but on societal structures as well.

Self-reflection can be an uncomfortable process. "It is not uncommon for anti-oppression education to elicit feelings of discomfort, fear and anger. Most people are unaccustomed to being challenged to having to reconsider their belief system".⁵ While this is a process that we may go through as we self-reflect, it is important to remember that an anti-oppression framework asserts that oppression exists on multiple levels. This includes how we treat one another (micro level discrimination) and how systems create and perpetuate oppression (systemic or macro level oppression). When the feelings such as guilt surface, it is important to contextualize oppression and remember that an anti-oppression framework aims to eliminate oppression on both micro and macro levels, and

⁴ Kondrat, M.E., (December 1999). Who is the 'self' in self-aware: Professional self-awareness from a critical theory perspective. *Social Service Review*, 73(4), 451 – 477.

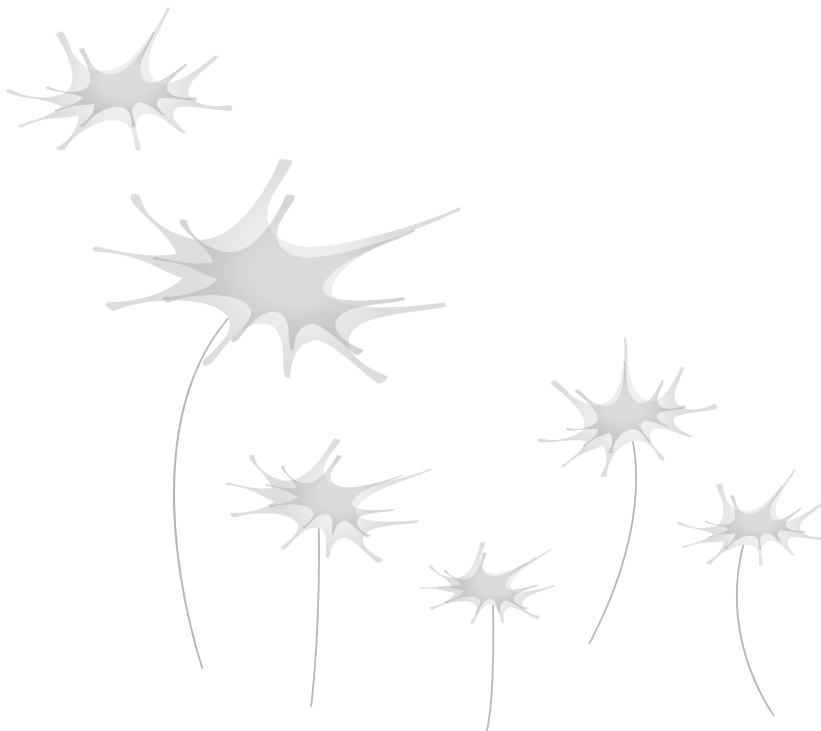
⁵ Shen, V. & Campbell, D.A., *Involve youth 2: A guide to meaningful youth engagement*. City of Toronto.

sees these as intertwined (i.e. how we treat one another is impacted by what we are taught by systems and institutions).

From a practical point of view, engaging in an ongoing process of self-reflection can help you in your work. It can help you feel more grounded in your decisions, allow you to feel more connected to the women you are working with, and, as a result, feel more confident in your work. Being in tune with one's thoughts, emotions and behaviours can be an empowering process. It is through reflection that meaning and knowledge are derived from your experience. Without this, we may unknowingly be allowing our thoughts, emotions, and behaviours to alter our attempts to fully connect with women and thereby support them.

“The key choice, then, is not whether to be an agent of change, but whether to be a more conscious agent of change”⁶

Keep this idea of self-reflection in mind as you work through the manual, as a range of activities and exercises will be provided to allow you to critically reflect on your own values, beliefs, and approaches that impact how you support women.



⁶ Kondrat, M.E., (December 1999). Who is the 'self' in self-aware: Professional self-awareness from a critical theory perspective. *Social Service Review*, 73(4), 451 – 477.

AN INTRODUCTION TO A FEMINIST ANTI-OPPRESSION FRAMEWORK

“Ensuring that anti-oppression is embedded in everything that you do by examining attitudes and actions through the lens of *access, equity and social justice*”

Theory refers to the perspectives, values, and beliefs we hold that guide our work. It includes knowledge and information that help us better understand the lived realities of the women and children we work with. One of these theories is an anti-oppression framework.

Anti-oppression refers to the “strategies, theories, and actions that challenge socially and historically built inequalities and injustices that are ingrained in our systems and institutions by policies and practices that allow certain groups to dominate other groups”.⁷

For the purposes of this manual, the term *feminist anti-oppression framework* will be used. This manual incorporates diverse ways of thinking from different interpretations of feminism within the context of an anti-oppressive framework.

For example, liberal feminism looks at the social construction of gender and how society has established norms and expectations of what it means to be a woman or a man⁸. These norms encompass expectations on how women and men are expected to think, act, dress, and behave, etc. Within these norms, inequality has been created by assigning superior values and increased morality, and, therefore, power to men at the expense of women. Radical feminism looks at how patriarchy manifests itself through male privilege, and thus power, resulting in the marginalization of women. Socialist feminism understands women’s oppression as caused by patriarchy, but sees a class-based system as further perpetuating women’s inequality. Socialist feminism examines how gender inequality intersects with other forms of oppression to create different lived realities.

⁷ Douglas, S. *Along the unique journey, Exploring equity frameworks: Finding common ground for collaborative action*. Regional Diversity Roundtable. [Powerpoint Slides].

⁸ Payne, M. (2005). *Modern social work theory*. (3rd edition). New York, New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

An anti-oppression framework starts from the premise that privilege and oppression exist within society, resulting in unequal access to power. This unequal access to power results in privileged groups gaining greater access to information, resources and opportunities whereas those groups that are oppressed experience the opposite.

Oppression is defined as “the systematic mistreatment of a people or group based on a belief in the innate superiority of one group or idea over another”⁹. One experiences oppression based on her or his belonging to a social group. The following table highlights who experiences oppression in our society.

Table 1: Who experiences oppression

IDENTITY	OPPRESSION	OPPRESSED GROUP
Gender	Sexism	Women Trans-gendered women and men
Race	Racism	People of colour
Class	Classism	Working class, People living in poverty
Ability	Ableism	People living with disabilities
Sexual Orientation	Heterosexism, Homophobia, Biphobia	People who are gay, lesbian, bisexual
Age	Ageism	Children, Youth, Seniors
Nationality	Colonialism	Aboriginal people
	Nationalism	Permanent residents, people with temporary visas, sponsored, people with no status, refugee claimants, convention refugees

Oppression occurs at different yet interconnected ‘levels’. At an individual level, which is also referred to as the micro level, oppression can be seen through discrimination, or in how people *treat* one another. Examples of oppression at an individual level include degrading jokes, hurtful comments, violence, and excluding someone based on their belonging to a social group.

⁹ Adapted from the *Cultural Competency Handbook* for students compiled by R. Degano and Dr. M. Disman for the Dept of Public Health Sciences, University of Toronto.

People who are gay, lesbian, or bisexual may be physically attacked because of heterosexism. Women experience disproportionate rates of violence because of sexism. People of colour may be called derogatory names because of racism. This discrimination is a form of oppression; however, the oppression exists because it is supported in our society by systems and institutions.

At a systemic level, also referred to the macro level, oppressive values, thoughts, and beliefs become ingrained or embedded into the various systems that influence our lives including, but not limited to: government, media, education, courts, child welfare, healthcare, military, religion, and even non-profit organizations.

Oppression becomes ingrained into systems that result in less access to power for people who do not identify as privileged groups. Less power is reflected in less access to information, resources, and opportunities.

Privilege refers to the unearned right someone has as a result of his or her identity.

The following table highlights who holds privilege in our society.

Table 2: Who holds privilege

IDENTITY	OPPRESSION	PRIVILEGED GROUP
Gender	Sexism	Men
Race	Racism	White
Class	Classism	Middle to Upper Class
Ability	Ableism	Able-Bodied
Sexual Orientation	Heterosexism, Homophobia, Biphobia	Heterosexual
Age	Ageism	Adults
Nationality	Colonialism	Those who are not Aboriginal
	Colonialism	Canadian-born Citizens

The unearned rights gained from holding privilege in society yields unquestioned power. It becomes easier for someone to assume social dominance by belonging to a particular group.

“For example, when women did not have the right to vote, that was a result of power being organized in such a way that only men had the advantage of voting. Voting was seen as a right that men had, but more accurately it was a privilege held only by men. At the time, it was seen as ‘normal’ for men to have this advantage and it remained so until the condition was challenged by women. While the privilege was real, it was not legitimate because it allowed males to exclude women from political power. The privilege in turn reinforced the unjust power of males over women in many other spheres of life.”¹⁰

In more recent and current examples, consider the following from the Male Privilege Checklist¹¹, adapted from an essay by Peggy McIntosh titled *White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack*.

- On average, I am taught to fear walking alone after dark in average public spaces much less than my female counterparts are.
- If I choose not to have children, my masculinity will not be called into question.
- If I have children and a career, no one will think I’m selfish for not staying at home.
- My elected representatives are mostly people of my own sex. The more prestigious and powerful the elected position, the more this is true.
- When I ask to see “the person in charge,” odds are I will face a person of my own sex. The higher-up in the organization the person is, the surer I can be.
- I do not have to worry about the message my wardrobe sends about my sexual availability.
- I can be confident that the ordinary language of day-to-day existence will always include my sex. “All men are created equal,” mailman, chairman, freshman, he.
- I have the privilege of being unaware of my male privilege.

This last point is particularly important as people are taught not to recognize their privilege. They are taught to see their access to information, resources, and opportunities as normal, natural and deserving.

¹⁰ Carniol, B. (2005). *Case critical*. (5th edition). (p. 7). Toronto, ON: Between the Lines.

¹¹ Compiled by Deutsch, B. (2004, September 14). *The male privilege checklist*. Retrieved from <http://www.amptoons.com/blog/the-male-privilege-checklist/http://www.amptoons.com/blog/the-male-privilege-checklist/>

“We all learn positive messages about dominant group people. There is nothing wrong with positive messages in themselves. But there is something wrong if they are exclusive, if they become positive stereotypes, which only apply to some and not to others. For any dominant group we are in, we learn positive messages about ourselves, even though we may not (in fact, usually don’t) realize it. Where we learn positive messages about ourselves we learn to internalize our own dominance”¹².

Consider your own social location. Are there parts of your identity where you hold privilege? If so, what are positive messages you have learned about yourself that have become internalized as ‘normal’ if you are:

- Heterosexual
- Of white skin colour
- Able-bodied (physically, mentally)
- Upper class (financially)

If you have internalized positive messages about areas where you hold privilege, what messages have you internalized about those experiencing oppression in the same category?

For example, someone holding economic privilege may believe that they have worked hard to deserve the associated benefits. While not to discredit people’s efforts, this internalized message leads to believing that those of low-income and living in poverty have not worked hard enough. Internalized dominance makes it easier to ignore the systemic barriers that people living with oppression experience that affect their access to power. In essence, this process creates social norms; what is defined as normal becomes defined by privileged and socially dominant groups.

Privilege and oppression must be seen as two sides of the same coin; they cannot exist without each other. In order for someone to have unearned advantages because of their social identity, others must lose power. In order for privileged groups to maintain their power, others become oppressed as a way to preserve this power.

¹² Sawyer, J. (1989). Internalized dominance. *Quarterly Change*. 1(4), 16 – 23.

Why do we need an anti-oppression framework?

An anti-oppression framework emerged because it was needed. “In North America, the theories and concepts of anti-oppression grew out of the social justice movements of the 1960s. Disenfranchised groups who were opposing the status quo also began to challenge each other to recognize that different people within these groups experience different levels of oppression”.¹³

While the above tables highlight who holds privilege and who experiences oppression in society, people’s identities are not categorized into neat and tidy boxes. People hold combined identities, including places where they hold privilege and/or experience oppression. This combined identity is referred to as one’s social location or social identity. This means that we work with women who often hold different levels of privilege and oppression. A woman may be low-income and be able-bodied; another woman may be an older woman of colour who is heterosexual. The complexity of women’s social locations will impact her access to power.

Different forms of oppression are interconnected, including sexism, racism, ableism, heterosexism, classism, and ageism. This is the strength that an anti-oppression framework brings to feminist women’s services. While the women we work with have all been impacted by sexism, how they experience this sexism will differ depending on their experiences with other forms of oppression and privilege.

Regardless of what other forms of oppression women may experience, it is important not to ‘rank’ oppression. We must avoid separating different forms of oppression into a hierarchy of importance. No experience of oppression is better or worse than another, rather they will create different experiences for different people. A woman who faces ableism does not experience oppression *more* than a woman living in poverty. A woman who faces racism does not experience oppression *more* than an Aboriginal woman. The important thing to note is that all of these women are experiencing oppression and comparing the severity of their oppression only serves to minimize their experiences. An anti-oppression framework guides us to see all forms of oppression as interconnected and all warranting elimination.

The following section includes activities that suggest ways in which a feminist anti-oppression framework can be applied to our work.

¹³ Alexander, M. (2008). *An integrated anti-oppression framework for reviewing and developing policy: A toolkit for community service organizations*. Springtide Resources. Retrieved from <http://www.springtideresources.org/resources/show.cfm?id=241>.

PART 1: CASE STUDIES

REFLECTIVE ACTIVITY: Advocacy

Cindy has tried to leave her abusive partner several times over the past year and a half. She has come to your shelter three times with her three young children ages 2, 4, and 7 and has returned to her partner each time.

While at the shelter for the third time, Cindy has expressed mixed thoughts and emotions about returning to her partner to her shelter worker, Alina. Cindy believes it's better for her children to be with her and her partner together, who is the father of her children. She also says that she is better off financially when she is with him. She has been on welfare and it does not allow her to meet her and her children's needs. Cindy has also become frustrated with the housing process, as she cannot find adequate accommodation for her and her three children.

Cindy also expresses fear when returning to her partner, as his physical and emotional abuses have increased in severity each time she returns. There is a part of her that wants to live independently from him, and another part that sees life with him as the most feasible reality for her and her children.

Alina listens to Cindy and then shares her own thoughts. Alina tells Cindy that she should be more patient with the housing process and that being on welfare is better than risking her own life and those of her children's.

Exercise 1: Take some time and write down your responses to the following questions. Share them with your colleagues through dialogue.

1. What are your initial reactions to Cindy's situation?
2. Think of other women that you have worked with who have faced a similar situation. How did you respond/react?
3. What are the barriers that prevent her from living free from violence?
4. Do you believe that she is making a good decision by returning to her partner?
5. How would understanding systemic oppression help you better understand and potentially relate to Cindy?
6. Do you agree with Alina's response? Why or why not?

To Think About ...

This case study raises two major issues for discussion. The first is the nature of systemic oppression. The second is how we as workers may internalize social norms of 'blaming the victim' and display them through our actions.

Our role as feminist anti-violence workers is to support a woman in whatever decisions she makes. Furthermore, it is part of our responsibility to better understand her decisions. In the case of Cindy, this is where an understanding of systemic oppression is helpful. From the case scenario, we can see that she has experienced barriers in obtaining financial and housing security. These barriers are two of the reasons she has returned to her abusive partner on several occasions.

Some may view this scenario and think that Cindy is not putting her best interests or the interests of her children first by leaving and returning to her partner several times. This is reflected in Alina's response as she has internalized social norms about mothering. A norm has been created and perpetuated in society that caring for children is a mother's primary responsibility. Consequently, any issue experienced by a child tends to be blamed on the mother, not structural factors such as poverty. The mother tends to be blamed for not protecting her children enough or in some instances, 'over-protecting' her children¹⁴.

The problem with Alina's response is that it does not take into consideration the impacts that systemic barriers have had on Cindy, and instead, takes on a very blaming tone. Internalizing assumptions of motherhood and parenting is an example of how sexism can become embedded in the way we provide support and, therefore, become embedded systemically.

'Blaming the victim' is an easy way to avoid acknowledging and addressing the many barriers faced by women on a daily basis. The 'blame the victim' mentality can seep into the minds of anyone, given the bombarding messages we continuously hear from powerful social outlets such as the media.

Consider the following findings from research conducted on how domestic violence homicides are discussed in the media¹⁵:

¹⁴ Ladd-Taylor, M. & Umansky, L. (1998). "Bad" mothers: The politics of blame in twentieth-century America. NYU Press.

¹⁵ Miss J. (2011, February 11). *Domestic violence coverage: Coverage of domestic violence in the news*. Retrieved from <http://mediamisses.wordpress.com/2010/02/11/domestic-violence-coverage/>

“Direct tactics involve using negative language to describe the victim, criticizing her actions such as her not reporting past incidences, or mentioning ‘consorting’ with other men as contributing to her murder.

Indirect tactics include using sympathetic language to describe the perpetrator, and emphasizing mental, physical, emotional and financial problems which might excuse his actions.

In 2008 there were two main cases covered extensively. One described the perpetrator as a loving family man who doted on his wife and young daughters but heard voices in his head and believed he was possessed by the devil.

The second involved a woman who had restraining orders due to a troubled relationship. She had tried to break it off but the period after the woman leaves is usually the most dangerous. She was said to be a caring, loving woman who never gave an indication of problems at home. However the man lost jobs, drank frequently, made threats and was physically violent. Authorities said it was a domestic dispute that went terribly wrong.

In these stories the explanation is inexplicable: the man was loving and the couple seemed happy. Sometimes there were warning signs: the man had difficulties, or the couple had a history of conflict. And there was always an attempt to find an excuse: mental disorder, alcoholism or unemployment.” [sic]

While Alina is not trying to make any excuses for the abuse, she is suggesting that Cindy is not doing what she “should” be doing, i.e. protecting her children.

We are socialized to believe that men and women are to think, act, and behave in certain ways. These become part of our social norms, which dictate which ideas have moral superiority over others. Those that deviate from the ‘norm’ are blamed, even if subtly.

If we step back and reflect, we can see that the idea of what has been defined as ‘right and wrong’ has been created by socially dominant groups, and continues to be reinforced by systems and institutions. Therefore, the ‘blame the victim’ approach is a convenient way to avoid paying attention to systemic oppression and instead rests on the theory of individualism whereby the woman’s well-being depends entirely on her individual efforts (not due to the barriers as a woman or being in poverty).

How do we change our lenses that may in fact “other” the women we work with? First, we become aware of how we have internalized these lenses. In the case of blaming the victim, we can see how these commonly held beliefs

have become ingrained in society as a social norm. By becoming aware, we are in a better position to challenge them. Working from a feminist anti-oppression framework means shifting our lenses from those that are “othering” to those that reflect equity and accessibility.

To practice from a place of equity and accessibility means that we must understand the structural causes of abuse, the gendered nature of abuse, and the systemic barriers that impact women who are experiencing abuse. This is what an anti-oppression framework would consider.

Let us return to the case scenario. In addition to highlighting how sexism can become embedded in our responses to supporting women and children, this scenario also raises issues of classism. Classism refers to “differential treatment based on social class or perceived social class. Classism is the systematic oppression of subordinated class groups to advantage and strengthen the dominant class groups.”¹⁶

Think about your reactions to Alina’s following comment: “Alina tells Cindy that she should be more patient with the housing process and that being on welfare is better than risking her own life and those of her children’s.” This is a very loaded comment that needs to be unpacked, and this is where a feminist anti-oppression framework can be applied.

First, Alina is making assumptions about what aspects of safety are most important to Cindy. The way we perceive safety depends on how we perceive violence. In Cindy’s situation, not only has she experienced violence from her partner, but she has also experienced violence because of poverty. To suggest that Cindy accept one form over the other is a very minimizing response and fails to acknowledge the various factors at play affecting Cindy’s safety.

Second, telling Cindy that she should be more patient with the housing process is problematic because it is essentially telling her that she should be patient with oppression. Cindy’s need for housing can be situated within a larger context of an unequal distribution of wealth, resulting in some people living in poverty.

Furthermore, women and children are disproportionately represented among those that are poor. This feminization of poverty is caused by numerous factors including, but not limited to:

- Traditional roles dominated by women tend to pay less and have less job security (e.g. childcare, hotel industry)

¹⁶ Class Action. *What is classism*. Retrieved from <http://www.classism.org/about-class/what-is-classism>

- Women tend to occupy more part-time positions than men
- Domestic (unpaid) work continues to be done predominantly by women
- Sexism in the workplace, including harassment and a glass ceiling. (A glass ceiling refers to an invisible barrier embedded within the workforce that prevents women and other marginalized groups from moving into higher-paying, higher-status positions).

In addition, the government's role in perpetuating poverty cannot be ignored. For example, drastic cuts made to social assistance rates in 1995 have never been fully restored. Growing wait lists for subsidized housing reflect the lack of affordable housing available. All these factors present barriers to women living free from violence. These barriers further victimize women.

Now imagine that Cindy is a transgendered woman, a woman living with a physical or intellectual disability, a lesbian woman, a First Nations woman, or a racialized woman.

Exercise 2: Individually, and then with your team, explore the following questions:

1. How might each of these aspects of social identity affect Cindy's experiences?
2. How would your own social location (places where you hold privilege and experience oppression) affect your responses to Cindy if she were: a transgendered woman; a woman living with a physical or intellectual disability; a lesbian woman; a First Nations woman; or a racialized woman?

Facing systemic barriers can be overwhelming for women and it can be frustrating for workers who may feel a sense of powerlessness when supporting women. However, we must be aware of the powerlessness we may feel and how this can be perpetuated in the way we support women.

For example, instead of Alina telling Cindy that she should be more patient with the housing process, she should listen to her concerns and validate her thoughts and emotions. Cindy's difficulties with the welfare and housing are warranted and we need to say so.

Instead of telling Cindy that her choices are putting her and her children's safety in jeopardy, Alina could:

- Explore what Cindy needs in order to support herself and the children, both if she returns to her partner and if she chooses to live separately from him.
- Explore, if Cindy chooses, to support her in securing housing that will accommodate the needs of her and her children.

- Without judgment, explore what Cindy is hoping for in re-establishing a relationship with her partner.
- Discuss safety planning with Cindy so that whether she goes back to her partner or not, she feels better equipped to promote the safety of herself and her children. (This is where a risk assessment may be useful. However, when doing risk assessments it is important that both the concepts of risks and safety are conceptualized in a holistic way to include not only physical violence, but also experiences with poverty, homelessness, immigration and settlement, criminal and family court, community practices, religion, etc.)
- Assure Cindy that regardless of what she decides, she and the shelter are available to her for support.

These suggestions are in line with a feminist anti-oppression framework, as Alina would be linking Cindy's experiences with larger systemic factors and not placing individual fault. These suggestions would also allow safe dialogue to be created between her and Cindy and create opportunities for Cindy's feelings of empowerment.



REFLECTIVE ACTIVITY: Parenting

Francesca is a woman living with a physical disability who has a thirteen year-old son, Leo. Her husband has been physically, sexually, emotionally and psychologically abusing her for more than fifteen years. After an experience where her husband seriously injured her, she attempted to flee from the abuse. This is the third shelter she has been to, as the first two shelters were not physically accessible.

Leo begins to demonstrate signs of aggression toward the other children residing at the shelter. He uses derogatory language when speaking to the other children and, in one incident, almost gets into a physical fight with another young teenage boy.

Candice who is one of the shelter workers speaks with Francesca about what happened. In a firm voice, she tells Francesca that Leo's behaviour is unacceptable and will not be tolerated.

Shortly after, Candice speaks with a colleague about what happened. She says she feels bad for how she spoke with Francesca. "I shouldn't have been so rude to Francesca. It's not her fault that Leo is acting this way. The poor woman can barely manage to get around on her own, let alone take care of a teenage boy. We need to help her out as much as we can."

Candice approaches Leo the next day to talk about what happened. She ends the conversation by telling Leo that if he wants to speak with someone, the staff is available.

Exercise 3: Take a few minutes for you and your colleagues to write your responses to the following questions. Share and discuss your responses.

1. What stereotypes has Candice internalized about women with disabilities?
2. How has Candice made Francesca invisible from the parenting process?

To Think About ...

Women living with disabilities continue to face discriminatory attitudes when it comes to parenting that are deeply engrained in the belief that women living with disabilities are not parents or that they are not capable of parenting effectively because of their disability. Women with disabilities have been pathologized, which means that there is a widespread belief that living with a disability limits one's ability to parent that will result in poor quality of life for

children. This is reflected in historical practices of sterilizing women with disabilities and forcing them to have abortions.

Seeing women with disabilities as unable to be good parents stems from stereotypes society has created and perpetuated about people with disabilities. For example, people living with disabilities are often infantilized, meaning they are seen as dependent and childlike.

When a mother with a disability requires any form of accommodation to ensure she can care for her children (e.g. physical assistance getting baby to and from crib), this need is attributed to her inability to parent as well as an able-bodied person, not the need for accessibility.

Consider how this relates to the case study with Francesca and Leo. Candice, the shelter worker, made Francesca invisible in the process of addressing Leo's behaviour. Rather than having a conversation with Francesca about what has been going on with Leo, Candice dealt directly with Leo. Francesca's ability to parent is questioned and minimized.

There are power dynamics at play here within the 'worker-client' relationship.

Through a 'power over' approach, Candice eliminates the possibility of engaging in dialogue with Francesca that could have been an opportunity to get a deeper understanding as to what the family's lived experiences have been. Without having this understanding, there is no way for Candice to contextualize both Francesca's and Leo's experience. Candice manages how to deal with Leo and allows her own assumptions and beliefs to guide her actions. Clearly, our own assumptions can affect the dynamics between how we as individuals interact with the women we work with.

As an able-bodied person, it is quite likely that Candice is acting on her internalized dominance (this was described earlier in *An Introduction to a Feminist Anti-Oppression Framework*). Using a feminist anti-oppression framework would alert us to situations where our social location influences how we view and treat people who have experienced oppression.

Let's look at another example from the case scenario. Candice's comment that, "the poor woman can barely manage to get around on her own, let alone take care of a teenage boy. We need to help her out as much as we can" is extremely concerning. This is reflective of the stereotype that women with disabilities cannot parent effectively and need help to do so. We must be clear that there is a difference between requiring accommodations versus the ability to parent.

Accommodations for accessibility are required because society is set up and structured based on the needs of able-bodied people. The reason that barriers exist for people living with disabilities is because being 'able-bodied' has been socially constructed as the 'norm'. Those that do not fit this norm are seen as requiring additional support to fit the 'norm', instead of seeing the

very construction of society as the problem.

Accommodations for accessibility are required so that people do not face barriers that have been created by non-disabled people. Requiring an accommodation for accessibility does not mean the woman is unable to parent. Norms around what is considered acceptable and normal parenting, however, is also a social construct, having been created by socially dominant groups (such as people who are white, people who are able-bodied, men, etc.).

More examples of where people's parenting are questioned is with immigrants, refugees, and racialized communities who may parent differently than how it has been conceptualized in a North American context. Feminist anti-violence workers can internalize beliefs about acceptable and 'normal' forms of parenting and enact them in how they support women, as shown by Candice in the case scenario.

Candice's comments also perpetuate the stereotype that people living with disabilities are to be pitied and felt sorry for. This too is pathologizing behaviour as it negates the woman's strengths, skills, capabilities, and resiliency. When people living with disabilities are pitied, the structural barriers limiting their accessibility are minimized and, instead, the disability is seen as disabling. Candice attributes Francesca's disability as the reason she can't parent, and to take this one step further, the reason she can't parent "well" according to her own perceptions of healthy parenting.

Using a feminist anti-oppression framework allows us to see how parents living with disabilities have been pathologized, and how we may have internalized this way of thinking. By challenging these oppressive thoughts and beliefs, we become more equipped to focus on issues of accessibility and to promote women's autonomy and independence.

Providing accommodations for accessibility means changing our practice depending on the needs of the woman we are supporting. We must create a dialogue so that she can articulate her needs. In addition, our understanding of oppression at the systemic level will allow us to contextualize her needs as being caused by systemic barriers.

The best way to address this is to examine our own practices, both what is spoken and unspoken. For example, in the situation of a child "acting out" within the shelter, how do I respond?

Do I approach the mother directly and expect her to address the situation? What I'm not saying is that I expect her to address the situation in a certain way, that is, speak with her child, discuss what happened, and ensure her/his "acting out" does not happen again. My expectations are based on how I've internalized socially accepted parenting styles and approaches.

By examining my own practices and how they are influenced by what I am taught by socially constructed norms, I am engaging in critical reflection. By becoming aware of this, I am in a better position to approach the woman in a different way, in a way that does not trap her into my assumptions about what is “normal” and “acceptable”.

How could Candice have dealt with this instead:

- Approach Francesca directly?
- What assumptions did she make by her actions to deal with Leo directly?



REFLECTIVE ACTIVITY: Supporting Differences

A feminist anti-oppression framework is an approach to achieving equity. “Equity does not mean treating people the same. Rather, equity acknowledges that because of life conditions or past discrimination, the different treatment of women and men may sometimes be necessary in order to achieve the same results”.¹⁷

To practice equity means that we recognize women have diverse and fluid social locations. These different social locations will mean each woman will hold different levels of privilege and oppression in her life. For example, a young woman living with a physical disability will likely experience abuse differently than a woman who has entered Canada as a refugee claimant.

Consider the following...

Rachel is a 20 year-old woman who has been living with her boyfriend for the past two years. Rachel has been made dependent on her partner for personal support and has some access to a Personal Support Worker. In the past year, Rachel’s boyfriend has begun to use this caregiver role as a means to reinforce his control over her daily living.

Rachel has been physically abused by her boyfriend. While moving her from her bed to her wheelchair, he handles her very roughly. There have been times that he has left her on the toilet and in the bath for extended periods of times, ignoring her pleas for assistance. He continues to deny her of her needs by the withholding of her medication as well as sometimes cancelling appointments with her Personal Support Worker.

Rachel’s boyfriend is emotionally abusive and demeans her through comments such as “I have to take care of you like you’re my child,” and “No other man would do the things for you that I do”.

Rachel feels isolated and wants the abuse to end. After building a relationship with her Personal Support Worker while her boyfriend is away for a business trip, Rachel begins to disclose the abuse. Her Personal Support Worker gives her the name and number of a local shelter and encourages her to call the shelter for support.

Ayanna arrived in Canada over a year ago with her two children and husband. They entered Canada as refugee claimants from Somalia after being tortured by military officials. Ayanna’s husband was physically, emotionally, mentally and verbally abusive toward her and the children while in Somalia, and this

¹⁷ Women’s Issues Branch, Executive Council Office. (2003). *Gender based analysis guide*.

abuse has continued in Canada. Ayanna's husband took responsibility for applying for refugee status for the entire family.

Ayanna does not feel safe calling the police for help, because her family's previous experience with authority figures, including the police and military, has caused their family great physical and emotional harm. She does not know what will happen to her family and their refugee status if she calls the police.

Ayanna is in a different country, separated from anything that feels familiar including her surroundings, language, and people. Her husband controls all aspects of the family's life including finances and all communication with their refugee lawyer. She feels like she has no one to talk to and her husband reminds (threatens) her that he can send her back to Somalia and keep the children with him. Sometimes he says, "I will fail with immigration and they will deport us to Somalia; then I will kill you and marry another woman who will look after the kids".

While watching television, Ayanna sees a commercial for a local woman's based organization. After seeing this commercial several times, she considers calling.

Exercise 4: After reading these case studies, consider the following questions. We encourage you to engage in a discussion with your colleagues and team on the following:

1. What are the similarities between Rachel and Ayanna's experiences?
2. What are the differences between Rachel and Ayanna's experiences, based on their social locations?
3. How does the concept of equity apply to this case scenario?

To Think About ...



Let's imagine that both Rachel and Ayanna have come to a shelter for support. There may be similar issues that these women are facing which are created by the dynamics of abuse and gender inequality. For example, many women must deal with the following:

- Fear of losing their financial security that they currently depend on from their abusive partner.
- Fear of retaliation and shame from family, friends, neighbours and/or co-workers.
- Fear of losing their children.

- Fear that the abuse will not end if they leave the relationship. (This is a well-founded fear as it has been well documented that a woman's physical safety remains at risk even up to two years after leaving an abusive relationship.)

There will be similar issues that need to be addressed with both women such as providing emotional support, promoting her safety, and securing practical needs such as income support and housing. There will also be specific considerations for each woman because of her different lived experiences and unique social locations. This is where the concept of equity becomes important as it reminds us that each woman may need to be supported differently to ensure her needs are met.

With Rachel, we will need to explore such needs as access to attendant care and exploring opportunities to promote her independence. With Ayanna, we will need to explore such things as how torture has affected her, how the refugee process has impacted her, how to work with Citizenship and Immigration Canada to separate her refugee claim from her husband's, and how to support her during her settlement process (i.e. language, retraining, employment, and housing).

Remember that equity means acknowledging that oppression creates different realities for people. In practice, the concept of equity can be seen in creating *accessibility*. Accessibility means providing supports to reduce and eliminate systemic barriers. This concept is important because it shifts us from viewing her social location as the barrier, but rather the systems that perpetuate oppression as the barrier. For example, it is not a woman's disability that is disabling; it is the lack of accessibility built into our systems that is disabling. It is not the colour of a woman's skin that causes oppression; it is racism.



REFLECTIVE ACTIVITY: Food

Oppression becomes embedded into the systems and institutions in society. Our organizations are not free from perpetuating this oppression, despite our efforts to create safe and inclusive spaces.

If we look at the history of non-profit organizations, we can see that the settlement house movement in North America resulted in organizations being created by certain worldviews and social realities. These realities were often based on white, able-bodied, heterosexual men and women of upper economic class, as these were the segment of the population who had leverage to participate in voluntary efforts. While the intention may not have been to create barriers for people accessing support, barriers were created.

This has resulted in the need for understanding the barriers that have been created and identifying ways to reduce and ultimately, eliminate them so that any woman can access the supports our organizations provide. In other words, our attention must become focussed on creating accessibility.

Consider the following ...

Fatima has been assigned her chore list, which includes making dinner for all women and children in the shelter on Wednesday evening. Fatima identifies as Muslim and only eats meat that is Halal. She is comfortable creating a meal for everyone, which includes Halal meat but when she informs others that she will be making Halal chicken she immediately receives resistance from others. Some of the women in the home say they will not eat Halal meat. This results in a verbal confrontation between the women.

Exercise 5: Take some time to answer the following questions. Share your responses with your team to solicit feedback and to spark a dialogue.

1. What are your initial reactions to this situation?
2. As an anti-violence feminist worker on shift at the shelter during the confrontation, how would you respond to this situation?



To Think About ...

Many shelters have now seen the necessity of changing the very staples of food it has available. For example, some shelters have now started ensuring that Halal and Kosher meat is available. By doing so, shelters are responding to women's needs by ensuring adequate supplies of diverse forms of food.

A cross-cultural approach would view this accommodation as being culturally sensitive and, therefore, appropriate. However, because the change was made in a system that does not incorporate worldviews of diverse groups, change can produce hostility between women in the shelter. For example, some women may view this as the shelter 'favouring' particular women or giving them 'special treatment'.

One common cause of isolation for immigrant women in shelters is issues surrounding food¹⁸. Ensuring diverse types of food are available can be seen as an 'add-on' type of service which reflects a Canadian multicultural discourse. Multiculturalism suggests that institutions can accommodate all cultures because no one culture infiltrates or dominates organizations. This critique is not to suggest that women's cultural needs should not be met; this is a requirement for creating inclusion. The issue, however, is that organizations cannot stop there.

In order to ensure that 'add-on services' become an integral part of support, the culture of an organization must change. This involves changes in ideology, which are reflected in service delivery, policies, and management operations.

A focus on culture is important but insufficient in supporting women of colour. By emphasizing culture as the central importance in women's lives, systemic issues such as racism and the immigration process are made invisible. An anti-racist approach moves beyond multiculturalism to contextualize how gender, race, class, and other social identities affect women's lived realities.

¹⁸ Paredes, M.P. (1992). *Setting the precedent: Process as change in meeting the needs of immigrant and refugee women surviving sexual abuse and sexual violence*. Immigrant and Refugee Women's Project: Education Sexual Assault.

REFLECTIVE ACTIVITY: Spirituality

Similar to the previous example, worldviews of women who access support must be inherently reflected in our approaches to service delivery. If this were to occur, the role of spirituality would be valued in social service delivery.

Spirituality plays an important role in many women's lives. Each woman will understand, interpret, and act on her spiritual needs differently. Some examples of spiritual practices include prayer, meditation, mindfulness breathing, rituals and ceremonies.

Exercise 6: Consider the following, if a woman identifies her spiritual needs to you; do you feel as though your shelter can accommodate them?

1. If so, how?
2. If not, why not?

To Think About ...

There are practical ways to address ensuring women have safe and inclusive spaces to practice their spirituality. For example:

- The space used for counselling could also be used for praying.
- Provisions can be made for women sharing rooms to have private access to their rooms at specific times.

Women need to be consulted in this process of decision-making because it cannot be assumed that staff know which spaces are most appropriate. Feminist anti-violence workers can play an important role in sending the message that it is safe and acceptable for women to continue their faith and spiritual practices, should it be something that is important to them.

When we fail to address women's spirituality needs, the message we send is that spirituality and religion are not critical needs. However, spirituality has been cited as an important source of strength that gives women continued courage¹⁹.

In fact, failing to recognize the importance of spirituality in women's lives may perpetuate oppression that some women have experienced. In the context of violence and abuse, some women may be forced to give up their faith or convert

¹⁹ MacLeod, L. & Shin, M.Y. (1993). *"Like a wingless bird...": A tribute to the survival and courage of women who are abused and who speak neither English nor French*. Ottawa: Health Canada (National Clearinghouse on Family Violence).

to another religion. Women's spiritual beliefs may be ridiculed, or religious text may be interpreted as a way of justifying power and control over a woman.

Consider how colonialism has impacted the faith and religious practices of Aboriginal communities across Canada. Through oppressive Canadian government policies, the role of the Church, and residential schools, we saw children be forcibly stripped of their culture, faith, traditions, and religion. This historical oppression, which continues against Aboriginal communities in different ways cannot be ignored as its effects are still being experienced and lived today.

Given this context, it is important that shelters remove any barriers that prevent a woman from exercising her right to practice her faith or religion.



REFLECTIVE ACTIVITY: Reframing Anger

Melissa has been staying at a local women's shelter for the past month. In a conversation with her worker, Liz, Melissa begins to disclose information about the emotional and physical abuse she endured by her partner. During one incident, Melissa defended herself that resulted in a scratch on her partner's arm. Melissa called the police and both she and her partner were charged with assault.

Melissa begins to express her frustrations and anger that she was charged. Liz listens and asks questions to encourage Melissa to verbalize her feelings. As Melissa expresses herself, she talks about how her partner used this experience as a way to further control her by making threatening comments like "I'll make sure they know exactly what you did so you end up in jail".

Melissa's tone of voice begins to become louder as she talks about how the police treated her unfairly by not allowing her to fully explain what happened. She said they made her feel as if she was a criminal.

Liz asks Melissa to lower her tone of voice. Melissa becomes angry and asks Liz, "Why are you asking me to tell you how I feel if you don't want to hear the truth? Besides, ever since I've been here, you guys haven't once asked me what happened. It's like you see that I've been charged and just assume I'm guilty. You're no different than the police!"

Liz tells her that they can speak again after Melissa has calmed down. Melissa goes to her room and Liz goes to the office to share what happened to her colleagues.

Exercise 7: Take some time to answer the following questions and share them with your colleagues to create a dialogue of learning and sharing.

1. Pretend that you were the worker in this situation. What would your thoughts and feelings be as you listened to Melissa share her experiences and begin to raise her tone of voice in anger?
2. How comfortable do you feel working with women who display their anger emotionally? What about when women display their anger physically?
3. What role do you believe Liz played in escalating Melissa's anger?
4. If you were the worker in this situation, how would you have handled the situation? Think specifically about how you would have supported her with her emotional pain? Is there anything that you would have done differently?

To Think About ...

Navigating within systems and experiencing systemic oppression can elicit a range of emotions for both us, as feminist anti-violence workers, as well as the women we work with. One of these emotions is anger.

As this case study reveals, dual charging is an issue that has emerged within the criminal court system. In a recent research study by the Woman Abuse Council of Toronto, the issue of dual charging (both partners being charged) and sole charging (i.e. women only being charged) is explored. Through an exploratory study, 19 women who were dually or solely charged for domestic violence related offences were interviewed²⁰. The study concluded that the gender neutrality of the mandatory arrest policy has resulted in a lack of context for the use of force by women.

Some key findings include:

- Women's use of force tended to be defensive, rather than offensive.
- Of the 19 women interviewed, 17 experienced abuse by the person against whom they were charged for using force.
- Six of the 19 women called the police to get protection from their male partners, but were arrested instead.

Other research done on the issue of dual arrest and charging has shown that much of women's use of force tends to be in response to ongoing abuse from partners, they are at greater risk of further abuse after being charged, and that male offenders often gain knowledge of the criminal justice system and then use it against women.

This larger issue of dual charging affects women at a very personal level, as seen through the situation with Melissa. She was dealing with the abuse not only from her partner but was also, in her view, made to feel like a criminal by both the police and the shelter staff. This made her angry, and being told to suppress her anger only made her feel more belittled and minimized.

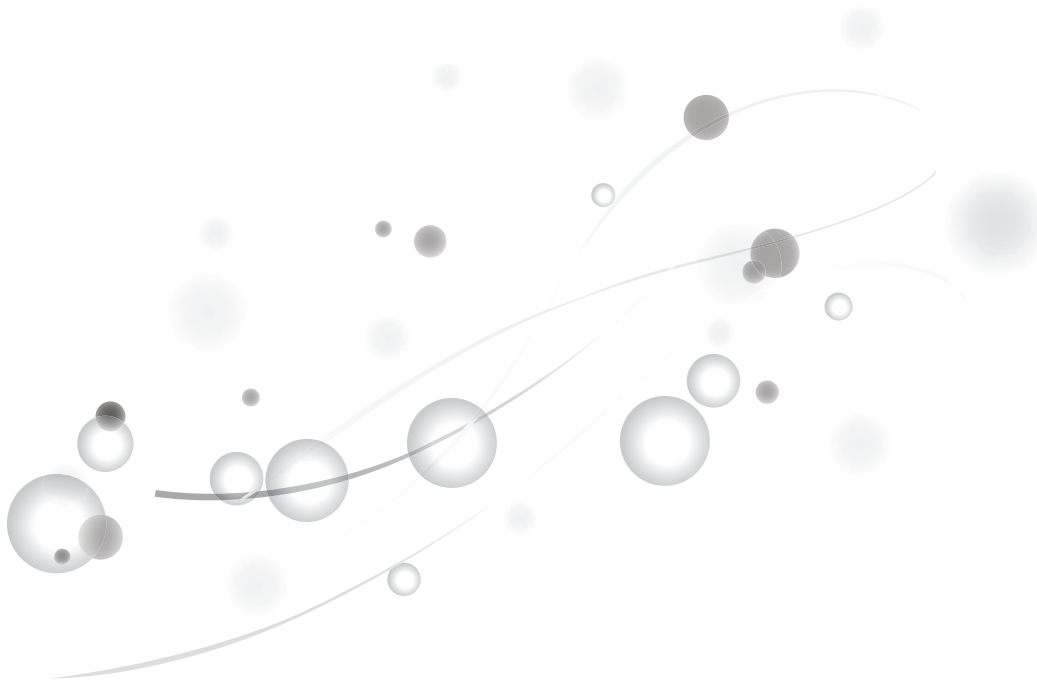
This raises the issue of how easy it is to forget the larger context impacting people's realities, and instead, attribute people's behaviour to personal attributes. This is referred to as 'depoliticizing', meaning the failure to contextualize women's experiences as influenced by systemic oppression.

In the moment of supporting Melissa, perhaps Liz attributed Melissa's display of anger as an 'unhealthy' way to communicate, as opposed to a normal way that people cope or react to oppression.

²⁰ The Woman Abuse Council of Toronto. (2005). *Women charged with domestic violence in Toronto: The unintended consequences of mandatory charge policies*. Retrieved from www.womanabuse.ca/womenchargedfinal.pdf

“We recognize and celebrate women’s anger when it is directed at perpetrators of woman abuse and/or institutions and systems which discriminate against women. However, we tend to assume a more hostile and judgmental attitude toward the anger women may feel and express when they experience racism or anti-Semitism or age-ism in our own agency. Whenever we hear ourselves or our co-workers label a resident as ‘hard to work with’, ‘too hostile’, ‘so angry’, ‘never satisfied’, or ‘inappropriate for our mandate’, we need to check ourselves and each other for racist and discriminatory attitudes which might be affecting our assessment of this woman”.²¹

While feeling angry is tolerated, expressing or displaying anger has been deemed an “abnormal” or an “unacceptable” emotion. We are taught this on a regular basis through socialization. It is unfair, however, to make assumptions.



²¹ OAITH. (2000). *Creating inclusive spaces for women: A practical guide for implementing an integrated anti-racist, feminist delivery system*. Plain language version.

REFLECTIVE ACTIVITY: Facilitated Referrals

Paramjit is a recent newcomer and Permanent Resident who has left her abusive husband and came to your shelter a couple of weeks ago. In addition to requiring emotional, income, and housing supports, Paramjit has expressed the need for language training, as she has a limited understanding of how to speak and write English. As a result, she has had a difficult time finding work as a radiologist, which is the profession she practiced in India for nearly 10 years. She has also expressed the need for support in obtaining the qualifications to practice as a radiologist in Canada.

As Paramjit's worker, Debbie researches local resources that can support Paramjit with her educational and employment needs. Debbie provides Paramjit with contact information for a couple of settlement agencies offering services that may help her with these needs.

Paramjit attempts to contact these agencies but returns to Debbie expressing her frustrations. With the first agency, she says that she did not understand how to use the automated phone systems and wasn't able to speak with someone directly over the telephone. Paramjit said the voice speaking on the automated system spoke too fast and used words that she did not understand.

With the second agency, she was given a list of information that she will need to collect and bring to the agency for an assessment. Paramjit does not have all this information as some of it is at her home where her partner lives. The worker gave her an appointment in one month, but Paramjit did not feel comfortable asking for an earlier date as she thought that might be perceived as rude.

Debbie responds by telling Paramjit to call the first agency again and listen for the prompt that allows her to be transferred to speak with someone or to leave a voicemail message. She also gives Paramjit email addresses that she can try.

For the second agency, Debbie tells Paramjit that she should call back and just ask for a faster appointment. She tells Paramjit that she will need to build her confidence and become more assertive in order to get her needs met.

Paramjit leaves looking concerned and defeated.

Exercise 8: Answer the following questions and engage in a discussion with your team.

1. What barriers to receiving services is Paramjit facing?
2. This case study raises the importance of providing referrals. How do you provide women with referrals?
3. How do you support women to increase their confidence and assertiveness?

To Think About ...

Depending on your role and responsibilities within your organization, you may not be in a position to provide support to a woman experiencing violence in all the areas she requires. However, our goal is to ensure women receive specialized support with someone who is knowledgeable about her needs, by advocating with her through the different systems she is likely to encounter.

In this case study, Debbie provided Paramjit with contact information for agencies that may be able to support her. Providing a meaningful referral is more than just providing a woman with a telephone number.

Part of our role as feminist anti-violence workers is to support women to navigate systems and institutions. This includes criminal court, family court, welfare, housing, child welfare, immigration, healthcare, education, and non-profit organizations. The necessity of our involvement rests on the fact that these systems create and perpetuate oppression against marginalized groups and as a result, women encounter barriers in trying to access these systems.

In Paramjit's case, do you view Paramjit's limited understanding of English or the automated system as the barrier? A feminist anti-oppression framework would suggest that the latter is the barrier. The systems we interact with place barriers on women's ability to access services. This is just one example. Another similar example is the lack of assistive telephone devices for people who are Deaf, hard-of-hearing, living with a speech disability, or deaf-blind. Again, it is not the disability that is disabling; it is the lack of accessibility that is disabling.

In addition to advocating eliminating barriers built into our systems, consider the following guidelines when making a referral to through support agencies:

- Ensure that the contact information you provide is current and accurate.
- Build partnerships with agencies. This can provide a better position to refer women to a specific worker at an agency. For example, this could help bypass referring to a generic helpline number with a complicated automated system.
- Ensure the referee understands the service you are referring. For example, the concept of counselling may be unfamiliar. For some newcomer and immigrant women, this type of support may not exist in their home country.
- Do not make assumptions of what services will work best for her. For example, just because a woman identifies as Portuguese, does not necessarily mean she wants to be referred to an organization serving primarily people from Portuguese communities.

- Offer suggestions and information, but not advice. It is important that we respect women's choice even if they might differ from our personal beliefs.
- Offer to be on hand with the woman when she contacts the agency so you can provide support should she require it.
- Call the agency (and worker if possible) in advance to let them know you have made the referral. Obtain permission from the woman before doing so, however.
- Follow up (when possible).

When practicing from a feminist anti-oppression framework, we should understand that:

- Navigating through bureaucratic systems can be overwhelming. This may result in women displaying a range of emotions such as feeling powerless, confused, scared, and so forth in response.
- Exploring options within the system is a way for women to become better informed of her choices.
- It is important to share information about how systems and institutions operate.

“As problematic and oppressive as these systems are, women need to learn how to work within them in order to get their immediate needs met. Anti-oppressive feminist practitioners see it as part of their role to help women develop these skills. In such a scenario, the social worker spends time role-playing and rehearsing scenarios with service users as a way of preparing them for their encounters with various institutions.”²²

In terms of the case study, Debbie could have used it as an opportunity to help build Paramjit's skills, rather than to just tell her that she needs to become more confident and assertive. The option of role-playing is reflective of an empowerment approach where opportunities are created to strengthen the woman's voice.

Following these guidelines is congruent with providing a facilitated referral, because it is not being led by the worker, but rather becomes a joint process between the worker and the woman.

²² Barnoff, L. & Coleman, B. (2007). *Women's services strategies for integrating anti-oppressive principles: Perspectives from feminist agencies*. In: D. Baines (Ed.) , *Doing anti-oppressive practice: Building transformative and politicized social work*. (p. 35). Fernwood Publishing.

PART 2: WORKER AND AGENCY PHILOSOPHY

REFLECTION ACTIVITY: Power of Language

You don't have to look too far to see how profit-based organizations have infiltrated the way non-profits function. Think of the words "client", "intervention", or "director". These terms are heavily influenced from a business perspective and have become commonly used terms within non-profit organizations.

Language is a powerful way to reflect our values and beliefs; therefore, examining the way we speak about certain issues is important to a feminist anti-oppression framework.

Consider the following comparisons:

Abused woman	...	Woman who has experienced abuse
Victim of abuse	...	Survivor of abuse
Disabled	...	Person living with a disability
Gay	...	Person who is gay
Homeless	...	Person who is homeless
Client	...	Community Member
Intervention	...	Support

Compare the terms again.

Which terms resonate with you? Which terms reflect your values and beliefs?

Let's look at the example of "client". This term comes from the business or for-profit sector and reflects the dynamics of a transaction. As a client, the woman comes to the organization I work at for support. When she receives her support, our transaction is essentially over. By viewing her this way, I fail to recognize her strengths and what she has to teach me.

Instead of labelling people as "disabled", "gay" or "homeless", the second column offers an alternate suggestion. By using the word "person" first, we recognize that their social identity does not define who they are; it is only *part* of who they are.

While power can be used to create and sustain oppression, power can also be used to create liberation and transformation as seen through a simple example with language.

Exercise 1: Take some time to reflect on the language used by you and your team.

1. What terms reflect your values? Which don't?
2. Are you prepared to change the language that does not reflect your values and/or beliefs?



REFLECTIVE ACTIVITY: Flexible Hierarchy

Much of our work is based on our ability to engage with women – our ability to build trusting and supportive relationships. While our intentions may be to create safe and inclusive spaces for this to occur, a feminist anti-oppression framework encourages us to explore the power that we hold as organizations and workers.

According to Ann Hartman in her article “The Professional is Political”²³, workers possess the following sources of power:

AGENCY RESOURCES	This includes the decision-making power organizations hold including the ability to determine how resources are utilized and how programs/services are provided.
EXPERT KNOWLEDGE	Within the ‘worker-client relationship’, the worker is the one seen as holding the expertise needed to help the client.
INTERPERSONAL POWER	This includes the ability to develop empathy, trust, and rapport with women.
LEGITIMATE POWER	This includes ‘social control’ functions, where workers are empowered to act with authority. An example would include the worker’s duty to report child abuse.

Let’s examine the first source of power: *Agency Resources*. At an organizational level, women’s-based organizations do not operate in silos from larger societal structures. Think of the dilemmas the following pose.

- In our quest to end violence against women, our primary focus is to meet the needs of women and children. Operating in an era of funding instability, the goal for many women’s-based organizations has become survival.
- Working from a place of shared power, many women’s-based organizations support the principles of democratic decision-making and consensus through dialogue. Does a traditional hierarchy of top-down decision-making allow for this to occur?

²³ Hartman, A. (1993). *The professional is political*. Social Work: 34 (8), 355 – 356.

In the game of survival, social service agencies, including many women's-based organizations, have shifted their way of functioning to reflect that of a business corporation. Power tends to flow along a hierarchy.

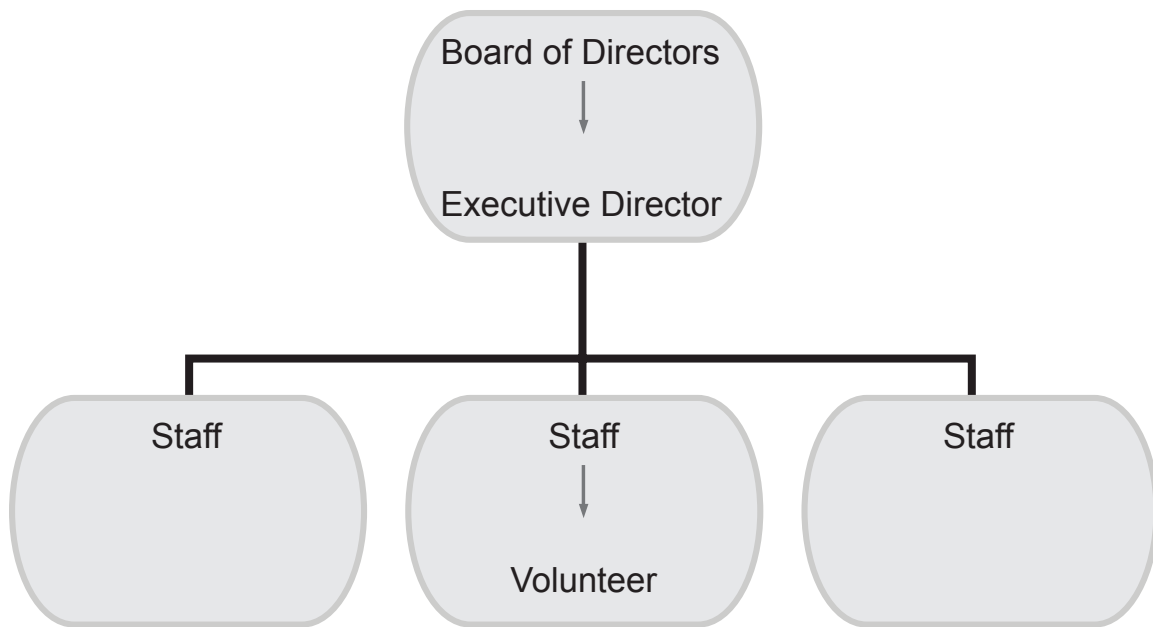
There are benefits to having organizations structured as hierarchies in that having a chain of command allows for accountability and it clarifies staff expectations and responsibilities. However, if this hierarchy does not allow for *flexibility*, then it can have negative implications for the extent to which the organization can meaningfully engage women in the change process. In other words, sharing power amongst staff, let alone sharing power with women from the community, becomes harder.

Exercise 1: Take some time to reflect on the extent to which your organization has a 'flexible hierarchy'. Answer the following questions:

- a) To what extent do you believe your agency's hierarchy allows for community members' voices to be heard, in terms of community issues, needs and assets? Discuss both strengths and areas of improvement for your agency.
- b) To what extent do you believe your agency could incorporate the planning, implementation, and evaluation roles of community members? Perhaps you have some concrete examples to refer to, where your agency has helped facilitate change amongst a community, while at the same time ensuring that the initiative was led by the community itself. Discuss both strengths and areas of improvement for your agency.



Exercise 2: Obtain a copy of your agency's organizational chart. Does it look something like this?



Where does a traditional hierarchy leave women we work with? Do they fit within our organizational structure?

To Think About ...

While there is no doubt that we work to support women and children to live lives free from violence, to what extent do we engage women outside of the helping relationship? Do we work with women as allies?

When women come to gain support they may not be at a place to engage in community initiatives to address violence at a systemic level. Their practical needs must be met first. This, however, does not stop us from connecting her daily realities to larger social change. For example, talking about issues of systemic oppression can be one way to prevent women from internalizing the belief that she is to be blamed for her experiences.

While anti-oppression focuses on how power is used to control people through oppression, a feminist anti-oppression framework also recognizes the possibility and power of empowerment. Therefore, while power can be used to create oppression, it can be used to create liberation. This will be explored further in the next two activities on *women's personal power and women's political power*.

REFLECTIVE ACTIVITY: Women's Personal Power

As feminist anti-violence workers, our lived realities help ground us in our work. Many workers can identify with experiences of violence, whether that violence is within the context of intimate relationships, poverty, racism, ableism, heterosexism, ageism, or any form of oppression. Our experiences have helped shape the ways in which our organizations operate and the ways in which we provide supports.

It is of utmost importance that our organizations create mechanisms that allow for women's diverse voices to be heard. It is women that know their realities best and, as such, know what types of supports will be most meaningful. Therefore, careful attention must be paid to soliciting women's ideas, feedback, and suggestions on the supports they receive from our organizations and the ways in which they are provided. This includes both women who have used our services as well as those that never have, but are part of our communities.

Exercise 1: As a team, answer and discuss the following questions:

1. When planning a new program and/or service, whose voices get heard?
2. Are women who have used our services consulted? Are women from the community consulted?
3. If yes, has this been helpful? How?
4. If these women have not been consulted, consider why not?

To Think About ...

If women are consulted, it is important that their voices hold weight; their ideas need to be respected and efforts need to be made to build on their ideas toward action. It shows a lack of trust and belief in women to consult with them, but then to do nothing with the ideas they have shared.

REFLECTIVE ACTIVITY: Women's Political Power

An anti-oppression framework focuses on the structural causes of oppression and in practice, anti-oppression means challenging this oppression. We need to be involving women and others in our communities in this process of social justice, whereby power inequities become exposed, and communities gather to redress them.

Involving women means more than viewing them as “clients”, it means seeing women as allies in our efforts to prevent, address, and eliminate violence against women. This reflects a ‘power with’ approach, where we recognize that as anti-violence feminist workers, we have the ability to leverage our power so that women can become directly involved in the change process toward eliminating violence against women.

Think about our professional values that guide the support we provide to women. In other words, when you are working with a woman, what values guide your approach to supporting her?

For example, they may include:

- Respecting women's right to self-determination.
- Recognizing the dignity of the women we work with.
- Understanding the importance of confidentiality.
- Practicing from a place of being non-judgmental.

Just as we have values that guide our work with women, we also have values that guide our approaches to working with communities. The following are a couple for your consideration²⁴:

- Energy for change must come from within communities. Women know their lived realities best. By creating opportunities and reducing barriers for women's involvement in community efforts, not only can their voices be heard, but their voices can also help effect change that is reflective of their needs and aspirations. Women have a right to real decision-making power when it comes to issues of violence against women.
- People are motivated by the realization that they can have some impact on their environment (empowerment) and this process can be a therapeutic way of bringing people together and changing the way they perceive themselves. It provides opportunities for women to be part of consciousness-raising efforts where the root causes of violence against

²⁴ Adapted from: Lee, B. (1999). *Pragmatics of community organization*. Toronto, CommonAct Press.

women become exposed. This can help combat the effects of internalized oppression discussed earlier.

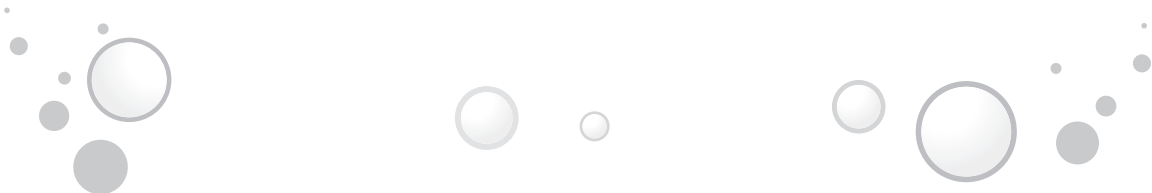
While the following section is not meant to provide an exhaustive overview of engaging women in the change process, it is meant to spark awareness and potentially action so that we may involve women who have experienced abuse in our responses to violence against women. Built into this discussion includes scenarios for your review and consideration.

Engaging and mobilizing communities is a *process*. Regardless of the number and types of methods used, change occurs over time, with different successes and challenges occurring along the way. It is through these experiences we build on our previous work.

For example, let's think about the women's movement in North America. During the 1960s and 1970s, we saw significant advances in women's roles within society due to the advocacy efforts of communities of women. Some key successes during this time period include, but are not limited to: the emergence of shelters for abused women and children; an increased understanding of viewing woman abuse as a social, not private issue; an increase of women entering the workforce; improvements to child care provisions; and greater access to free abortion.

Subsequent and current waves of feminist organizing have been able to recognize and appreciate these successes as our daily lives have been greatly affected by these changes. Furthermore, we are now in a position to build on these successes to create further change. This is a clear example of how community development is a process. While we can choose to look at a local initiative as an example of community development, we can also choose to look at longer periods of time to see how communities have historically gathered to ensure increased quality of living.

Community development is a term that is synonymous with community organizing and community work. These terms refer to a process where people are brought together for a common cause in order to become more aware of their conditions and to become responsible for taking action. For our purposes, we are referring to community development as engaging women (and potentially male allies and other key stakeholders in our community) to both address and prevent violence against women.



This can take place through:

- a) Raising awareness about violence against women
- b) Raising awareness about agency resources
- c) Facilitating greater participation of women in social action

Each of these areas will now be explored in more detail.

a) Raising Awareness about Woman Abuse

The purpose is to shift people's attitudes about how they perceive and understand woman abuse. By shifting people's views from blaming the woman to understanding the issue as socially caused may help change attitudes.

In our efforts to raise awareness, we may use methods such as: door-to door outreach; facilitating community-based conversations; workshops, presentations and/or training; or media coverage.

b) Raising Awareness about Agency Resources

Through information sharing, community members become more aware of what supports they can access. In addition, through information sharing people learn what service gaps exist that could potentially become the target for future community change work. Some examples of methods that could be used include: attending and having tables, displays, and written material at different community events; door-to-door outreach; as well as using the Internet and agency websites to promote information about resources.

Some community groups and organizations develop different types of promotional materials that can be handed out such as brochures, magnets, and pens. It is important to create promotional materials that are relevant to the communities we are engaging. For example, the Assaulted Women's Helpline has used creative marketing including nail files and lipstick tubes (where a red informational sheet is inserted) to surreptitiously distribute their phone number and services to women.

When conducting this type of outreach, whether it is raising awareness about the issue of violence against women or the services our organization provides, who is doing the outreach? Perhaps this is part of your role as a feminist anti-violence worker?

Exercise 1: As a team, answer and discuss the following questions:

1. Take inventory of the different methods your organization has engaged in over the past year to raise awareness about violence against women in your community?
2. Of these methods:
 - a) How was staff directly involved?
 - b) How were women who have used your agency's services involved?
 - c) How were other community members involved?
3. In what ways can women who have used your agency's services and other community members, in your view, be more involved in helping to raise awareness about woman abuse in your community?

Think about the different ways that women and others from your community can become involved in the planning, implementing, and evaluating of these outreach methods? If we agree that women have the right to be part of solving the issues impacting them, then this is a perfect opportunity! We need to explore ways to share this work with our community.

- For example, do you know of women that could staff your agency booth at an upcoming event? Of course, we need to be mindful that we support people to do this work. A good way to start is to go as pairs, with one person a staff member and the other a community member. They may need training so they are familiar with our agency and the services we provide so they are able to respond to questions that may arise. We also need to be mindful of ensuring this type of work is accessible to women in particular; therefore, it is a responsible practice to ensure that women are provided with childcare and transportation support as required.
- Regardless of what approach we use, be it a booth or a workshop, we need to be mindful of the way we present the issue of violence against women. It is important to know the dynamics of your community so that information is shared in a way that is meaningful for them. For example, if you held a workshop called “domestic violence” or “woman abuse”, do you think people would come? Perhaps the stigma of the issue may be so internalized that we may need to approach the issue in a gentler and more approachable way. Some communities have used the language of ‘healthy relationships’ or have used creative methods such as movies to spark a dialogue on an otherwise silenced issue.
- We also must be mindful of *where* our outreach and education efforts take place. Are we expecting women from the community to come to us, or are we willing to go where they are? While there are times that coming to our agency will be the best option (e.g. for safety concerns), it is important to know the different places that people in a community gather. This requires

you to not only know your community, but to think creatively. For example, some people have been able to engage their communities in conversation at grocery stores, in beauty salons, and in faith-based institutions. If you spend time getting to know the leaders in your community, you will be amazed at how these entry points will make themselves available to you and your efforts.

- Remember that through outreach and education, we are not only targeting women survivors of abuse, but also all members of the community. This includes, but is not limited to, individual community members, service providers (across different sectors), community organizations, faith-based communities, media, the school system, healthcare, and businesses. Because we understand violence against women as a socially caused issue -- everyone must be part of the solution.
- When engaging in outreach and education with our communities, we must provide opportunities for women to continue to be involved. For example, perhaps a workshop is being held with a group of women on the topic of healthy relationships. Be sure to provide room for people to discuss ways they can be part of the solution! It can be very disempowering to only leave people with information, and not validate the ways they can contribute to solving the issue. Ways you can do this include: informing women about existing initiatives they can be a part of or encouraging community members to continue a dialogue about what they can do together.

Through both raising awareness about violence against women and community resources, the end result is more educated communities. Remember the concept of praxis (reflection + action = change)? Outreach and education are great tools to engage communities in reflection. This can be an incredibly powerful way to build the momentum in communities for longer lasting change.

c) Facilitate Greater Participation of Women in Social Action

Social action refers to mobilizing women in understanding and challenging systemic oppression. Mobilizing can include a one-time event like a candlelight vigil; however, it is not uncommon to see the momentum from one event turn into a more sustained movement. Think about the different shelters and agencies that have been developed, many have come from the sparking of ideas between community members and through a series of events combined with dedication and vision.

Any effort that includes women and other allies from the community coming together to plan and implement a strategy for addressing violence against women can be considered mobilization. For example, this could include conducting community surveys or focus groups to better understand women's needs; arranging for community gatherings; holding workshops or conferences; engaging in fundraising initiatives; lobbying for legislative change;

demonstrations (marches, rallies, vigils, etc.); or campaigns (multiple approaches used strategically).

Regardless of the approach used, what makes mobilizing a form of community development are the community members directly involved in planning and implementing it.

Our community response to woman abuse has tended to rely on social services and larger institutions doing the work. To highlight this, consider the following:

- When are meetings for community-based initiatives (e.g. events, campaigns, partnership-based projects, rallies, etc.) held? Are they held during the day, which is convenient for staff, but can be difficult for working women?
- Is childcare provided or reimbursed for women to attend meetings and community events?
- Is transportation provided or reimbursed for women to attend meetings or community events?
- Are language interpreters and sign language interpreters made available?

By not encouraging or allowing the full participation of community members, the capacity to create self-sustaining responses and effective solutions has been hindered. This is even more pertinent when looking at communities that have experienced accessibility barriers to service including Aboriginal women, women of colour, low-income women, lesbian and bisexual women, women living with disabilities, older women, and transgendered women. Creating self-sustaining responses is even more vital because they can have a wider impact on community safety rather than relying on systems to intervene.



IN CLOSING

We hope that you have found the content, activities and exercises embedded throughout this manual helpful. Our goal was to facilitate a process whereby feminist anti-violence workers could engage in critical self-reflection while integrating theory from an anti-oppression framework.

We must remember that change is a lifelong process and that we are constantly learning ways to deal with and eliminate oppression. There are no easy answers, but practicing from a feminist anti-oppression framework puts us on the right track toward creating accessibility and equity for the women and children we support in our work.

Acknowledge and celebrate your commitment, dedication, and passion for working toward ending violence against all women and children.

“The question isn’t who’s going to let me;
it’s who is going to stop me.” -Ayn Rand

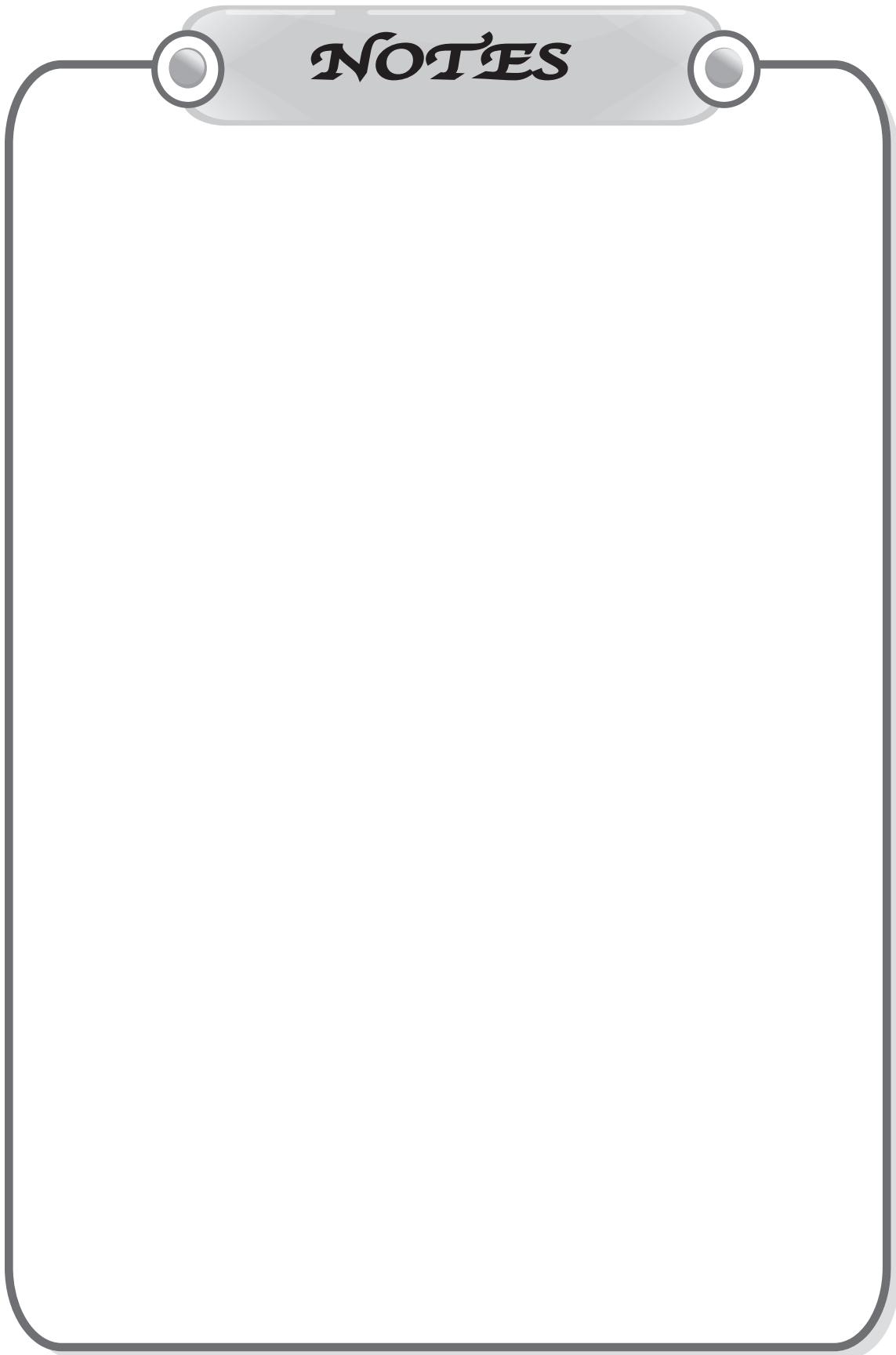
REFERENCES

- Adapted from: Lee, B. (1999). *Pragmatics of community organization*. Toronto, CommonAct Press.
- Adapted from the *Cultural Competency Handbook* for students compiled by R. Degano and Dr. M. Disman for the Dept of Public Health Sciences, University of Toronto.
- Alexander, M. (2008). *An integrated anti-oppression framework for reviewing and developing policy: A toolkit for community service organizations*. Springtide Resources. Retrieved from <http://www.springtideresources.org/resources/show.cfm?id=241>
- Barnoff, L. & Coleman, B. (2007). *Women's services strategies for integrating anti-oppressive principles: Perspectives from feminist agencies*. In: D. Baines (Ed.), *Doing anti-oppressive practice: Building transformative and politicized social work*. (p. 35). Fernwood Publishing.
- Carniol, B. (2005). *Case critical*. (5th edition). Toronto, ON: Between the Lines.
- Class Action. *What is classism*. Retrieved from <http://www.classism.org/about-class/what-is-classism>
- Compiled by Deutsch, B. (2004, September 14). *The male privilege checklist*. Retrieved from <http://www.amptoons.com/blog/the-male-privilege-checklist/>
<http://www.amptoons.com/blog/the-male-privilege-checklist/>
- Douglas, S. *Along the unique journey, Exploring equity frameworks: Finding common ground for collaborative action*. Regional Diversity Roundtable. [Powerpoint Slides].
- Glass, R.D. (2001, March). *On Paulo Freire's philosophy of praxis and the foundations of liberation education*. Retrieved from http://www.aera.net/uploadedFiles/Journals_and_Publications/Journals/Educational_Researcher/3002/AERA3002_Glass.pdf
- Hartman, A. (1993). *The professional is political*. *Social Work*: 34 (8), 355 – 356.
- Kondrat, M.E., (December 1999). Who is the 'self' in self-aware: Professional self-awareness from a critical theory perspective. *Social Service Review*, 73(4), 451 – 477.
- Ladd-Taylor, M. & Umansky, L. (1998). "Bad" mothers: The politics of blame in twentieth-century America. NYU Press.

- MacLeod, L. & Shin, M.Y. (1993). *“Like a wingless bird...”: A tribute to the survival and courage of women who are abused and who speak neither English nor French*. Ottawa: Health Canada (National Clearinghouse on Family Violence).
- Miss J. (2011, February 11). *Domestic violence coverage: Coverage of domestic violence in the news*. Retrieved from <http://mediamisses.wordpress.com/2010/02/11/domestic-violence-coverage/>
- OAITH. (2000). *Creating inclusive spaces for women: A practical guide for implementing an integrated anti-racist, feminist delivery system*. Plain language version.
- Paredes, M.P. (1992). *Setting the precedent: Process as change in meeting the needs of immigrant and refugee women surviving sexual abuse and sexual violence*. Immigrant and Refugee Women’s Project: Education Sexual Assault.
- Payne, M. (2005). *Modern social work theory*. (3rd edition). New York, New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Sawyer, J. (1989). Internalized dominance. *Quarterly Change*. 1(4), 16 – 23.
- Shen, V. & Campbell, D.A., *Involve youth 2: A guide to meaningful youth engagement*. City of Toronto.
- The Woman Abuse Council of Toronto. (2005). *Women charged with domestic violence in Toronto: The unintended consequences of mandatory charge policies*. Retrieved from www.womanabuse.ca/womenchargedfinal.pdf
- Women’s Issues Branch, Executive Council Office. (2003). *Gender based analysis guide*.

NOTES

NOTES



NOTES

