

BLACKBURN CENTER

POSITION STATEMENT: SOCIAL CHANGE

Introduction

We live in a culture of violence such that the existence of violence is tolerated and accepted. The presence and extent of societal violence strains the cohesiveness of any community. The presence of violence in relationships destroys trust and shatters the connection between people. The violence in the culture results in numbness to its presence and silence instead of outrage, and does not discriminate based on age, race, sexual orientation, gender or societal status.

Oppression of women has deep seated and historic roots in this society. While progress has been made to eradicate the oppression of women on a societal level, an uneven power relationship continues to exist between men and women. Gender inequality has resulted in society's acceptance of violence towards women and reinforces the belief that domestic and sexual violence is acceptable. Further, it reinforces the belief that women should be subservient to violent acts perpetrated by men. This inequality serves to support reactions of insensitivity and disbelief when women report experiences of violence.

Mission

Blackburn Center actively advocates for the rights of all people to live free from violence and oppression in their homes and communities and provides supportive services to survivors of all forms of domestic violence and sexual assault.

Commitment to Social Change

In support of the first part of its mission, Blackburn Center commits to engaging in social change activities that will support the transformation of culture and social institutions over time as they relate to violence against women. Blackburn Center's Board of Directors will establish a continuum of recommended activities that will serve as a guide for this work.

Theoretical Foundations: Domestic and Sexual Violence

While Blackburn Center appreciates a variety of theoretical orientations, the primary theoretical approaches that guide the agency's work are:

- *Social Learning Theory*: Social learning theory is an update and expansion of traditional behaviorism, which emphasized how learning or behavior change occurs in response to environmental consequences. Social learning theory argues that we do not necessarily need to directly experience those consequences in order to learn or change. We learn by vicariously observing what happens to others. We choose to imitate others (or not) according to how we perceive their consequences (rewards or punishments). This observational learning viewpoint emphasizes modeling and imitation of behaviors through the processes of attention, retention, motor reproduction and motivations. Social learning theory recognizes that we learn from observation of our parents, teachers, mentors, siblings, peers, and all significant others. It also recognizes media as a significant influence in learning.

Violence is learned as an acceptable response to satisfy one's needs.

Simple Description: Monkey See, Monkey Do.

- *Feminist Theory*: One must recognize that women and men (girls and boys) develop in gender-based contexts. Feminist theory is an understanding that social and political forces, not merely (or even primarily) individual factors, shape human behavior and experience. A fundamental concern is how power relationships are lived, between people and among social groups. Feminist theory begins with the premise that we live in a patriarchal society where women are oppressed in overt and covert ways.

In our patriarchal society, violence against women is permitted due to the imbalance of power in interpersonal, social, economic and political systems.

Simple Description: Women do not have equal rights and thus become the easy target of violence.

- *Systems Theory*: System theory is a way of understanding human behavior and interactions in terms of relationships. The theory assumes that the problems people experience are relational in nature and as such solutions are also relational. All human experiences involve, influence, and are influenced by other people, groups and/or systems.

Our culture reinforces violence as a social norm. The entire system must be addressed if violence is to be eliminated.

Simple Description: To address violence, you must address the social context.

Core Beliefs

The following core beliefs were articulated during the process of developing a position statement on social change for Blackburn Center. These beliefs inform all aspects of the center's work.

- **Equality in relationships with a respect for human dignity is essential if domestic and sexual violence is to be eliminated.**
- **In order to address domestic and sexual violence, there must be social change. Social change requires change in attitudes, beliefs, and actions through individual, group, and community education.**
- **Open discourse about domestic and sexual violence is necessary to stimulate social change. This discourse should include discussions of the "hidden" cost of violence, i.e., health care, economic, and the residual impact on children.**
- **Victims of violence deserve to be heard without judgment.**
- **Victims have the right to define their own healing and deserve support and assistance to make informed choices and decisions. Some persons with preexisting psychological conditions are more vulnerable to experiences of domestic violence and sexual assault and as such may require comprehensive therapeutic services.**
- **All perpetrators of violence must be held accountable for their behavior.**

Approved by the Board of Directors, June 23, 2004

Works Cited

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Copies of these articles may be obtained by calling Blackburn Center, 724.837.9540.