

Voices Heard SISTERS Unseen

A COMMUNITY
EDUCATION GUIDE



This community education guide was prepared with input and assistance from the following:

- Arati Vasan, Institute for Women, Law & Development
- Nancy Turner, National Coalition Against Domestic Violence
- Yasmin Tambiah, Institute for Women, Law & Development
- Diana Onley-Campbell, Union Institute Center For Women
- Maya Coleman, Whitman Walker Clinic, Northern Virginia
- Lea Browning, international human rights lawyer
- Tania Abdulahad, Family Preservation Program

Written and Produced by Grace Poore

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PREFACE

This community education guide is created for use with the video, "Voices Heard Sisters Unseen." Both resources are meant to expand perspectives by providing a range of viewpoints we seldom see or hear. In both, domestic violence is treated as a gender issue, a power and control issue, and a sexuality issue.

In "Voices Heard Sisters Unseen," battered women provide information not only as "talking heads" but also as poets and journal-writers. Some of the women communicate as performance artists. Others speak as advocates working to change the way the system treats women seeking safety and justice. By using multiple forms of expression, "Voices Heard Sisters Unseen" intends to emphasize that women are more than survivors or victims, we are also vibrant people who have transformed terrifying personal experiences into political activism and/or creative work.

"Voices Heard Sisters Unseen" has no narrator or "expert" psychologizing about "learned helplessness," or "women who love too much." There is no "objective" outsider trying to understand if battered women are a particular type who "attract violent partners." Instead, the video is a communique of intimate and political opinions that women present in different ways across time and place.

While it is generally believed that specialized approaches to advocacy and services are expedient, practical and necessary to ensure "good quality," we need to ask ourselves and the organizations we work for: What kind of justice expects women to splinter themselves in order to get protec-

tion? What kind of empowerment demands silence for services?

Battered women in "Voices Heard Sisters Unseen" are lesbians, deaf, undocumented/without immigration status, in prostitution, or women with disabilities or women with AIDS. The video does not compare and contrast who is the more oppressed. Instead, it attempts to show how compartmentalizing women according to the services they need forces them to choose among their many identities in order to find support and safety.

On another level, the video (like the guide) examines what roles the State, the community at large, and women's communities in particular play in defining safety for those in abusive relationships. It also looks at how identity politics can contribute to the conspiracies of silence that pervade disenfranchised communities attempting to protect their own. At its core, what the video is trying to say is that for a woman who is battered, the reality should never be about choosing between her full humanity and her right to protection from the system and from social services, between her community's civil rights and her own right to live without violence. Battered women are not a homogeneous mass of "victims."

It is my hope that those of us who want to end violence against women will shape a justice that involves inter-disciplinary and cross-issue responses so we can improve our assistance, not only to the women who have been highlighted in the video but also to the many others who are excluded from our "working definitions" of battered women.

Grace Poore, SHaKTI PRODUCTIONS

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this guide is to:

- act as a supplemental education and training tool for the video, "Voices Heard Sisters Unseen,"
- initiate dialogue about the issues raised in the video,
- elicit ideas for practical application on how programs/policies/procedures can be more helpful and accountable to battered women across the spectrum,
- and help you bring home to your community/agency/group the "dialogue" presented in the video.

GUIDELINES

Since the purpose of this community education guide is to assist you with the content of your presentation or training, we assume that you, as the group facilitator, leader or trainer, will determine your group's structure, i.e. one large group discussion or a mixture of large and small working-group discussions.

Questions in the guide are organized under two main categories: **Pre-Video Screening Dialogue** and **Post-Video Screening Discussion**, with a special section on **Controversial Questions and Questions For The Media**. Again, we leave it up to the facilitator/trainer to decide the format of your group's activity/training. This will enable you to use the guide and the video with different

groups of people in a variety of settings – at a community center, college campus, church, civic center, conference workshop, youth program, staff or volunteer training, board meeting.

It is critical that facilitators/trainers provide the group with basic background information on domestic violence before they watch the video. For instance, we recommend handouts on the **definitions of domestic violence, dynamics of power and control in abusive relationships, the power and control wheel, information on why men batter, who is a batterer, and statistics on domestic violence.** To help you gather the information you need, we have provided a resource list at the back of this guide.

The one major thing we emphasize is that you show the whole video as part of your presentation. We also suggest that in preparation for the viewing, you first pose the questions that we list under "Pre Screening Dialogue" (see page 6) A discussion based on these questions will serve as an "ice-breaker" and help you establish the diversity of your group in terms of experience, knowledge and personal backgrounds of participants.

If possible, we urge you to involve and include the participation of young women, old women, women in prostitution, non-immigrant and immigrant women, lesbians, bisexual women, women with disabilities, deaf women, and women who are HIV Positive or have AIDS. The participation of these women will take your presentation and group discussion out of the realm of "mere" intellectual exchange and give deeper meaning and purpose to the exchanges that do occur.

LENGTH OF PRESENTATION

It is assumed that your presentation will be an activity that is sponsored by a group that wants to set time aside for consciousness-raising. Therefore, you should plan for a presentation that is **at minimum 2 1/2 or 3 hours long** – 76 minutes for the video and 60 - 90 minutes for the group discussion. For presentations in a classroom or for a college course, you may wish to extend the time over two class periods, encouraging students to take notes during the video screening so they can actively participate in discussion during the next period.

PRE VIDEO SCREENING DIALOGUE

Before you show "Voices Heard Sisters Unseen," spend some time getting the group acquainted with each other's ideas. In addition, you will be helping to set the context for the video by asking the group to focus on issues that will be addressed by women in the video.

It is important to note that the purpose of these questions is merely to get people to share information, not critique each other's responses.

1. If you were stranded alone in a city that you were not familiar with and you have lost your wallet, purse, keys and address book, what would you do? Where would you turn?
2. What protects you from being battered in an intimate relationship?
3. If a battered woman decides to leave the abusive relationship, what steps do you think she should take? List all the steps.
4. Who can't you imagine as a batterer? For example, responses might be, "The pastor of my church" or "The board member of my battered woman's program," or "My best friend who donates a lot of money to AIDS programs."

The first two questions are intended to help participants think about their privilege or lack of it, their access to resources or lack of it, their options or lack of them.

After the video is shown, it would be interesting to refer back to responses that people gave to the pre-screening questions. For example, the group could be asked to look at how the responses they gave to questions 1, 2 & 3 apply to battered women who are from the groups represented in the video. Responses to question 4 could help them understand the myths that prevail about who a batterer is and who a battered woman is or is not.

POST VIDEO SCREENING DISCUSSION

I.

We suggest starting off with questions that focus on the dynamics of power and control in abusive relationships.

1. Using the Power Wheel or information about definitions of domestic violence, ask the group to talk about how power and control are played out in each of the groups represented in the video. It is important to stress that domestic violence and battering are not limited to physical violence but must include the entire spectrum of abuse—verbal, emotional, mental, physical, sexual, economic.
2. How do the experiences overlap for the different women in the video? How do the experiences differ?

3. One survivor in the video says, "She controlled my life, she controlled what I did...I became what she wanted me to be, it wasn't me anymore." Other survivors say, they wanted to kill themselves before their batterers killed them. Erasure of self and loss of autonomy are a consequence of battering. What are the other costs to battered women in the video?
4. One of the advocates in the video says that battering is not a personality characteristic—a person learns how to be abusive, has the opportunity to abuse and makes the choice to inflict abuse. Based on this explanation, how can you, in your personal and professional capacity, hold a batterer accountable?
5. How can we as a society prevent the teaching of abuse? How do we minimize the opportunity for abuse? How can we affect the choice that a person makes to be abusive?

II.

The next part of the discussion deals with whether services that group participants provide are geared to the full range of women.

1. Does the information you put out to battered women about the resources you provide, include battered women from the communities represented in the video?
2. Of the resources that you believe are necessary for battered women to stop the violence in their lives, which ones successfully address the needs

of battered women represented in the video? Which do not?

3. How do you let these specific groups of battered women know about the resources that you provide?
4. If the resources are not currently available to them, how would you make them available to these groups of women?
5. On the societal level what prevents services to the battered women you saw in the video? At your organizational level what prevents these services?
6. How would you integrate the concerns of the specific groups of battered women in the video into the domestic violence work that you do?

These questions are meant to draw out from the group their ideas on how to connect isolated groups of battered women to domestic violence services." They also can lead to a discussion on the pros and cons of targeted outreach versus integrated outreach, and the benefits and limitations of making marginalized women part of the mainstream versus making mainstream domestic violence services accountable to marginalized women.

RELATED QUESTIONS

1. How would you deal with the needs of battered lesbians for judicial and law enforcement protection? It is important to stress here that in a homophobic society, lesbians are under risk of further re-victimization and censure from the

very system and society that they turn to for help.

2. Deaf battered women in the video talk about the isolation that deaf women feel in hearing shelters. How would you deal with this in your program/agency/organization/community?
3. Women in prostitution are targets for blame and discrimination. Some of the reasons for this are discussed in the video. How have you dealt with the needs of women in prostitution?
4. In the video, we hear how women in general and battered women in particular have little control over use of condoms to prevent AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases. How would you empower battered women for whom rape is part of the domestic violence they experience?
5. How would you assist a battered woman with HIV/AIDS in a shelter setting? It is important to stress here that this woman may need more than a bed and a support group, and that safety from the batterer does not preclude the fact that she is living with AIDS.
6. How does society as a whole keep women powerless in a relationship where sexual violence and rape (including marital rape) occur?
7. What are the negative repercussions of mandatory testing or forced disclosure of HIV/AIDS on battered women seeking services?
8. What policies do you have in place in your programs to address safety precautions against

HIV/AIDS transmission while also protecting the rights of battered women with HIV/AIDS?

9. If such policies are absent, how would you go about getting them introduced and instituted in your agency/program?

The intention of these questions is to get at the complexities of women's lives and the struggles they face on multiple fronts. Often service-providers will say that they have "never turned anyone away." They may argue that they have "never had a prostitute or a deaf woman or a woman in a wheelchair come to them for services." They may use old examples to verify their claims of inclusive service - "We had one lesbian who used our services three years ago," "There was that one woman who did not speak English who left suddenly without saying anything," "Remember the woman with AIDS who had all kinds of problems adjusting to the other residents?" etc., etc. Policies of inclusion mean nothing when personal attitudes of those who work with battered women can over-ride policy. On the other hand, not having a policy on who to serve and how to provide services does not help women in crisis situations. In fact, the lack of policy can sometimes exacerbate the crisis and alienate the very people we are trying to assist.

It is said that whether we know it or not, every urban shelter has served a woman with HIV/AIDS. It is probably also true that every court, police precinct, shelter, social service agency, and legal aid office has been approached by women from the groups repre-

sented in the video. What the system and service providers do not recognize is that many women may not reveal who they are or the full extent of their terror and how the batterer has used societal prejudice to keep them isolated and afraid. They may not even reveal that they are being battered. To be unaware of the realities of battered women is to facilitate the control that batterers already have over the people they abuse.

For participants who do not work on issues that relate to domestic violence, we suggest the following questions.

1. What services do you or your agencies already provide to the communities identified in the video? Which of these services focus on domestic violence?
2. How do you suggest using the array of services that already exist in your city/county to reach out to the groups of battered women represented in the video?
3. We do not believe that it is enough to simply create an organization to deal with "that population," whatever "that population" might be. Therefore, how would you integrate domestic violence awareness into the work that you do within your community?

Questions 1-3 are aimed at getting those who do not focus on domestic violence to think about how their offices, agencies or programs can become sources of support to the many

"invisible" battered women who use their services.

RELATED QUESTIONS

1. How can refugee resettlement agencies, immigration rights or immigration attorneys assist undocumented battered women coming to them for help with immigration issues?
2. How can a doctor's office or disability rights group make domestic violence awareness part of their routine services/advocacy to disabled women?

You can add your own questions to this list.

III.

This section is to generate discussion on the role of battered women's shelters and domestic violence programs.

1. How can women be empowered and protected within your shelters?
2. In what ways can we hold battered women's shelters and domestic violence programs accountable to all battered women?
3. How would you hold these shelters and programs accountable when they re-victimize women like those represented in the video?

IV.

This section deals with the system's response to domestic violence.

In the video, a domestic violence prosecutor says, "Women cannot stop the violence of the abuser. They can leave, they can get divorces but they cannot stop the violence. It is up to the criminal justice system to stop domestic violence."

1. How can the criminal justice system stop domestic violence without disempowering the battered woman?
2. When the system does not intervene appropriately to stop the violence, how can battered women be empowered?
3. The police and courts are a problem for many of the battered women represented in the video. What ways are there to hold these institutions accountable to battered women?
4. What ways are there to help the system work better for ALL battered women?

V.

For this part of the discussion, we suggest moving the group into a deeper discussion about personal attitudes.

1. One advocate in the video states that the work we do to help battered women is about risk. What kind of personal and organizational risk are you willing to take to help the women represented in the video?

2. How would you get around policies that discriminate against undocumented people and immigrants to help an undocumented battered woman?
3. Are you aware of the groups locally or nationally that work on providing safety and protection to women in prostitution? How can you link your agency/program with such groups?
4. How would you deal with board, funder or community resistance to providing assistance to the groups of battered women that are represented in the video? List the actions you would take.
5. How would you get around the reasoning, "We don't have enough funds to serve all women?"
6. Can you identify groups locally or nationally that can support you in your efforts to deal with board, funder or community resistance? Name them. If not, see resource list at the back of this guide.

Questions listed above are geared towards getting the group to think about the distance we are expected to maintain between the "us" and "them." The intention is to show how attitudes are translated into the way we provide services, create procedure, and design and implement policy.

Talking about the distance between the "us" and "them" also lays the groundwork for the group to look at how, on personal and organizational levels, they distance themselves from women in the video, whether those women are battered or not. For example, the video points out the barriers that exist be-

tween most of society and women in prostitution; between those who are citizens and those who are undocumented/without immigration status; between heterosexual women and lesbians.

Depending on who is participating in your group, this discussion could also underscore the distance that is maintained within and between different disenfranchised communities, as well as between and among their activists and advocates.

RELATED QUESTIONS

1. How can the distance be reduced and removed between, for example, advocates for immigrants' rights and advocates for disability rights? Or between the deaf women's community and women in prostitution? Between non-English speaking residents at a shelter and a resident who has AIDS? Between a service-seeker who has a disability and a service-provider who is a lesbian?

VI.

This last set of questions is aimed at helping the group brainstorm on what they can do in the short and long terms to assist battered women from the groups represented in the video.

1. What specific changes can you make that will not cost your program/agency a lot of money

to assist battered women from the communities you have seen in the video?

2. If you were creating a brand new policy/procedure/program, what would you do to help at least 3 of the 6 groups of battered women in the video? Identify the 3 groups.
3. Name 3 ways that you, in all your different roles, can be of help to each of the battered women represented in the video. These roles include, professional, personal, and political, in both public and private realms.
4. Some survivors in the video talk about needing shelters and safehouses exclusively for women from a particular community. How would shelters that are exclusively for lesbians help or hinder survivors? How would shelters for women in prostitution help or hinder their efforts to stop the violence in their lives? How would shelters for battered women with AIDS help or hinder the quality of their survival?
5. There are many battered women's shelters that are run by non-survivors of domestic violence. How would it be for lesbian survivors if a shelter for battered lesbians were run by lesbians who were not battered? Or if programs for battered women with HIV/AIDS were run by AIDS advocates who had never experienced domestic violence? Or if programs for undocumented battered women were run by immigrants who had never experienced domestic violence?
6. Likewise, how would it be for survivors from a particular community if the shelters were run by those from outside their community? For ex-

ample, shelters for deaf battered women run by hearing women? Or agencies for disabled battered women run by non-disabled women or disabled men? Or shelters for lesbians run by non-lesbians? Or support groups for undocumented women run by men or women who did not share the same cultural background?

7. Ask members of the group who have programs exclusively for a particular group of battered women to talk about the pros and cons of their exclusive services.
8. Ask members in the group who have programs with positive and empowering leadership/management structures to talk about how their structures can benefit women from the groups represented in the video.

These questions try to get at power imbalances in the way programs are set up. They also offer an opportunity to assess which existing services work well and truly benefit all battered women. At the same time, the questions provide a forum to discuss how programs can be modified and how new programs that are being planned can begin taking into account the needs of women that have long been ignored.

RELATED QUESTIONS

1. How do we as a society compartmentalize women?
2. How can we get beyond compartmentalization while maintaining good service quality?

These questions get at how we can stop shuttling women from one agency to another and keep funders from determining the way services are provided and to whom. They also get at the myth that "special interest" groups undermine the quality and availability of services for "the rest of us."

We hope the discussion in sections I through VI can lead to the understanding that in reality things that are good for so-called "sub-groups" are actually good for everyone. It might be helpful to have the group think about examples of these.

CONTROVERSIAL QUESTIONS

The function of racism, homophobia, ablism and other oppressions is to keep communities that are under siege silent about our leaders who batter. This means that many communities struggling for civil and political rights have not dealt with the violence that is being inflicted by some of our leaders on their intimate partners. While the conspiracy of silence benefits the batterers, it is a betrayal and, in some cases, a death trap for those who are being battered.

In "Voices Heard Sisters Unseen," it is a lesbian who brings up the issue of "much revered activists" who batter. However, this problem is definitely not unique to the lesbian community. If anything, it may be lesbians who have begun confronting our communities about driving battering underground.

The following questions are geared for a discussion on the conspiracies of silence.

1. How are members of a particular community complicit with the violence of the batterer?
2. Why are members of a disenfranchised community reluctant to acknowledge, intervene and prevent violence from occurring to women in their community?
3. What should a community's responsibility be towards the abuser if the abuser happens to be a leader of that community?
4. What should a community's responsibility be towards a woman who is abused if she happens to be a leader of that community?
5. What are the negative repercussions of going public with information about leaders who batter? What steps need to be taken to keep these repercussions from destroying the community and its achievements in the struggles for its civil rights?
6. What is the larger societal responsibility towards the community that is grappling with questions of internal accountability and the need to protect its own?

It is likely that the group may not agree on answers to these questions but it is important not to shy away from the issues that come up around these questions because they are an integral part of what many battered women face when they try to stop the violence in their lives.

QUESTIONS ABOUT & FOR THE MEDIA

If there is time, you may wish to ask your group to discuss how we can counter the negative effects of media prejudice, and educate responsible journalists about fair coverage of issues relating to battered women across the entire spectrum.

1. How do the media foster the conspiracies of silence?
2. What media images keep circulating about battered women in general?
3. How do the media perpetuate the idea that unless battered women leave the abusive relationship, they are not survivors, or that leaving only happens once?
4. How do these ideas prevent high profile personalities who are battered women from seeking assistance as battered women?
5. How have you educated the media in your city/county/state? What positive results have your efforts yielded? Give specific examples.
6. What is your idea of an accurate media representation of battered women? How does this idea apply to battered women from the groups represented in the video?
7. Name some things you can do to educate the media about the groups of battered women represented in the video.

PARTIAL RESOURCE LIST

For specific educational materials or statistics on the following issues, you may wish to contact the organizations listed below. Enquire with each organization about the cost of receiving materials and permission to reproduce them.

Gay & Lesbian Battering

Abused and Battered Lesbians (ABLE)
909 Northeast 43rd St Suite 208, Seattle, WA 98105
Phone: 206-547-8191

National Coalition Against Domestic Violence
P.O. 18749, Denver, CO 80218-0749.
Phone: 303-839-1852. Fax: 303-831-9251

Network For Battered Lesbians
P.O. Box 6011, Boston, MA 02114
Phone: 617-424-8611

New York City Gay & Lesbian Anti-Violence Project
647 Hudson Street, New York, NY 10014
Phone: 212-807-0197

Bi-lingual & Bi-cultural Domestic Violence Services

Coalition For Immigrant and Refugee Rights
995 Market Street, Suite 1108, San Francisco, CA 94103
Phone: 415-243-8215

Community University Health Care Center
Program for Southeast Asian Battered Women
2001 Bloomington Avenue South, Minneapolis, MN 55404-3089
Phone: 612-627-6888

East Harlem Violence Intervention Project
P.O. Box 136, Triboro Station, New York, NY 10035
Phone: 212-360-5090

La Casa de las Madres
965 Mission Street, Suite 300, San Francisco, CA 94103
Phone: 415-777-1808

MANAVI Support Group for South Asian Battered Women
P.O. Box 614, Bloomfield, NJ 07003
Phone: 908-687-2662

SAKHI for South Asian Battered Women
P.O.Box 20208 Greeley Square Station, New York, NY 10001.
Phone: 212-714-9153

San Francisco Asian Women's Shelter
3543 18th Street, Box 19, San Francisco, CA 94110
Phone: 415-751-7110

Battered Women With AIDS Services

Casa de Esperanza
179 East Robie Street, St. Paul, MN 55107
Phone: 612-227-9291 or 612-772-1723

Denise Rouse
(Founding Director, Wash. D.C. Women's AIDS Council)
Currently, Technical Advisor with USAID HIV/AIDS Div.
Phone: 703-875-4494

Battered Women With Disabilities

Domestic Violence Initiative for Women with Disabilities
P.O. Box 300535, Denver, CO 80203
Phone: 303-839-5510 (Voice/TDD)

Family Violence Coordinator, Barrier Free Living
270 East 2nd Street, New York, NY 10009
Phone: 212-677-6668

Finex House, Inc.
P.O. Box 1154, Jamaica Plain, MA
Phone: 617-436-2002 or 617-288-1054

Kathy Schumacher and Beverly Hall, c/o Minnesota Coalition For Battered Women, 1619 Dayton Ave. #303, St. Paul, MN 55104
Phone: 612-646-6177

Women in Prostitution

WHISPER (Women Hurt In Systems of Prostitution Engaged in Revolt)
1821 University Ave., Suite 287
So. St. Paul, MN 55165-0796
Phone: 612-724-6927

General Domestic Violence Information

National Clearinghouse for the Defense of Battered Women
Phone: 215-351-0010

National Clearinghouse on Marital & Date Rape
Phone: 510-524-1582

National Coalition Against Domestic Violence
Phone: 303-839-1852 or 202-638-6388

National Resource Center on Domestic Violence
Phone: 1-800-537-2238



SHAKTI PRODUCTIONS began working on "Voices Heard Sisters Unseen" in 1989. This production was done by an all-women crew with help and assistance from individuals and groups across the U.S. If you want a presentation done with the video for your group, contact SHAKTI PRODUCTIONS at: 8403 16th Street, #006, Silver Spring, Maryland, USA 20910-2831. Phone: 301-589-4462. This address may change so call first for current information.

If you have this guide you should most likely also have the video. If you don't and want to order a VHS tape, contact our distributor, Women Make Movies at: 462 Broadway, Suite 500N, New York, NY 10013. Phone: 202-925-0606. Fax: 212-925-2052.