Speaking of Women:

Gendered Language and Discursive Struggle in Domestic Violence Work

A Thesis

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On my honor,

I have neither given nor received

unauthorized aid on this thesis.

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Abstract

The social movement to end violence in the home has always been characterized by discursive struggles, both within the movement and in its engagement with wider society. This study examines how movement discourse is transformed and rationalized at the individual level, presenting a case study of one domestic violence advocacy agency located in a politically conservative community. In-depth interviews were conducted with 17 employees and volunteers of the organization, including three former employees. The study found a central discursive struggle within the organization surrounding the use of gendered language, reflecting tensions between newer and older members of the movement. A new discourse of "inclusivity" is becoming prominent in the organization, and its complexities suggest that de-gendering language may be a much more nuanced discursive shift than researchers of the movement have previously stated. In somewhat of a contradiction, proponents of inclusivity simultaneously see gender-neutral language as fitting into the conservative political landscape, yet also as progressively challenging this landscape by allying with the LGBT community. As gender-neutral comes to be seen as the "new progressive" and older advocates feel increasingly unable to express their concerns, the movement must examine the possibilities and consequences of its shifting discourse for social change.

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Language is huge in this work, it's everything. To me, language creates our reality: how we talk about the problem, how we label the people we are working with, how we describe it to the community. How we choose to speak about this issue has everything to do with how we bring change to bear. So it's essential that we think about the language we are using.

-- Worker at a domestic violence advocacy organization

The social movement to end violence in the home has always been characterized by discursive struggle, both within the movement and in its engagement with wider society. From the naming of the problem, to the naming of the people the problem involves, to the naming of the movement itself, language has always been a central topic of contention and debate (Walker 1990). However, investigations of this movement and of social movements in general have tended to overlook the role of individuals in shaping the discourse of their particular organization, and by extension the discourse of the movement (Fried 1994; Hammons 2004).

This study examines how movement discourse is transformed and rationalized at the individual level, presenting a case study of one domestic violence advocacy agency located in a politically conservative community. Its findings show a central discursive struggle within the organization surrounding the use of gendered language, a struggle which reflects tensions between newer and older members of the movement. A new discourse of "inclusivity" is becoming prominent in the organization, and its complexities suggest that de-gendering language may be a much more nuanced discursive shift than researchers of the movement have previously stated. In somewhat of a contradiction, proponents of inclusivity simultaneously saw gender-neutral language as fitting into the conservative political landscape, yet also as progressively challenging this landscape by allying with the LGBT community. As gender-neutral comes to be seen as the "new progressive" and older advocates feel increasingly unable to express their concerns, the movement must examine the possibilities and consequences of its shifting discourse for social change.

Theoretical Perspectives

The term "discourse" has elicited much confusion and debate in social theory, as it has a long and complicated history of usage in philosophy, social psychology, and linguistics (Mills 1997). However, the concept takes on an especially profound and complex meaning in the work of French poststructuralist theorist Michel Foucault. Although his notion of discourse includes speech, documents, and other texts, it is fundamentally about much more than these phenomena. For Foucault, discourses are not merely "groups of signs" which signify pre-existing things, but rather are "practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak" (Foucault 1972:49). He points to the constitutive nature of discourse, how it actually gives shape and form to different categories of experience and identity (Prasad 2005). Put simply, the manner in which a thing is spoken and written about constitutes the thing itself. Thus the "object" of a discourse and the discourse itself emerge together in the same process (Sheridan 1980).

In Foucault's earlier work, often referred to as his "archaeological" phase, he elaborates the concept of *discursive formations*. In *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972), Foucault presents an alternative to the existent history of ideas, which he critiques as having imposed on the past a false narrative of continuity and evolutionary progression towards some culminating point. Instead he focuses on complexity, discontinuity and contradiction as integral elements of historical narrative. In so doing, Foucault seeks to undermine the apparent stability of contemporary institutionalized practices, such as psychiatry or criminal justice, by exposing these practices as nothing more than the products of discourses which are fundamentally characterized by historical ruptures and contradictions. A discursive formation may be conceived of as a group of largely discontinuous statements, governed by a certain set of rules which allow the variable grouping to appear as stable and timeless despite its complicated and confused history (Sheridan 1980).

As Foucault moved into his "genealogical" phase, he retained an interest in discourse but displayed a more explicit concern with the role of power relations in the shaping and

sedimentation of discourses (Prasad 2005; Sheridan 1980). Towards the end of *Archaeology*, he had already begun to conceive of discourse politically, in terms of a struggle: "[Discourse] from the moment of its existence poses the question of power, an asset that is, by nature, the object of a struggle, a political struggle" (Foucault 1972:102). In other words, he began to see discursive space essentially as a battle zone mediated by power relations, with different bodies of knowledge competing for legitimacy and vying to advance their definitions and truths. Foucault further developed these ideas with his concept of power/knowledge, elaborated in a later work titled *Discipline and Punish* (1977). Here he claims that power and knowledge directly imply one another, that "there are no power relations without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose or constitute at the same time power relations" (Foucault 1977:27). With this concept, Foucault proposes that power and knowledge cannot be thought of as separate or distinct phenomena. The exercise of power is responsible for the emergence of new objects of knowledge, while conversely, knowledge developments mediate the ways in which power is exercised.

Relatively recently, social movement theory has seen a significant shift from a fairly strict resource mobilization paradigm to the inclusion of more cultural analysis (Johnston and Klandermans 1995; Morris and Mueller 1992). Accompanying this shift has been an incorporation of the concepts of discourse and discursive struggle in the study of social movements (Taylor and Whittier 1995; Fine 1995). Cultural perspectives point to the study of discourse for understanding how social movements act as agents of cultural change. Wuthnow (1989) contends that social movements can be viewed as "communities of discourse" engaged in the enunciation of new cultural codes that very often contest dominant representations. Sociologists of social movements analyzing discourse have been interested in how the language, texts, ideas and symbols of a movement engage in a struggle to redefine social phenomena (Taylor and Whittier 1995). Most explicitly, feminist researchers have identified discursive struggle as a prominent strategy in the contemporary women's movement (Katzenstein 1995; Taylor and Whittier 1995).

Similarly, some scholars of domestic violence have taken a Foucauldian discursive approach towards the issue (Dell and Korotana 2000; Ferraro 1996; Harvie and Manzi 2011; Leisenring 2006; Walker 1990). Such an approach contends that understanding domestic violence requires more than a search for its causes and effects. It also requires an understanding of how different manners of speaking about domestic violence are themselves powerful social practices, constituting our perceptions of both domestic violence and the people it involves. Domestic violence is discursively produced in many different locations both textually and in interaction, including legislation, social science research, courtrooms, hospitals, shelters, social service agencies, and religious institutions (Ferraro 1996). Therefore, domestic violence may be conceived of in terms of different discourses, such as feminism, medicine, psychology, religion, or criminal justice. The problem may be defined as one of individual psyches, family dysfunction, criminal activity, or societal oppression, and these different perspectives may fundamentally determine responses to the issue. Put briefly, domestic violence may be seen as a convergence of discursive constructions (Dell and Korotana 2000; Walker 1990). Thus the category of "domestic violence" is not a singular phenomenon, but a complex site of contested meanings and defined knowledges.

The struggles between competing domestic violence discourses are characterized by differential power relationships. Institutionalized bodies of knowledge such as law and medicine delimit and establish domestic violence according to their own discourses, and because these discourses are authoritative in our society they are often privileged over others, notably over feminist, socio-cultural analyses of domestic violence (Dell and Korotana 2000). Discussion and production of knowledge about domestic violence constitutes what domestic violence is, and power resides in the ability to produce that knowledge and have it be regarded with authority (Foucault 1977). Therefore, domestic violence may be seen as fundamentally political, a site of power relations and continual discursive struggle (Dell and Korotana 2000; Ferraro 1996; Harvie and Manzi 2011; Walker 1990).

Approaching domestic violence as a discursive construction is not a means of abstracting a pressing and devastating issue, but is rather a means of understanding how taken-for-granted conceptual frames directly impact practical outcomes. Discourses make possible certain social practices that regulate our lives. Different ways of accounting for domestic violence warrant different ways of responding to domestic violence, and this discursive struggle is the context in which policies are produced and actions are taken (Dell and Korotana 2000; Harvie and Manzi 2011). For example, a psychological discursive construction produces a conception of domestic violence that is decontextualized and individualistic, where both the causes of and solutions to domestic violence are seen as residing within the individuals concerned. This influential discourse has important consequences in that individuals are constructed as "abnormal," and solutions are aimed at the individual, examples being therapy for a victim and anger-management treatment for an abuser. Another discursive construction, such as feminist or juridical, would offer an alternative approach and solution to the problem, because the problem would be defined differently. (Dell and Korotana 2000).

A feminist theoretical lens discursively constructs domestic violence as primarily an act of gender oppression, drawing on statistics which state that abusers are usually men and victims are usually women (Dobash and Dobash 1992; Katz 2006; Schechter 1982; Walker 1990; Yllö and Bograd 1988). In this view, the act of violence is an exertion of the power and control assigned to men through socially constructed gender roles, and domestic violence as a collective practice serves to maintain the oppression of women in society (Pence 1999). One way in which a feminist domestic violence discourse is constructed is through the use of gendered language in describing the issue, which began with the very naming of the "battered women's movement." Feminist researchers and activists in the movement have become increasingly concerned as the language of domestic violence becomes more gender-neutral, which many see as depoliticizing the movement through an avoidance of the root issue of gender oppression (Dobash and Dobash 1992; Kurz 1989; Morgan 1981; Walker 1990).

Additionally, feminist writers are concerned with the emergence of what may be considered "reverse" discourses from anti-feminist and men's rights groups, which use social research to point towards women's culpability as violent aggressors and de-gender or reverse the issue (Berns 2001; Dobash and Dobash 1992; Mann 2008; Yllö and Bograd 1988). A body of research exists in the United States which claims to have found symmetry between men and women concerning the perpetration of violence in the home, and sometimes even claims that women are more abusive than men. This research has been heavily criticized for its reliance on a small number of national surveys, its narrow and restricted approach to research, and the illegitimacy of its data collection instrument (Dobash and Dobash 1992; Yllö and Bograd 1988). Despite these criticisms, the findings are still widely used to advance the "reverse discourses" described above (Berns 2001; Mann 2008).[1]

Discursive struggles are central in the story of the movement to end domestic violence. According to Harvie and Manzi, "discursive struggles have determined how domestic violence has been defined, the extent to which individual accounts were believed, the seriousness with which incidents were taken, and the priority devoted to policy responses" (2011:82). Thus, a discursive analysis of domestic violence is not merely an intellectual exercise, but a task which concerns the lives and wellbeing of real people affected by this social movement.

Historical Context: The Battered Women's Movement

The battered women's movement emerged in the early 1970s as a direct outgrowth of the women's liberation movement. In a grassroots fashion, the movement initially took on a decentralized and non-hierarchal character. The earliest shelters in the United States developed out of feminist consciousness-raising groups and rape-crisis centers, where through the sharing of personal experiences women discovered that a disturbing pattern of abuse was occurring in the home (Dobash and Dobash 1992; Ferraro 1996; Schechter 1982; Pence 1999). Feminist theory

[1] For an example of a current micro-level study of domestic violence advocates which bases its analysis off of this "reverse discourse" data, see Schow (2006).

offered an analysis that connected individual struggles with a wider culture of patriarchy and ideology of women's subordination, thus politicizing what had previously been a private matter. In this way, violence against women in the home came to be discursively produced as a social problem, rooted in gender inequality and demanding profound structural change. There arose a voice of and for abused women which had previously been absent from public discourse (Dobash and Dobash 1992; Schechter 1982).

The significance of feminists' transformation of domestic violence into a publicly recognized problem cannot be overstated. Prior to this period, silence surrounded this issue in all major social institutions, community organizations and media. Initial activists could not even use research data to make their claims, because such information did not exist (Tierney 1982). In a relatively short amount of time, activists successfully argued that the state had an obligation to protect women from abusive partners, and that battered women constituted a special population in need of a range of services (Dobash and Dobash 1979; Tierney 1982). The plight of battered women, once socially invisible, became a subject of public discussion.

While feminist voices were essential to achieving recognition of the problem, it is important to note that the battered women's movement has never been completely unified in either ideology or practice. In fact, the movement of the United States has been marked by its diversity in comparison to those of European countries (Dobash and Dobash 1992). While feminists played a primary role in the beginnings of the movement, they were not its sole actors. Feminist efforts of the early 1970s were accompanied by traditional charity, social work, and religious efforts to assist battered women as the social problem became more widely recognized (Tierney 1982). Thus more "traditional" discourses which privileged service-provision and individual therapy began to compete with more "progressive" discourses which stressed peer support and wider social transformation (Ferarro 1996). A survey of existing women's shelters in 1977 found that only 46 percent identified as "feminist" in orientation (Ferraro 1980), and early studies document diverse analyses of battering among advocates (Wharton 1987). Even among

feminists, disagreements arose over to what degree the criminal justice system and other state institutions should be included as solutions to the problem (Pence 1999).

As the movement has grown, many activists and researchers have expressed concern over a continuing depoliticization of the battered women's movement as it becomes increasingly "co-opted" by mainstream institutions (Dobash and Dobash 1992; Hilton 1988; Johnson 1981; McDonald 2004; Schechter 1982; Tierney 1982; Walker 1990; Wharton 1987). Structurally speaking, the non-hierarchal, collectivist-style organizations of the early movement have largely been replaced by increasingly bureaucratic, hierarchal organizations (Dobash and Dobash 1992, Ferarro 1996; Riger 1994). Such institutionalization is the result of both pressure from outside funders and the pragmatism necessitated by serving a large population in need of immediate assistance (Dobash and Dobash 1992; Johnson 1981). Some movement activists have argued that organizational hierarchy and bureaucracy are inherently anti-feminist (e.g. Ahrens 1980; Ferguson 1987; Pahl 1985), and some studies have shown a gap between feminist ideology and practice in hierarchal organizations (Murray 1988). However, some more recent writers are open to the possibility of feminist bureaucracies, arguing that feminist organizations may take a range of forms and still be successful (Martin 1990; Reinelt 1999).

In addition to organizational structure, other concerns have been raised by feminists about the co-optation of movement discourse. A transition away from gendered analyses of power and towards pathologies of individual family dysfunction seems to have characterized the last few decades (Ferarro 1996; McDonald 2005). Many recent empirical studies have documented how an upsurge in criminal justice discourse (Ferraro 1996) undermines the movement's feminist roots by preventing victims from defining their own situations, thereby disempowering them (Bailey 2010; Cramer 2004; Hamilton 2010; Harvie and Manzi 2011; Loseke 1991). In an effort to provide adequate services, legitimize and simply stay alive, the movement appears to have largely lost touch with its original political goals of societal transformation. Feminist discourse is disappearing as the more prominent discourses of medicine, psychology, and criminal justice

advance their definitions of domestic violence (Dell and Korotana 2000; Ferraro 1996; Harvie and Manzi 2011; Walker 1990).

Current Micro-level Research on Domestic Violence Discourse

While there exists an extensive literature detailing the history, development and political tensions of the movement to end violence in the home, few empirical studies have addressed the movement's current discursive practices at the organizational and individual levels (see Hammons 2004; Harvie and Manzi 2011; Lehrner and Allen 2008, 2009). Investigations of this movement and of social movements in general have tended to overlook the role of individuals in shaping the discourse of their particular organization, and by extension that of the movement itself (Fried 1994; Hammons 2004). The narratives of social actors can serve as crucial indicators of a social movement's evolving and competing discourses (Lehrner and Allen 2008).

Thus far, current micro-level studies of this movement have shown a continued disappearance of the movement's original discourse. Harvie and Manzi's (2011) study of a multi-agency partnership revealed that criminal justice discourses overshadowed feminist ones in a collaborative context. Hammons' (2004) case study of a shelter revealed that although both politicized movement discourses and professionalized socio-psychological discourses circulated within the organization, shelter workers were "socialized" into using social-psychological language which was seen as legitimizing their efforts. Lehrner and Allen's (2008, 2009) conversations with domestic violence advocates led them to question whether domestic violence work may even be considered to be a "social movement" anymore, based on advocates' thoroughly depoliticized and inconsistent narratives, individual psychological perspectives, lack of knowledge about the movement's history, and the absence of a collective identity.

These sparse studies provide only a glimpse into current domestic violence discourse. In order to better understand the political status of the movement, the ideologies and discursive activities of advocates and shelter workers must be studied further. The present study is a case study of one shelter/advocacy organization, situated in a highly conservative political context. A

central discursive struggle surrounding gendered language was identified within the organization, and participants' narratives around this struggle provided further insight into how the discourse of the movement is changing. These findings contrast to those of other current studies in that most participants maintained a socio-cultural analysis of domestic violence and a social change movement orientation. The findings also suggest that the motivations for and implications of de-gendering language may be more complex than they have been previously portrayed in feminist research.

METHODS

The present study was conducted at a nonprofit agency serving victims of domestic violence and sexual assault. The multi-departmental organization offers direct services to victims including a shelter, advocacy, and counseling, and also engages in community outreach and educational efforts. The organization was founded in 1974, and currently employs 37 people with 180 active volunteers. The organization is located in a large city in the western United States, and the surrounding community is characterized by a notably conservative political climate due to a strong military and religious presence.

The data for this study consisted of 17 in-depth interviews. Interview participants included management, staff, board members, and volunteers, as well as three former staff. Their length of involvement in domestic violence work ranged widely, from six months to over twenty years. Five participants were male and twelve were female. Participants were chosen with the goal of assessing the complete range of discourses in the organization, and priority was given to speaking with people who had been at the organization for at least one year.

All participants were interviewed in person, and interviews ranged from 45 minutes to 80 minutes in length. A semi-structured protocol was developed to capture how participants viewed the organization, how they defined the problem and solution, how they felt about the use of

certain language, and their relationship with and definition of feminism.[2] Questions were phrased in terms of "domestic violence work" in order to avoid priming participants towards a particular discourse, as domestic violence terminology is officially used by the organization. The interviews were designed to be flexible and open-ended. For example, the organization's mission statement emerged as a central point of contention in early interviews, and subsequently participants were asked directly for their thoughts about the mission statement if they did not offer them on their own. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. Each transcript was analyzed in its entirety and coded for emergent themes. Subsequent reviews of the data produced more general themes spanning several interviews, and eventually two primary meta-narratives or discourses emerged.

RESULTS

The interviews revealed both commonalities and differences across participants' accounts of the organization and domestic violence work in general. Within the 17 responses, two distinct discourses emerged that were in many ways at odds with one another. These discourses, which will be termed the "grassroots discourse" and the "inclusivity discourse," diverged primarily around a central point of contention: the organization's use of the word "women" in its official mission statement. Respondents fell into one of three groups. The first group adhered to the grassroots discourse, and stated that gendered language should remain included in the mission statement. The second group adhered to the inclusivity discourse, and stated that the mission statement should be de-gendered. The third group incorporated both the grassroots and inclusivity discourses in their responses, and expressed ambivalence towards gendered language in the mission statement.

[2] For complete interview schedule, see appendix.

Commonalities Among Groups

While the grassroots and inclusivity discourses were divergent in many ways, a few common themes spanned responses from all three groups. Every participant incorporated the idea of "power and control," and all stated that statistically speaking, the most common victims of domestic violence are women abused by men. While not everyone offered an explanation of this discrepancy, feminist analyses were most prevalent and were found in all three groups. Finally, most participants had a common notion of how the organization is perceived by the wider community.

Virtually every participant at least once mentioned "power and control," a concept which comes out of the well-known Duluth model of domestic violence response circa 1981. These words have become something of a catch-phrase in movement discourse, referring to the notion that domestic violence is a pattern of coercive behaviors which result in an offender establishing a relationship of dominance over a victim, where violence is used to maintain the offender's "power and control". The language of power and control may be associated with domestic violence work as a social change movement, as it locates the roots of the violence in wider social inequality and oppression and seeks to change how systems respond to violence so that they may help victims rather than blame them (Pence 1999). A Duluth model understanding of domestic violence pervades this organization's training and textual materials, so it is unsurprising that the idea of power and control was prevalent in individuals' explanations. A few simply mentioned the phrase, but most incorporated the concept as a central component of their understanding.

> What I've learned now over the years is that, and we talk about it a lot, it is an issue of power and control. It's not an anger management problem, it's one individual asserting power and control over another. But it's an issue of social justice, it's based out of oppression. There are people that believe they are entitled, that they have privilege, and that they can control because of that entitlement and privilege, they can control other people.
>
> Domestic violence is the abuse of power and control, I mean that's the short answer. I think it's related to the greater issues of social justice in our community, just issues of equality, justice, and the belief that, I guess it's related to the belief that people don't have equal rights, that people don't have the right to their own

> opinions, and their own ideas. And the use of power and control is believing I can control this other person, as if they were a piece of property, and that's my right.
>
> Domestic violence to me is when one person in an intimate relationship is trying to control the other person through whatever means are available, and sometimes that comes out emotionally, verbally, physically, financially. But it's just, it is control. Prior to coming here, I don't know that I would have described it that way. I don't know that I would have been able to say it was about power and control. But it's great to have words to put to that, because that's really what it is.
>
> It is an act of, you know, power and control. It's one person in a relationship wanting to have power over and take control of all aspect's of their partner's life . . . I would say that those words specifically, and that thinking, grows out of the whole Duluth model. I can't say that I necessarily would have framed it up that way before I went through the training, although it totally makes sense to me. So yeah I think it's the training, the Duluth model informs how I think about and talk about domestic violence, for sure.

In these last two quotes, we can see how the language of power and control was something these respondents had learned since coming to the organization. They expressed that this language allowed them to frame and understand the issue in a new, more "correct" way. This sentiment was found in most responses.

Participants also displayed a universal recognition of the fact that the vast majority of the organization's clients are women abused by men, and most extended this gender discrepancy to society as a whole. Not everyone felt compelled or able to offer an explanation for this, but the majority who did gave predominately feminist analyses which identified, to varying degrees, the historical patriarchal oppression of women and/or gender role socialization as primary causes.[3]

> I see domestic violence and sexual assault as ways of maintaining broader oppression and gender privilege by exercising that power over someone else, and when someone feels threatened, feels that the power they've become accustomed to is threatened, they're going to be more likely to use those behaviors.
>
> Primarily its man on woman violence, and that's the fact. I mean it seems to me that's the only consistency about domestic violence. It seems to transcend every other sort of demographic or classification except the gender one, as far as being primarily male on female. I don't know why that is, I think there's been some sociology work on the idea of what a man is, and how men perceive themselves.

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[3] Note that offering a feminist analysis did not always correspond to identification as a feminist. Discrepancies in feminist identities and definitions of feminism will be discussed later.

> Society has trained women and acculturated us to believe that we have less power, and that we have less control over our lives, and that we have to be weaker and timid and just accept what we're given, and be dependent. So I think that those concepts contribute to the disparity of power in relationships. And then, I think men are also put into a pigeon-hole to be strong, and masculine, and always in control, and always to exert power, and the image of what it means to be masculine, that adds to the use of power in a relationship.
>
> I don't know if it gets back to those really traditional gender roles people are raised with, and can't get away from the idea that a man is the king of his house and those kinds of things, and women I think. . .I can see where it would be pretty easy to feel kind of beholden to a male figure in your life, and be trying to please, and feeling like if you dared speak up that you wouldn't have support elsewhere. So I guess it's that traditional, that we're still plagued by those traditional roles, even though it seems like they should have been eradicated ages ago.
>
> Patriarchy, that's essentially where it comes from.

Finally, almost every participant expressed a belief that most of the wider community had either no knowledge about the organization, or had negative perceptions of it. Most identified a political rift with the conservative religious community, who saw the organization as being radically feminist, militant, man-hating, anti-family, and "pro-gay agenda." Participants expressed discouragement, bewilderment, and sometimes amusement towards what they considered to be heavily skewed perceptions of their organization.

> One of the big stereotypes with us, well not one, there are several, is that we are male-hating, anti-family, anti-marriage, and most recently, although I find this one fascinating, pro gay-agenda.
>
> Their perception is either a bunch of people who hate men who want to disrupt traditional families, yeah that we're anti-family which I love, men-haters, the most recent addition to the list that I've been hearing is that we have a pro-gay agenda that we're pushing. And I'm like, we are? That's so fascinating to me.
>
> There are people out there, unfortunately, that think we split up families, that we send women to abortion clinics. I don't know where these ideas come from, especially if they haven't been in to see what we do, or come to any of our training, or actually know what we do. Because a lot of people do not have a clue what we do.
>
> I mean, what we always hear is that we're like haters, male-haters, with our gay agenda, you know, which is funny. I think that's what a lot of people think, and then I think there's a lot of people that just don't even know what we do.

> I do know that there are some people who think we don't like men, we're man-haters and feminist crazy people, and that's a problem for me, honestly, I really have an issue with that. I think it's a terrible image to portray in the community.
>
> What do most people think about us? Man-hating lesbian bitches, that's what I've heard.

Overall, members of the organization shared a basic understanding of what domestic violence is, how it works, and how it relates to gender inequality. These understandings were loosely feminist in nature, incorporating what might be considered "original" battered women's movement language from the Duluth model. Additionally, most people shared the perception that the surrounding community had skewed or negative perceptions about the organization, and many were confused by and concerned about this issue. Beyond these similarities however, there emerged two very distinct and divergent discourses concerning the use of gendered language and the identity of the movement.

The Grassroots Discourse

The first discourse identified in the organization will be termed "grassroots," referring to ideas and positions associated with the organization's earlier stages. The word "grassroots" was used as a descriptive term both by people who adhered to this discourse and by people who distanced themselves from it, and therefore was deemed an appropriate title. A group of five respondents fell squarely into the grassroots category. All except one had been involved in domestic violence work for over a decade, and one had been in the movement for over twenty years. Three of these respondents had left the organization, and the group consisted of both women and men.

Members of the grassroots group were fairly consistent and unified in their responses. Compared to other respondents they were more explicit about their feminist orientation and displayed a more thorough knowledge of the movement's history, although feminist identification and understanding of the history was found in other groups as well. What most strikingly distinguished this discourse was its adamant portrayal of domestic violence as a women's issue,

which was clearly expressed in respondents' desire to keep gendered language in the organization's mission statement . While grassroots respondents were willing to serve male victims, they wished to maintain a focus on the gendered nature of the problem, believing that to do otherwise was a betrayal of the movement's real purpose and a disservice to the women who comprise the majority of domestic violence victims.

> If a man comes in here as a victim, we will help him, definitely . . . but because we come from the standpoint of gender oppression, where women have been the ones that have been oppressed against, that's why it's a women's movement. You know, if you go back to the whole grassroots and everything, yeah, it's a women's issue.
>
> I feel that victims are primarily women and [the mission statement] states that, so let's not avoid that, let's not try to make it more inclusive when the problem is not more inclusive. It's exclusive, primarily, majority, 80 percent or higher are female victims. So why would we want to water that down?
>
> Coming from the background of the feminism movement, I've always been in support of, it's a male-perpetrated offense in the majority of cases, so I've always been in support of the language of women and children in the mission statement . . . I think because it still is a male offense onto a female in the majority of cases, and I think it's still important to say that, and not back off that and not feel embarrassed, that you know, we need to make it neutral in some way. Again it doesn't dismiss that it happens to males, but I think it's really important to keep a focus on that the majority of offenses are committed by men.
>
> I think by not including women and children in there, we're trying to appease the people who claim that we don't like men. I think it's going away from who we truly serve, the majority of the people we serve. I feel like when we bend to appease people, that's not, that's social work. That's not grassroots.

In these quotes, especially in the last, we can see that members of the grassroots group saw de-gendering the mission statement as bending to the political pressures of the conservative community. That gender-neutrality was considered to be "watering down" or "backing off" suggests that these respondents saw a need to maintain a strong political front in guarding the rights of women. They grasped, in a loosely Foucauldian sense, the fundamentally political nature of language and the power that it holds in public discourse. Here we can also see the use of the term "grassroots" in describing this position.

Proponents of the grassroots discourse also felt strongly that the organization needed unity, focus, and a more coherent identity. They clearly distinguished between "social change"

and "social work," and found it imperative that the organization figure out to which goal it was truly committed. Often implicit in this distinction was the opinion that a social change domestic violence organization should be feminist in its outlook.

> I think it's all about messaging. I think the community needs a consistent message if they're going to understand domestic violence and sexual assault, and what's causing that. If we have too many varied messages out there, then people won't know what to think about it. I think it's okay for us to have disagreements about some things, but I think it's critical that we agree on our mission, our vision, and our core values. Because if you don't agree on those basic tenets, then your foundation starts to crumble.
>
> I think the organization needs to go back and review who they are, and who they want to become. There's been so many changes there, of staff, people who were highly experienced in the field that have left there, and I think this creates the opportunity for them to go back and define who they really want to be . . . I think there's just a lot of confusion right now of who they are and who they want to be.
>
> I think the organization truly struggles with whether it is a social work or a grassroots organization. I think some people here believe that we are both, and I don't believe you can be both . . . I don't think it's as much of a movement as it was. It's struggling, because everybody's so divided. They're not as cohesive as they used to be.
>
> The organization has to decide, at a fundamental level, it it's an advocacy organization, advocating for these women and children who've been marginalized, or they have to decide if they want to be broader and focus on, you know, families. Because they're really two different missions, it's different areas of focus. I think part of the problem maybe is that they don't really know what kind of organization they are. Are they a feminist advocacy organization that advocates on behalf of women and children, period, or do they want to be a broader, you know, do they want to be something other than that? I don't think they are having discussions at that fundamental level.

Here we can see how the grassroots discourse calls for the adoption of a single, coherent identity for the organization. The last quote especially demonstrates how grassroots respondents saw a social change movement as corresponding to a feminist analysis.

Finally, the grassroots discourse was characterized by continual abstract references to some kind of an intangible, essential understanding of domestic violence and of the movement. Respondents often described both people in the community and others in the organization as either "getting it" or "not getting it." This pointed towards an unspoken, shared agreement or common identity among the grassroots group that was not present in the same way among other

respondents. Indeed, grassroots respondents who had left the organization expressed dismay that this essential "it" was no longer present there.

> There's some like really, I don't want to say old-time advocates, but advocates that have been here a while, who really grasp the grassroots. And it's like, some people may not understand exactly what that means. People, you know, either get it, or don't get it, but it's hard to connect with everyone here.
>
> My perception is that there's a very good hearted, well intended staff there, many of whom just don't really understand domestic violence. Really don't, in a fundamental way, get it. Because it seems sort of straightforward, oh yeah here's one person oppressing another person, but the way that manifests can be so, um, insidious, that it's hard to really understand it.
>
> I think people there are confused about what, you know they can voice what it is, but I don't think they have a true understanding of what it is. I don't think they have a good understanding of the history, of the feminist movement. You'll find some people that still use the terminology grassroots, that still have that strong core belief about advocacy, but I think that's mostly been lost. . .there's still people there that believe in the movement, are very dedicated to that movement, where as I think others don't understand that movement. You know, they think they understand it, but my experience is that they don't. They really don't truly understand it.
>
> I know there are some people that really understand, but I'm not sure that understanding pervades the organization in any kind of deep way that drives everything, it just, it's taken huge steps backward. I mean I still, don't misunderstand me, it's an awesome organization, they do awesome work, it's very needed, and everybody I know is well intentioned, has a good heart and they want to get it, but there's just something, there's a big piece missing.

In these quotes we can see that the grassroots respondents themselves had a difficult time articulating exactly what "it" was that the others were not getting, suggesting that perhaps respondents had never needed to explain this "it" in the past. The ambiguity of this language suggests that what the respondents were trying to express could not be articulated through words, but rather had to be understood through experience and involvement in their movement.

The grassroots discourse was primarily characterized by a focus on the gendered nature of domestic violence and a desire to keep gendered language in the mission statement. Responses that fit into this discourse showed a more explicit feminist orientation and more thorough knowledge of the movement's history, and made a stark distinction between social work and social change. These respondents valued unity, focus and shared identity, and their abstract

references to a deeper understanding pointed towards an essential element of the movement which most saw as having been lost.

The Inclusivity Discourse

The second prominent discourse will be termed "inclusivity," referring to a collection of ideas and motivations that are newer to the organization. Nine of the respondents were determined to belong to the inclusivity group, and the group included both women and men. Most were fairly new to the organization and to the field, their length of involvement ranging from six months to five years. Respondents were considered to be proponents of the inclusivity discourse if they firmly stated that gendered language should be removed from the mission statement for reasons of inclusivity. However, this group was far more mixed than the grassroots group in terms of their political identity and knowledge. While all of the respondents put forward some feminist ideas, only four identified as a feminist while the others rejected a feminist identity for themselves and the organization. Only two of the respondents displayed knowledge of the movement's historical relationship to the women's movement.

The most obvious distinguishing feature of this discourse was a firm desire to de-gender the organization's mission statement, either by adding the word "men" in addition to women, or by replacing any gendered language with "victims." Respondents felt that because they served men as well as women, the mission statement did not accurately reflect the organization's work. Furthermore, they were concerned that excluding men from the mission statement would prevent male victims from seeking help, and most claimed that it also excluded people in same-sex relationships and transgendered victims. Respondents expressed a desire to be "inclusive" of all victims, and felt that gendered language was exclusive.

> Well, the mission statement needs to be broadened. Because we talk about being culturally inclusive, we talk about that we have no barriers, we accept everyone, but when you limit it to women, then we're excluding the male population. So I think it may keep men from coming to us for service, but I think it's also limiting, because we know that we provide services to men as well, so I don't think it fully describes what we do.

> What if a man wants to go, is he going to feel like our organization is the right place for him? So our goal, hopefully we somehow promote that we are family oriented, male, female, transgender, I mean whatever the situation is, that it's open to everyone.
>
> The mission statement identifies women, which makes people think that we don't help men or boys, which is not true, obviously. . .There might be a man who doesn't call, because he doesn't think there's a resource. And that would be my concern, if that was a barrier to someone seeking help, a victim seeking help.
>
> I don't like the mission statement, because I feel it doesn't represent the fact that we do help male victims. I also think we could do a better job just providing more of an equality statement, that we will help people in the LGBT community, because we will. We will also house transgendered clients, but that's not really something that we're very open about, it's kind of done under the rug a little bit, I think.

In addition to a desire to be inclusive of all possible victims of domestic violence, many in the inclusivity group also pointed out that the mission statement played into the politically conservative community's skewed negative perceptions of the organization. They felt that focusing on women contributed to conservative claims that the organization was anti-male, anti-family, and pro-gay agenda.

> I think the mission statement gives the wrong impression about us out there. We're seen as men haters and all that kind of stuff, that we may have a gay and lesbian agenda, I've heard that. So I think men need to be included in the mission statement.
>
> I think having "women" in there, it can be taken a million different ways, and that's the thing. It's like okay, if you want to believe that we hate families, and you see that we help women and children but we won't help dads, then we must be anti-family. Like we're only about women and children and there's no mention of fathers, that could be seen as a negative thing for sure.
>
> I think that it just gives ammunition to people who accuse us of being sexist against men, all they have to do is quote our own mission statement from our website. It becomes easy for people to, we have an image problem in the community. It's three things that consistently come up: one, man-haters, two, we like to break up families, and three, gay agenda. And certainly, I don't think our mission statement helps with those images.
>
> I think language is very powerful, and that's why we've had such discussion over our mission statement. I think that some of our language has contributed to people thinking that people in the domestic violence movement, not just our organization, are feminist, bra-burning, man-hating Nazis or whatever.

Some respondents expressed that they intentionally tried to avoid these negative perceptions in interactions with people outside of the organization. This was accomplished through an avoidance of gendered language and an emphasis on services to male victims.

> We don't want to offend people, we just want to educate. So I think it's being careful of our language, you know, I always catch myself saying woman woman woman, and should be changing it to victim.
>
> The gender issue, I really try to steer clear from that when I'm speaking to people about the organization. Because otherwise it makes it more difficult to do what we do. Yes, most of the victims that we serve are women, but I don't think looking at it in those terms is the right way to go about it.
>
> I feel the the majority of people feel that we only help women, and in conversation I'll make it a point myself to say that we don't only help women, we also help men.
>
> I definitely let people know we have a lot of male clients. Because a lot of people don't know that, and our mission statement doesn't help with that either.

Interestingly, while professing a hope to pacify relations with conservative critics, respondents in the inclusivity group also saw the de-gendering of language to be a daring political move. The language of grassroots was described as traditional and safe, while the language of inclusivity was viewed as progressive and risky. Respondents felt that it was easier to maintain a focus on gender, and the removal of gendered language was seen as a goal to work towards.

> So, the mission statement as it reads right now is very appealing to certain people because, oh, they help women, isn't that nice. You know it's very easy, when you're looking at domestic violence from that kind of traditional perspective of oh, it's all about women, it's about when a man hits a woman. Then you can look at our mission statement and say that's what they do, and it's real clean, and they like that. It's comfortable, you know, who wouldn't want to help women? . . . I think people expect us to be more progressive, and so our mission statement is off-putting because it isn't. But as far as changing it, I'm not sure if we're there yet as an organization.
>
> Trying to change the language so that it reflects that it could be either male or female is a step towards educating that both sides are open to both sexes. That the male could be the victim. So I think it's important that we do that. The problem is, how to we change people's mindset?
>
> I think people still feel safe thinking that, for the most part we're only helping women and the majority of our clients are women. Because they're kind of grassroots, and think that power is taken away from women if we start focusing outside of helping women. So I think there's a little bit of fear in changing the

> mission statement. But I think that taking more of an approach of helping anyone, not a gender-based approach, is becoming more commonplace. So hopefully at some point we'll finally get on board with that philosophy too.
>
> I would say that we're more conservative than a lot of other organizations. Some people are more radical than we are, they say that you can't use gendered pronouns for offenders, you can't call the offender "he" and the victim "she" at all, and that's more radical than we are. And I do think we need to not fall into that trap, of simply referring to male offenders and female victims. . .I try to use "survivor" and "perpetrator" as much as I can.

Here we can see that a fundamental shift has occurred in the attitudes of the respondents. Whereas earlier gendered language was described as putting the organization in an uncomfortable position relative to the community, here it is seen as easy, safe, and comfortable. Now switching to gender-neutral language is seen as progressive, frightening, and even "radical," whereas before it was portrayed as a way to appease the organization's critics. This seeming contradiction often appeared within a single respondent's interview.

Six out of the nine respondents in the inclusivity group specifically stated that non-gendered language is progressive because it is more open to differing sexual orientations and gender identities. In this way de-gendering language became about not only the inclusion of male victims, but also about rectifying oppression of the LGBT community.

> I think we should remove gender norms, because if someone doesn't identify as male or female, I want them to understand that they can still get services here, so I think even if we were to put "men and women," it would still be a little exclusive.
>
> When we give the impression that we exclude men, we put gay and transgendered victims in a difficult position. They may not be sure if our services are for them, if they are welcome in our organization. I'm a huge believer that we should be changing our language regarding that, that we're not going to be the best victim services organization we can be until we're accessible to all victims.
>
> We're kind of doing a lot of things in society all at one time. We're trying to break down gender norms, we're trying to reduce violence, and we're trying to provide equal rights to people regardless of their sexual orientation. So I think as those issues become more prominent, we have to take a look at our services.
>
> This one woman I interviewed called me out on [the mission statement] really quickly, and she was like, "well, I don't see any mention here about the gay community, and I won't work for someone if they don't share my core values and if you don't provide services for same sex couples then I don't want to . . ." and I

> was like oh, God, yeah we do! So I think it gives people the impression that we're not like, with it, politically speaking.

In the last quote, the respondent points to the possibility that gendered language may upset not only socially conservative members of the community, but socially progressive people as well. In a political environment where the LGBT community is routinely marginalized, further exclusion of this population is likely to be something that many progressive people and organizations are careful to avoid.

While every respondent in the inclusivity group offered what may be considered at least a loosely feminist analysis of the gender disparity in domestic violence, not all actively claimed a feminist identity. One respondent explicitly identified with third-wave feminism, three of the respondents identified themselves as feminist in a broad, liberal sense, while the other five respondents expressed a desire for equality but claimed that they did not want to be labeled a feminist. In these five responses, the organization was said to be mistakenly perceived as feminist, but with a negative connotation. Here the idea of feminism became synonymous with the exclusion of men, both as victims and as members of the movement.

> Personally, I don't see it as a feminist organization. I hope we are out there for anyone who has been in domestic violence or sexual assault. I don't want us to be a feminist organization because then men won't come. Or gay people may not come. Transgendered, they may not come. I want us to be open to all who need our assistance.
>
> I think if people see us as feminist, then that sometimes automatically closes the door. Because people assume without asking any questions, they're already going to assume that we don't like males, we're lesbians, it's only about women, we hate men. So I think, it's not, I don't personally think feminism is negative necessarily, but I think other people view it as negative which is why it's a word I don't want to personally associate with.
>
> I don't view it as feminist work. And maybe that's because I know the work we do extends beyond just helping women, and because I think we're trying to improve upon what people think of us in the community. I think we're trying to move a little bit away from being identified as feminist in the work here, but I think it's really slow progress. But I think we're changing slowly.

In a few cases, feminism was seen as a system of thought privileging women over men, and was contrasted with the organization's values of social justice and equality.

> I think we believe in the rights of all people, so I don't know that we're feminist. Feminism is limiting, it's a label. I think what we strive for is equality and social justice, and I think we have to be more broad-minded, I guess.
>
> I think people definitely consider us a feminist organization, which is what I don't like to do when I'm speaking to people about us. I don't want to label it as this women's issue, feminist kind of deal. I really try to take a more global approach to this, to say it's a community issue that everybody has a stake in. Yes women may be more of the victims, but the price is paid by everybody. But I definitely think the conception out there is that we will do anything and everything to make sure women get as much as they can get, and I think it's more of a social equality, social justice kind of deal, not feminism.

In the above quotes, we can see how a very specific and narrow definition of feminism emerged among some inclusivity respondents. Feminism was seen as involving and concerning women exclusively, and it was perceived to be at odds with goals of inclusivity, diversity, equality and social justice. While this narrow definition was only put forward by some in the inclusivity group, it should be noted that all inclusivity respondents, regardless of their personal understandings of associations with feminism, were adamant that domestic violence not be framed as a "women's issue" because they believed that such a framing would allow the problem to be ignored by the community.[4]

Finally, inclusivity respondents expressed a permissiveness of disagreement and diversity of opinion in the movement. While the grassroots discourse emphasized a need for shared understandings and a unified identity, proponents of the inclusivity discourse were far less concerned about these issues. However, they maintained that their work was geared towards social change, in some cases contrasting it to social work much as the grassroots respondents did.

> I would say that we all agree that the work we do is important. I mean, I don't know if we would agree on much more than that.
>
> I think it's important for us to all question each other on a regular basis. I think can get caught up in being tunnel-visioned in any work that we do.

---

[4] Avoidance of "women's issue" framing does not necessarily preclude a feminist, gendered analysis of power in domestic violence work; for an example see Jackson Katz's *The Macho Paradox* (2006).

> I think healthy disagreement is good. And we try to create an environment where people can express their ideas and opinions and have good discussions, because really if we want to create social change and change in our community and change for our victims, we need to have these discussions to move forward. So not disagreements like all out fights or anything, but you know, exchanging different views and opinions and seeing things in a different way, so I think it's all good . . . just a gathering of diverse ideas.
>
> I'm okay with agreeing to disagree, and I think that's sometimes difficult for other people in this field who are, kind of take a more social work approach where they feel we need to all agree on things. And I personally don't believe that, I feel that we can all have our own opinions. I'm much more comfortable knowing that I don't have to agree with everyone, but still hold true to my opinion.

In this last quote, we can see that like the grassroots respondents, some in the inclusivity group also explicitly contrasted their approach with social work, suggesting that they saw it as more oriented towards social change.

The inclusivity discourse was characterized by a desire to change the language in the organization's mission statement, and in everyday conversations, to include all potential victims and not just women. Primarily, respondents were concerned about the possibility that male victims would not feel welcome at the organization and would not seek help. The political justifications for this change seemed somewhat contradictory in nature, as respondents simultaneously wished to appease conservative critics of the organization and to become more progressive.

Respondents that fit into this discourse were more varied than those in the grassroots group in terms of their political identity and knowledge of the movement's history. While all of the respondents put forth some loosely feminist ideas about domestic violence, they had different feelings towards feminism, and different ideas about what feminism is and how it relates to work with victims of domestic violence and sexual assault. While some identified with liberal feminism, others wished to distance themselves and the organization from feminism, as they equated feminism with exclusion and saw it as existing in opposition to goals of equality and social justice.

Finally, respondents in the inclusivity group were more open to unresolved differences of opinion, and were far less concerned than the grassroots group about establishing a unified identity and discourse. However, inclusivity respondents also saw the organization as being geared towards social change rather than simply social work, and many identified their work as part of the "anti-domestic violence and sexual assault movement."

On the Fence

The third group consisted of three women who incorporated both the grassroots and inclusivity discourses in their responses. All held managerial positions in the organization, identified as liberal feminists, and were relatively new to the field. These respondents expressed ambivalence towards the use of gendered language in the mission statement, and claimed that they could see the relevance of both sides of the debate.

> I think there's a lot of ownership by women for this movement, and some people may think that if we include men in the mission statement, or we make it gender neutral, then it takes away something from the power of women, and the history behind that. But on the other side, it's also acknowledging that there are victims of both genders. So, we don't want to minimize women, but at the same time we want to be available to everyone, which is tough.
>
> I think [the mission statement] definitely contributes to the thought that we don't do services for men, that we like women better than men, but I also think it's empowering. And some women feel much safer coming forward when they know, hey, I'm going somewhere where they really help women, and it's a women's agency. So it's a toss up, it's hard.
>
> We have a lot of conversation internally about the fact that our mission statement is gender biased in and of itself, and we get comments from the community about it, so that's definitely something that we probably need to explore further. But I don't now how you, then you get into the whole rub of if you use non-gender specific language, you dilute the topic so much that it takes away some of the power and passion behind the work that you're trying to do, and does it misrepresent the people you're serving, because by and large this is still a crime perpetrated by men against women. So yeah, that's an unresolved piece.

These responses articulate the most immediate concerns of the two discourses, namely the centrality of gender to the issue and the imperative that the organization be available to all

victims. This group's struggle to make sense of the debate and determine their position reflects the organization's internal struggle in developing a unified identity and discourse.

One respondent attempted to come up with a potential compromise which answered to the central concerns of both the grassroots and inclusivity discourses. She hoped that the mission of the organization might maintain a focus on gender oppression, while the organization's other discursive media could stress inclusivity of all victims.

> I mean, I know a lot of people, they're like if you want to be inclusive how dare you say women in your mission statement, but I think if we look at the oppression of women as being a root of domestic violence, I think that could be okay. We just have to really be good about making sure that men know that they're welcome here, you know transgender and all of that, in our marketing as well. I mean I just, the thing about oppression and gender, I think that's a lot of it. It's still the root that women and children are oppressed, and that, you know, can still be maybe our core, but, as well as embracing men as victims too . . . I think we could do a better job in our visual and written material to embrace everyone, but maybe keep our mission how it is, I don't know.

This was the only participant in the study to suggest the possibility that the organization's discourse might accomplish inclusivity within the framing of domestic violence as a women's issue. The fact that only one participant attempted to combine the two positions into a tangible compromise suggests that for most people at the organization, the two discourses are seen as being largely irreconcilable. Thus, the organization is truly in the midst of a Foucauldian discursive struggle over language, meaning and identity, an important and formative moment in its history.

CONCLUSIONS

Findings from this study suggest that the original grassroots discourse of the battered women's movement is currently at odds with a new discourse of inclusivity, which is associated with an "anti-domestic violence movement." The fact that most respondents who were newer to the organization fell into the inclusivity group, and that those in the grassroots group were either closer to retirement or had left the organization already, suggests that the inclusivity discourse may be gradually replacing the grassroots discourse in the organization. A central consequence of

this change is the potential de-gendering of the organization's mission statement, a big step in the continual movement away from framing domestic violence as a women's issue.

Many researchers and advocates have raised concerns about such de-gendering of language in domestic violence work. The literature has been highly critical of this linguistic shift, viewing it as indicative of depoliticization and co-optation of the movement (Dobash and Dobash 1992; Katz 2006; Kurz 1989; Morgan 1981; Walker 1990). Other current micro-level studies of domestic violence agencies have found that de-gendered narratives correspond with psychological and individual-level understandings of domestic violence, as well as an increased perception of domestic violence advocacy as social work rather than as a social change movement (Hammons 2004; Lehrner and Allen 2008). However, the results of this study complicate such claims. The inclusivity discourse present in this organization suggests that the act of de-gendering domestic violence language is perhaps more complex than it has previously been perceived.

First, the fact that most respondents in the inclusivity group spoke to the gender disparity in domestic violence and offered at least loosely feminist, sociological analyses to explain this phenomenon suggests that preferring gender-neutral language is not necessarily indicative of a lack of understanding of the oppression-based nature of the issue. Furthermore, inclusivity respondents saw their work as being oriented towards social change rather than simply service provision, and they still spoke about domestic violence work in terms of a "movement," suggesting that de-gendering the issue does not necessarily correspond with a "social work" attitude. Already, these basic findings suggest that there is a more complicated story to be told about the adoption of gender-neutral language.

The Complexities of Inclusivity

Throughout the interviews, it became clear that the inclusivity group's desire to de-gender the mission statement was at least partially a response to the community's powerful conservative political discourse, which is arguably quite hostile towards anything related to feminism or

women's rights. This is evidenced by the inclusivity group's claims that the language of women in the mission statement furthers negative stereotypes about the organization, as well as the fact that some actively tried to avoid focusing on women in order to be accepted in the community. That respondents were very aware of and concerned about conservative perceptions of them, and that they saw de-gendering language as a means of lessening such perceptions, is highly indicative of the co-optation and conscious depoliticization which has been criticized in the existing literature.

On the other hand, many in the inclusivity group described themselves as progressive or even radical, and politically speaking saw themselves in opposition to their conservative critics. Therefore, "bowing to conservative pressures" may not be an entirely accurate description of the new discourse. Such progressive political identities became especially prominent in respondents who expressed solidarity with LGBT rights, another movement facing serious backlash in the community. These respondents saw the de-gendering of language as being inclusive not only of men, but also of LGBT victims. Thus, gender-neutrality became conflated with being pro-LGBT, a very progressive position in the community, while focusing on gender was seen as traditional, easy, and politically outdated.

Here, a crucial contradiction in the inclusivity discourse emerges. De-gendering domestic violence was portrayed as a response to pressures from a conservative discourse, and some respondents explicitly stated that it might help avoid *misperceptions of a pro-gay agenda*. And yet, these same respondents saw gender-neutral language as *progressive*, some hoping that inclusive language would allow them to better ally with the community's LGBT movement. The question then arises, is gender-neutral language a means of fitting into the conservative community, or a means of challenging the community by a validation of LGBT rights? Can it really be both? Can a single change simultaneously accomplish two seemingly conflicting goals? This contradiction reflects a general confusion about the current movement's identity, a confusion which was pointed out by some of the grassroots respondents. These and other difficult questions must be considered by domestic violence organizations as they move towards inclusivity, and as

they decide how and if they want to be a progressive political force in their communities. These questions lead to an even more central one: what are the implications of this new inclusivity discourse for the future of the movement?

Potential Implications

In this community, the succession of the grassroots discourse by the inclusivity discourse has potential implications which may both help and hinder the movement. In one sense, the desire among some respondents to use inclusivity as a means of allying with the LGBT rights movement could garner more support from progressive members of the community. Those who wish to challenge dominant social conservatism are the type of people the organization needs to engage, but they may see gendered language as excluding LGBT victims and may be less likely to support the organization if they feel that LGBT issues are ignored. Such a sentiment was expressed earlier in this quote:

> This one woman I interviewed called me out on [the mission statement] really quickly, and she was like, "well, I don't see any mention here about the gay community, and I won't work for someone if they don't share my core values and if you don't provide services for same sex couples then I don't want to . . ." and I was like oh, God, yeah we do! So I think it gives people the impression that we're not like, with it, politically speaking.

In such a conservative political climate, the alliance of progressive movements whose goal is overall social change could be very beneficial, and perhaps even crucial to the survival of each individual movement.

Another potential implication of the inclusivity discourse is a less coherent movement identity, suggested by the fact that proponents of the inclusivity discourse seemed far less concerned with this issue. In this context one could argue, and indeed some inclusivity respondents did argue, that disagreement is "healthy" in that it keeps the movement from becoming too narrow-minded, and therefore unresponsive and ineffective in a politically challenging community. However social movement theorists have overwhelmingly argued that

unity and strong collective identity is a key component of successful social movements (Boggs 1986; Melucci 1985, 1989; Taylor and Whittier 1992). Therefore, a weaker collective identity may be perceived as a potentially negative implication of inclusivity.

Similarly, the loss of a focus on gender could prove to be a serious hindrance to achieving social change, as has been pointed out by many researchers and activists. (Dobash and Dobash 1992; Katz 2006; Kurz 1989; Morgan 1981; Schechter 1982; Walker 1990). According to this position, a gendered analysis of power is central to understanding and effectively combatting the gendered crime of domestic violence. Responses in the inclusivity group showed that such an analysis may already be losing its prominence in the organization. While inclusivity respondents acknowledged the gendered nature of the issue and offered feminist explanations of it, they did not feel the need to maintain gender as a focus in combatting the issue. Rather, they desired to move away from the framing of domestic violence as a "women's issue" in hopes that the community would be more responsive to it. Some inclusivity respondents had very narrow interpretations of feminism, seeing a feminist identity as being incompatible with goals of inclusion, diversity, social justice and equality. This need to eschew feminist analyses of power might prevent an inclusive movement from ever really getting at the real "root" of the problem, that is challenging society to end gender oppression more broadly.

Furthermore, gender-neutral language could inadvertently lend support to the 'backlash' discourse of patriarchal resistance in larger culture, which promotes the view that men and women are equally violent and power imbalances are nonexistent. Here, de-gendered analyses of domestic violence "divert attention away from men's responsibility and the cultural and structural factors that oppress women and foster violence" (Berns 2001). Such a concern may be especially relevant for this organization, given that it is situated in a highly conservative context.

Given these concerning implications, an important finding from the present study is the conception of political progressiveness among inclusivity respondents. From a feminist standpoint, it has been well-argued that gender-neutrality in domestic violence work is actually quite *regressive* in that it obscures the real issue at hand, which is the societal oppression of

women. In this organization, the inclusivity discourse paints gender-neutral language as a kind of "new political front" in domestic violence work, making it appealing and relevant for people who see themselves as progressive individuals. Thus, many who understand and sympathize with a gender-based analysis of power are encouraged to avoid it when engaging with the rest of the community, and this avoidance is seen as progressive.

This process becomes especially clear when considering the conflation of LGBT rights with gender-neutrality. In this scenario, inclusion of LGBT victims is seen as precluding a focus on gender oppression. Thus LGBT rights and feminism, two social movements which generally coincide in broader culture, become curiously incompatible with one another within the context of the inclusivity discourse.

Discourse and Change

Various explanations have been offered as to what is driving changes in the battered women's movement, or more recently the "anti-domestic violence" movement. Many have concluded that as domestic violence advocacy organizations have become more closely tied up with government funding and institutions of the state, pressures to depoliticize have caused the movement to become increasingly co-opted (Dobash and Dobash 1992; Katz 2006; Kurz 1989; Morgan 1981; Walker 1990). The results of this study suggest that such changes can also occur in response to a community's overall political tenor. When a community's political discourse is saturated with conservative rhetoric, sensationalist terms such as "anti-family" and "pro-gay agenda" may be used loosely and frequently to defame and pressure organizations with relatively progressive agendas, especially those dealing with issues of gender or sexuality.

These findings also suggest that another possible reason why original tenets of the movement are fading is that proponents of the grassroots discourse are unable to effectively communicate their position and concerns to a new generation of advocates. During the interviews respondents in the grassroots group were adamant that the current movement is missing something essential, yet they had a difficult time explaining exactly what that essential

"missing piece" is. It seems that a largely unspoken agreement or understanding about domestic violence and about the movement has been lost in translation between the advocacy generations, and grassroots advocates are slowly giving up. This is expressed in following quotes from two grassroots respondents who had left the organization:

> I get tired of trying to talk out and try to, you know, really motivate the leadership to understand everything that I've been talking about. I just became an uphill battle. And I think that's where I just, I didn't want to fight it anymore. Actually, to be really truly honest about it, I felt like I was fighting more on the inside than I was on the outside in the community. People that I felt had far less experience in the field were not listening. So it was time for me to leave.
>
> We didn't feel heard. We didn't feel validated or supported, I can tell you that. And we felt like the agency just went in an opposite direction from when we first started and became involved in it. And I think people just got tired.

It appears that the grassroots discourse has been struggling to sustain its relevance in the wake of new concerns being introduced to the organization, namely the inclusion of male and LGBT victims. The goal of inclusivity is steadily overshadowing the broader goal of taking on gender oppression, as evidenced by newer members opinions about the mission statement which reflect what they believe the priorities of the movement's public discourse should be.

This study was limited to the confines of the organization itself, and would benefit from research in the outside community to see what discourses exist and how they relate to those found in the organization. Additionally, this study was limited in its lack of racial and ethnic diversity among the participants, who were majority white, and further research might be conducted to determine if differing racial and ethnic backgrounds affect domestic violence discourse. Finally, this study is limited by its small sample in a single domestic violence advocacy organization. Similar studies conducted at other organizations will show if these findings are prevalent elsewhere. Future research might also examine the effects of political context by comparing organizations in conservative communities to those in more liberal or progressive communities to see how the different contexts affect the discourse.

Inclusivity may very well be an inevitable necessity in the anti-domestic violence movement as it struggles to survive in a largely "post-feminist" culture, and as it attempts to align

itself with with other anti-oppression movements such as that of the LGBT community. However, the new discourse presents some formidable challenges to the movement. In this study, the inclusivity discourse presented internal contradictions and confusion about the organization's political relationship with the community. Moreover, a discursive shift to gender-neutral language may eventually lead to the loss of a gendered analysis of power in movement discourse, which from a feminist theoretical perspective is an absolutely essential frame of reference for combatting domestic violence. Because gender-neutrality is becoming the "new progressive" in the movement and because grassroots advocates are struggling to communicate their point of view and are leaving, it may be difficult or even impossible to get that gendered analysis back once it is lost.

Proponents of an inclusivity discourse understand domestic violence as a societal and cultural issue, and they view their work as being part of a social movement. They still display the passion and desire to create broad change that is necessary for such a movement to exist. But given the challenges mentioned above, the movement's new generation may need to seriously consider how its efforts at inclusivity affect collective identity and situate the movement politically. This means being cognizant of the potential consequences of shifting focus away from gender in their analysis of "power and control." The organization in this study was found to be in the midst of a discursive struggle between older and newer ways of speaking about and understanding domestic violence and social change, and this struggle is surely a critically decisive moment in the history of the movement.

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Appendix

Interview Schedule

What is your position(s) at this organization? How would you describe what you do?

How would you describe the work that this organization does?

How long have you been working with this organization? How long have you been working in the area of domestic violence/sexual assault?

How did you become involved in this work?

How would you define domestic violence?

In your opinion, what are the most common public misconceptions about domestic violence?

In your experience, what are some of the biggest challenges facing victims of domestic violence?

Why do you think domestic violence occurs?

What do you think are the most promising strategies for combatting domestic violence?

What is the relationship between gender and domestic violence?

What is your opinion about the organization's mission statement?

Do you discuss these kinds of questions with your colleagues?

To what level would say that members of this organization agree on issues surrounding domestic violence? Why do you think this is?

Do you ever face challenges or disagreements when discussing these issues with others here? What are these disagreements about?

In your work, do you interact with people from other organizations/agencies? Please describe these interactions.

In these interactions, what kinds of things do you discuss?

What are some challenges or disagreements you face in interacting with other organizations?

What is the importance of language in discussing these issues?

Do you personally identify yourself as a feminist?

How would you define feminism?

How do you think most people think of feminism?

How do you think feminism relates to work in domestic violence/sexual assault?

Do you think that this is a feminist organization? Why or why not?