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# Male IPV Perpetrators' Perspectives on Facilitation of Batterer Intervention Program: Results From a 2-Year Study

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As part of a two-year ethnographic study of batterer intervention programs (BIPs) we interviewed 76 male perpetrators of intimate partner violence (IPV) on their perspectives regarding BIP facilitators. Participants endorsed a number of characteristics of facilitators that helped to reduce their resistance to the group process and assisted in engaging them in the learning process, including facilitators who were invested in the program and its mission, and displayed a non-judgmental demeanor. At the same time, they also endorsed facilitators who were honest with them and challenged them on their behavior, and who exhibited a high degree of experience in IPV. Additionally, participants endorsed the need to have a female facilitator as part of the group to further promote engagement and learning. This study has implications for thinking about what components of BIP facilitation might be important for reducing some of the resistance that may lead to client attrition, and how BIPs can better engage clients in prosocial behavioral changes.

**KEYWORDS: batterer intervention programs; facilitation; intimate partner violence; perpetrators**

Batterer intervention programs (BIPs) represent a key component of the socio-judicial response to intimate partner violence (IPV; Barner & Carney, 2011). During the 1980s, many states began adopting mandatory and pro-arrest laws, thereby increasing the number of arrests for IPV crimes (Barner & Carney, 2011). As a result, state criminal justice systems began to recognize the need for appropriate sanctions and programs to address IPV perpetration (Barner & Carney, 2011). BIPs emerged, therefore, in response to this need and since then have become increasingly popular in the United States. Although it is unclear how many operate within the United States, Maiuro and Eberle (2008) have estimated that nearly 2,500 programs are in existence. Today, between 80% and 90% arrests for an IPV crime result in a court-mandate to a BIP as part of the adjudication process, making BIPs the primary mechanism by which perpetrators are held accountable (Cannon, Hamel, Buttell, & Ferreira, 2016). Furthermore, many states have developed and adopted standards or guidelines for how BIPs should operate (Boal & Mankowski, 2014b; Maiuro & Eberle, 2008). BIPs therefore represent an important component for reducing partner violence in the United States.

BIPs generally are guided by two key principles, victim safety and perpetrator accountability (Gondolf, 2015). The goal is to intervene upon abusive behaviors and reduce recidivism (Gondolf, 2015; Saunders, 2008). How BIPs do this, however, varies widely and surveys of BIPs have shown that, while various models or programmatic approaches exist (e.g., Duluth, Emerge, AMEND, cognitive behavioral therapy, psychodynamic/process models, Acceptance and Commitment Therapy; Babcock et al., 2016), many programs may integrate a variety of intervention strategies into their practice (Aaron & Beaulaurier, 2016). Psychoeducational, cognitive behavioral or other therapeutic approaches, or a combination thereof, can all be used to help promote behavioral change among BIP clients (Gondolf, 2015). Additionally, while some research has demonstrated positive results with individual (Murphy & Eckhardt, 2005) or couples therapy (Stith, McCollum, & Rosen, 2011; Stith, Rosen, & McCollum, 2003; Stith, Rosen, McCollum, & Thomsen, 2004) when working with perpetrators of IPV, many BIPs continue to utilize a group treatment based format (Price & Rosenbaum, 2009). Though no one intervention modality has been proven to be more effective than another, proponents of group work believe this format is better suited to address some of the cognitive distortions and denial that men who perpetrate violence exhibit (Lehmann & Simmons, 2009). Group work allows BIP clients to confront each other on their abusive behaviors and share their experiences, reduces the sense of isolation and stigma around IPV, enables opportunities for role-play and exploration of new behaviors, and can help to avoid the pitfall of collusion with perpetrators that may occur in other therapeutic contexts (Lehmann & Simmons, 2009). Many BIPs also use an open-ended process that allows men who have been in the group longer to take a leadership role and assist in "breaking new members" in (i.e., helping to role model positive behavioral change and begin to minimize resistance; Saunders, 2008). Thus, while multiple modalities for working with perpetrators exist, group work continues to be the primary approach for interventions with male perpetrators of IPV, and many state standards for BIPs endorse this modality (Maiuro & Eberle, 2008).

Despite the role BIPs play in the socio-judicial response to IPV, there is limited evidence to support their ability to reduce recidivism. Though a few recent studies of BIP efficacy have produced favorable results (e.g., Boots, Wareham, Bartula, & Canas, 2016; Kelly & Westmarland, 2015; Zarling, Bannon, & Berta, 2019), most continue to not (Aldarondo, 2012; Carter, 2010; Eckhardt et al., 2013; Haggård, Freij, Danielsson, Wenander, & Långström, 2017; Herman, Rotunda, Williamson, & Vodanovich, 2014; Labriola, Rempel, & Davis, 2008; Murphy & Ting, 2010). Furthermore, research has shown that BIPs contend with a number of issues that may affect their efficacy, including lack of funding, difficulties with training and retention of facilitators, and program monitoring (Aaron & Beaulaurier, 2016; Boal & Mankowski, 2014a; Morrison et al., 2016; Price & Rosenbaum, 2009). Additionally, dropout rates remain high among programs (Brodeur, Rondeau, Brochu, Lindsay, & Phelps, 2008; Jewell & Wormith, 2010; Olver, Stockdale, & Wormith, 2011), meaning many clients fail to follow through or complete programs. Given these findings, there is a continuing need to identify ways to support BIPs and improve both immediate (e.g., dropout) and long-term (e.g., recidivism) outcomes.

The identification of the components of the BIP group process that are important for client engagement, and ultimately, for facilitating change among perpetrators is one avenue for thinking about how to improve BIP efficacy. A growing body of qualitative studies have sought to do just that and have focused on describing the BIP experience from the perspective of perpetrators (Boira, del Castillo, Carbajosa, & Marcuello, 2013; Chovanec, 2014; Gray, Lewis, Mokany, & O'Neill, 2014; Holtrop et al., 2017; Kelly & Westmarland, 2015; McGinn, McColgan, & Taylor, 2017; Pandya, 2009; Parra-Cardona et al., 2013; Shamai & Buchbinder, 2010). In general, these studies have found that BIP clients endorse common themes related to the process of group work including, learning from other clients, feeling less alone, and feeling supported, among other things (Boira et al., 2013; Gray et al., 2014; Holtrop et al., 2017; Parra-Cardona et al., 2013; Shamai & Buchbinder, 2010; Silvergleid & Mankowski, 2006). Clients also report gains from the group process, such as increased knowledge about abuse and its impact on victims, developing empathy, and anger and emotional regulation or alternative coping mechanisms (Boira et al., 2013; Chovanec, 2012; Gray et al., 2014; Holtrop et al., 2017; Kelly & Westmarland, 2015; Morrison et al., 2018; Pandya, 2009; Parra-Cardona et al., 2013; Shamai & Buchbinder, 2010; Sheehan, Thakor, & Stewart, 2012; Silvergleid & Mankowski, 2006). These studies have helped to highlight the ways in which the group process, and in particular, the exchange that occurs between clients in a BIP, can serve to engage men in the goals of the group and encourage their participation and motivation to change.

An area that has received less attention in the literature, however, is the role that facilitators play in the BIP group context. Most literature on BIP facilitation has been focused theoretical orientations and/or the "how-to" of working with clients who have been violent with their partners, or on the educational or specialized training needs of BIP facilitators (e.g., Bent-Goodley, Rice, Williams, & Pope, 2011; Paymar, 2000; Pence & Paymar, 1993). There has been a small body of research on the strategies facilitators use to try to minimize resistance (Kistenmacher & Weiss, 2008; Levesque, Pro-Change Behavior Systems, & America, 2008; Musser, Semiatin, Taft, & Murphy, 2008; Scott, King, McGinn, & Hosseini, 2011). These studies have found that various strategies facilitators employ (e.g., motivational enhancements, encouraging involvement, being aware of one's attitudes toward clients, providing empathic support to clients) can help to minimize resistance and engage clients in the intervention process (Kistenmacher & Weiss, 2008; Levesque et al., 2008; Musser et al., 2008; Scott et al., 2011). There has also been a small body of research on the therapeutic alliance in batterer intervention and the challenges to, and enablers for, developing relationships with clients that motivate them toward change (Boira et al., 2013; Scott et al., 2011; Taft & Murphy, 2007; Taft, Murphy, King, Musser, & DeDeyn, 2003; Taft, Murphy, Musser, & Remington, 2004; Walling, Suvak, Howard, Taft, & Murphy, 2012). In particular, research by Taft et al. (2003), Taft and Murphy (2007) has found a positive facilitator-client alliance, or rather the degree to which BIP facilitators and clients bond and are able to agree upon the goals of treatment, is important for treatment compliance, and reducing abusive behaviors. Similarly, Boira et al. (2013) found that a positive therapeutic alliance was significantly associated with clients' assessment of program utility, or the degree to which clients found the program useful. Only a handful of qualitative studies of the group process, however, have included clients' perspectives on facilitators and most have done so to a limited extent (Boira et al., 2013; Chovanec, 2012; Holtrop et al., 2017; Shamai & Buchbinder, 2010; Silvergleid & Mankowski, 2006). Nonetheless, these studies have helped to highlight how certain facilitator characteristics (e.g., listening/letting men talk, problem solving, keeping men focused on themselves) may promote client engagement and provide support for prosocial behavioral change among perpetrators (Boira et al., 2013; Chovanec, 2012; Holtrop et al., 2017; Shamai & Buchbinder, 2010; Silvergleid & Mankowski, 2006).

Facilitators, therefore, play an important role in promoting client "buy in," and how clients perceive and respond to facilitators may have a direct impact on their willingness to comply with, and complete, treatment. Much, however, remains unknown in regards to clients' perspectives on BIP facilitators. Such information is vital to understanding how facilitators can best minimize resistance, promote client engagement, and in turn, influence attrition and recidivism rates (Chovanec, 2009). The objective of this analysis was to understand how men participating in a BIP perceived facilitators, and more importantly, what aspects of facilitation they felt were beneficial or helpful to the BIP process.

## METHODS

### Parent Study

Between 2013 and 2015, we conducted a two-year ethnographic study of two community-based BIPs in an urban setting in the United States. The parent study utilized semi-structured interviews and observations of BIP group sessions to achieve two key aims. First, we sought to describe the BIP process, identifying both process and content components of BIPs. Second, we sought to understand the experience of BIPs, any factors that enabled intervention, and/or any barriers to intervention with men who perpetrate IPV, from the perspective of clients, professionals who work with BIPs, and victims.

### Current Analysis

We conducted open-ended, semi-structured interviews with 76 male perpetrators court-mandated to attend one of two community-based participating BIPs. Interviews broadly explored multiple facets of the BIP experience from the client perspective, including but not limited to: clients' initial reaction to hearing they were mandated to a BIP, their first impressions of the programs, barriers to engaging in intervention, what they found helpful/unhelpful about the program, what they gained from the program, their thoughts on the other men in the group, their thoughts on facilitators, and any improvements to the BIP they would make. The current analysis uses these interviews to understand BIP clients' perspectives specifically on group facilitators. We started our discussion with participants about the facilitators by asking them to broadly tell us how they felt about the facilitators. We then probed more specifically for clients' perspectives on what they liked and disliked regarding facilitators using one or more the following questions: "If you were facilitating the group, how would you do it?," "What did you find helpful?," "What did you like?," "What did you find unhelpful?," "What did you not like?," and/or "What would you do differently?."

### Setting

Data were collected in collaboration with two community-based BIPs. At the time of data collection, each program served over 100 men per year, had at least five locations, and over 10 years of experience in BIP provision. Both programs were open-ended, meaning that clients could enroll in the program at any time. One program was 16 weeks and the other 24 weeks. Although both participating BIPs accepted self-referrals into their programs, they primarily served clients who were court-mandated to attend by the local judicial system. Finally, the programs utilized adaptations of two different BIP models for their curriculum. One utilized a variation of the Duluth model, or a feminist psychoeducational approach, which underscores the role of men's power and control over women as a contributing factor to abuse, and frames abusive behaviors within the context of patriarchal ideologies that position women as weak (Pence & Paymar, 1993). The other utilized a variation of the Emerge model, a curriculum that combines educational and cognitive behavioral therapy techniques and is typically dual-phase, wherein perpetrators who show progress are allowed to advance to a more intensive program after some time (Emerge, 2016).

### Data Collection

Clients were eligible to participate if they were currently attending or had ever attended one of the two participating BIPs. A study staff member regularly attended BIP group sessions at each agency and, before group sessions, would introduce the research to the clients in attendance. Clients were provided with an index card and instructed to write down their first name only and a safe number where they could be reached if they wished to participate. Otherwise, they simply were to leave the index card blank. The study staff collected all index cards at the same time in order to ensure participant privacy. Clients were also provided with a flyer with all relevant study information and instructed on how to contact the study staff should they decide to participate later. Clients were also encouraged to speak with study staff after the BIP group session if they had questions, wanted to schedule a time to participate or other concerns about the study. We also utilized an "honest broker" system to mail out flyers to all clients who had ever registered for one of the participating BIPs within the last year. Recruitment through mailers, however, was low and yielded only three participants, all of whom had also heard of the study through recruitment at the BIP group sessions.

One-hundred and fifty-two clients provided their contact information for participation. Each client was contacted a minimum of three times by phone for participation before being considered lost to follow-up. Only three clients declined participation at follow-up. In total, 76 clients completed the study interview, 37 of which were recruited from the 16-week program, the remainder from the 24-week program. Due to the stigma that is associated with IPV and the relationship between the judicial system and BIPs, we sought to maximize enrollment and ensure safe, voluntary participation by not collecting any identifying information (e.g., age, race, charges, length of time in program) about the clients who participated. This was done at the suggestion of, and in consultation with, both our local institutional IRB and the participating BIPs.

All interviews were conducted by a PhD trained anthropologist who has expertise in IPV and in a private space offered by the BIPs, or via telephone, whichever the client preferred. Interviews lasted on average between 45 to 90 minutes. Clients were compensated with a $30 gift card to a local retailer for their participation. All clients provided verbal consent prior to completing the interview. The institutional review board at the University of Pittsburgh approved this study.

### Analysis

Each interview was audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Transcripts were then entered into Atlas.ti for analysis. The analysis took a two-coder iterative approach, with an emphasis on content and global coding of thematic categories an d subcategories (Crabtree & Miller, 1999). In the first step, the two coders reviewed all transcripts line by line in order to identify and label all potential broad thematic categories, and then met to compare initial coding and begin to develop a codebook. In the next step, the two coders then performed more detailed coding, examining each code for subthemes, and met once again to refine codes and the codebook. The codebook was then presented to stakeholders for further insight and refinement. In the final step, the coders recorded all the transcripts using the codebook and met once more to reconcile any differences if need be. The themes presented below are those that arose consistently across the overwhelming majority of participants.

A note on analysis: When analyzing client interviews as they related to BIP facilitators it became clear that clients expressed overwhelmingly positive views on facilitators. When clients did express something they disliked, found unhelpful, and/or would do differently, their responses did not necessarily relate to facilitators per se, but rather to aspects of the program (e.g., time, cost, location). Thus, we chose to focus this article on our analysis of clients' positive views on facilitators, and what aspects of facilitation they found helpful.

## RESULTS

We found six main thematic categories related to clients' perspectives on what characteristics of BIP facilitators they found helpful or beneficial to the BIP process: (a) facilitators were invested in the program and its mission; (b) facilitators were non-judgmental; (c) facilitators used non-confrontational strategies to engage clients; (d) facilitators were honest and challenged clients to think about their behavior; (e) facilitators were experienced in working with IPV; and (f) female facilitators provide clients with a different perspective.

## Invested

Participants overwhelming endorsed facilitators that they felt "cared." When asked what participants specifically meant by "caring," it became clear that they saw facilitators as individuals who demonstrated a high level of commitment or investment in the BIP and its mission. This dedication ranged from the level of assisting individual clients to the broader goal of ending IPV. Thus, for some participants, facilitators' genuine commitment to or investment in the program's clients was important. As one stated, "They are very concerned about the people in the group. They try to help anybody in the group that they can. They are really concerned about you. They give a lot to the men." Another similarly stated, "From getting to know them, I found they are in it for the right reasons; they want to help people. They're committed to helping." Others described how facilitators demonstrated a deep commitment to the program in general, "She's in it [the program] for the right reasons. I can tell that she is not there just because it is her job. Everything she does, she cares. She cares about the program." Another offered, "He wasn't there. 'Alright I'm getting a pay check so I really don't care what these guys learn.' He really wanted to see you learn. That's cool with me."

Others described what they saw as facilitators' commitment to the long-term goal of ending IPV. Some framed this as facilitators' desire to ensure that the clients made enough significant change that they would not end up in the "same situation." As one stated, "She cares about the group. She wants to see us do better and ultimately she doesn't want us to come back to the group, or have similar consequences in the future." Another stated, "She just wants to make sure we learn something before we walk out of the door so we won't go back and get into the same situation." Others described what they saw as facilitators dedication to the issue of IPV; as one stated, "I think it's very important that you know, and it took me a little bit to understand this, the reason they are there is because they're seeking the opposite side to make this (IPV) better." Thus, some participants saw facilitators as "caring" because they took time out of their lives and committed it to ending IPV. Similarly, another participant added, "She has so much going on in her life and it's like why would you put yourself in this situation (i.e. working with perpetrators). But it's to stop the problem. I give her all the credit in the world." Participants therefore endorsed facilitators who they viewed as invested in them as individuals, the program, *and* the larger cause of ending IPV.

Furthermore, many admitted that seeing facilitators' investment helped to minimize some of the initial resistance they felt when they arrived at group. As one participant stated, "I'll tell you this, the quicker that any individual can see that, that person really cares about you, they want to help you, it gets easier . . . as soon as I realized that they're in this for me, that wall came down." Another offered, "I was kind of resistant at first, but once he started speaking, you realize he means well, he's there to help us, the least we can do is listen and be open to what he has to say." A third participant summarized:

> When we had a new person each week and I knew they didn't want to see that. I remember [facilitator] saying one time, that it is a good thing if we don't have these classes. They don't want to see us back there again. They try to make sure everyone takes something from this so they don't end up back here again. But their was goal to make it to where it doesn't happen.

### Non-Judgmental

Participants also felt that being non-judgmental was a key component of BIP facilitation. As one participant stated, "They are not there to judge you which was nice. I like that they don't judge, so that's good." When asked what facilitators did that made them seem non-judgmental, some participants described what they saw as facilitators' open-mindedness. As one participant stated, "Her willingness to want to interact with the group and always be open minded about somebody's opinion even if it may be a little rash or rough was great." Others described the way in which facilitators demonstrated humility. As one participant stated, "He let you know that he has problems too. He is not perfect. He don't point the finger." Another similarly stated, "I mean there were things that she related to us, her realizing that she has triggers and you know she has an emotional safety plan to avoid reacting to those triggers. So she wasn't sitting up on a pedestal." Still others described not feeling "put down" by facilitators, "She does not put you down. She doesn't judge nobody and doesn't think nobody is bad. That's what made me feel better about the class. She doesn't put down nobody."

Furthermore, many participants asserted that because facilitators were non-judgmental, they felt safe to open up in the group. For example, one participant described how the facilitator responded to clients' admission of abusive behaviors, "She ain't gone make you feel less. If you say something she might not agree, but she's not gone down talk you. She'll say something to make you think about what you said, but that a good thing." Another participant similarly stated, "I think the facilitators are great, and they really make you feel welcome there and free to say whatever without judgment." Participants also described how a non-judgmental approach helped them to be receptive to the feedback facilitators provided. As one stated, "The way they are in class. The way they say things, it lets you hear what they are saying without feeling scolded and things like that." Thus, facilitators' open-mindedness allowed clients to be more honest in group and open to receiving critical feedback. Another participant summarized:

> She doesn't judge. If you [a facilitator] go in there prejudiced, that's not going to change anyone's outcome on how their problems are dealt with. It would turn people off. They would stop listening to her. It works the way that she does it. Rather than jumping down your throat and saying you are wrong, wrong, wrong. That would make me shut down. I would just be in the class, but not "be" in the class.

## Non-Confrontational Strategies

Participants also described facilitators' ability to solicit their participation in the group as helpful. Many admitted that initially they were reluctant to participate in the group. As one participant stated, "Going in, I didn't think that I would participate. But they make it very easy, it surprised me after the first night, I was like wow, this is not what I expected." Another similarly stated, "They [facilitators] bring it out you. Whatever you got inside you, they bring it out you. I didn't really want to talk, but they brought it out of me." Thus, participants admitted that they did not want to participant in the beginning, but found themselves doing so despite their initial reservations.

When asked specifically what facilitators did that helped to engender their participation, participants described a variety of non-confrontational strategies. Some described the comfortable environment facilitators created, "They make you open up. They make you feel comfortable and relaxed so you want to talk. You want to speak." Similarly, another stated, "From day one, they made me feel very comfortable. They made the whole process feel very comfortable and relaxed. I think that is why a lot of the guys open up." Others described how facilitators engaged clients by asking for their opinion, "If you are not participating, they will ask you a question, in a nice way, like 'How do you feel about it?' to bring you into it." Another stated, "They'll ask, 'Do you have anything to say?' Just with a good attitude. It's not pushy, it's more like, 'Well how do you feel about that?' Just trying to encourage you to speak." Others described facilitators' genuine interest in what clients had to say as fostering participation, "They don't force you to talk, but if you start to say something, they really want to hear it." Another similarly stated, "Her listening helps open you up when you are talking. She listens." For others, the facilitators' disposition seemed to play a role in their willingness to participate, "They're very nice, polite, it's easy to open up with them. They are both good at what they do." Another offered, "People are just willing to be open and talk with her in my opinion. Just her personality, she's an outgoing person and I think it is easy for people to break out of their shell and partake in group discussion." Regardless, participants felt that facilitators' use of non-threatening tactics enabled them to open up and participate in the group process. As one participant summarized:

> When you come in you are all tight about your situation. You don't want nobody knowing what you did. But [facilitator], she is so nice, and she really wants to hear what you have to say. She makes you feel comfortable to where you are like "Alright, this is what really happened," you know and be open about it. She just makes you feel comfortable talking about it.

## Honesty and Challenging Behaviors

Participants also endorsed facilitators who they felt were honest and challenged group members regarding their behavior. Participants appreciated how open and straightforward facilitators were with them about their behaviors. As one participant stated, "I appreciated that [the facilitator] was straightforward. He's explicit. He didn't sugar coat nothing. He wasn't there to play games. He doesn't beat around the bush." Another similarly stated, "She knows what's going on, she's here to be honest with you and I liked that." Participants felt that facilitators' honest feedback was necessary for their learning process. As one participant stated:

> She's upfront and tells it how it is. That is the way it should be. Be honest. I think people learn better if they are told like it is. Yeah, it's going to hurt them at first but that is better than them finding out the hard way two years down the road or a week later or something.

Thus, while participants recognized that the truth was sometimes upsetting, it nonetheless helped them to think about their behaviors. Another participant stated, "They get you to take an honest look at what you are doing, and question you about it. I mean, how else can you change your behavior if you don't take a real hard look at it?"

Participants also appreciated facilitators who would challenge clients or confront them on their behavior. As one participant stated, "She's straight up. She says what she thinks, if you're bs'ing then she'll say something and that's the way she should be." Such strategies were seen, again, as important to helping clients think about their behavior. As one participant stated, "They both challenge people sometimes when they need it, just to get us to think about our behavior and the repercussions of our actions." Another added, "[Facilitator] challenged people sometimes. She actually confronted them about things, including me. I needed that. Whenever you are called out on something like that of course it makes you think about it." Furthermore, participants recognized that facilitators used this strategy not to be punitive, but rather because they wanted clients to learn from their experiences. One participant stated, "She doesn't bite her tongue when it comes to why we're there. She doesn't make you feel bad about it. But she does challenge you to try to get you to understand your behavior and why you're there." Thus, participants saw this strategy as the facilitators' way of getting them to be honest about their behaviors, so that they could address them and make positive changes. One participant summarized:

> If she felt like you was bluffing about the situation she let you know, she just called you out on it. Not to be a mean person or something like that, but she just wants you to face reality and think about what are you doing to fix it and what are you learning so far.

### Experienced in IPV

Participants also felt that having facilitators who were "highly experienced" was important. In general, participants described facilitators as being "experienced" or as "knowing what they were doing." As one participant stated, "First of all they have a lot of experience. I felt I was talking to someone who had seen a lot [in terms of abuse]. So that is the first thing I want to say about them positive." Another similarly stated, "They seemed like they knew what they were doing. I can respect the fact that they are experienced and know what they are doing." When asked specifically what indicted to participants that facilitators were experienced, or "knew what they were doing," some clients pointed to the depth of knowledge facilitators had on abuse as a subject area. As one participant stated, "[Facilitator] was well-suited to the group in terms of understanding the situation, he seemed to be educated and knowledgeable in terms of social behavior and the situation [i.e. abuse] that we were a part of." Another participant similarly stated, "They are very educated. It seems like they have knowledge of domestic violence and what they are going to teach you [about it]. They seem to have a lot of knowledge." A third similarly stated, "The facilitators give you like a lot of information and they experienced it before where they know a lot about the situation [i.e. domestic violence] that we were in." Other participants pointed to what they saw as facilitators' ability to manage the group. Some participants expressed this as facilitators' ability to "read" clients, or understand where they were in the process. For example, one participant stated:

> They to have a good understanding of how people in that situation worked. They'd done it enough times that they could like get behind the scenes with people. They were keeping tabs on who was making progress, and who was just kind of saying the same old, same to get through the week.

Another similarly stated, "I can tell she is skilled in is reading people and knows where they are at. I can tell she's been doing it a while and she's educated at what she's talking about." Other participants pointed to facilitators' ability to handle difficult clients. For example, one participant stated, "The way the facilitators handle negative attitudes in class. They're pretty good at swinging it back to the idea of we're not there because of what somebody else did. We're there because of what we did." Another participant offered, "She has experience in what she is doing, even her patience dealing with people who don't cooperate, dealing with all kind of people. She handled those situations very well, which was also a learning experience for me." Thus, participants endorsed what they saw as the facilitators' extensive knowledge of IPV and experience working with clients.

When asked how these qualities benefited the process, participants asserted that such experiences allowed facilitators' to do two key things. First, facilitators' expertise and knowledge of IPV allowed them to present information to clients in a way that was understandable. Clients expressed this in various ways. For example, one participant framed this as being able to make a clear point. He stated, "She knows what she's talking about and she gets the point through. She does a very good job of getting the point through, or getting it across." Another client felt that the facilitator provided relatable information, stating, "Her answers are something you can relate to. They are something you can understand. Some people are very hard to understand. I can definitely relate to what she says." Others described what they saw as facilitators' ability to communicate clearly, "She knows how to communicate. She demonstrates it all the way through like—she understand what the book and the concept is, but she knows how to express it in a way that you can understand it." Another similarly stated, "The way that she explains things to us to make us understand. She explains things in detail to where you won't be really confused. You can understand what she is saying." Thus, participants felt that a good facilitator was one that had the ability to relay information to the group in a way that made it easy for clients to understand. As one participant stated:

> You ain't got to strain your brain to try to figure this out. They break things down at you. I like the way they break things down. I mean ‘cause some people might not know what other people be saying. And they be like, break it down in pieces you know to let you know that this is right, you know?

Second, participants felt that facilitators' ability to manage the group provided structure and kept clients "on task." Some described how facilitators' ability to "read" clients allowed them to meet clients at where they were in the process, and to address resistance without causing much disruption to the group. One participant provided an example of this, stating:

> We had a guy in there . . . she did a good job with him. I watched her a couple of times he was talking, you know saying "it's not my fault." She didn't argue. She just talked about it, let him get his feelings out, then she talked about his feelings and went right back to what we talking about. And what could have been a twenty minute conversation turned into probably maybe ten, maybe less.

Another client similarly stated, "Some of the guys try to take it into another direction, but she never gets sidetracked. I have never seen an instructor who could do that so well and not make people feel bad about what you're feeling." Other clients described what they saw as facilitators' general ability to ensure that the group was not derailed by one client. As one participant stated, "They are very good at what they do. They want you to speak freely but they don't want you to dominate the meeting either. So I think they do a good job of that, keeping us on task." Another similarly stated, "She guides and directs very well. Some people will go on a tangent. She takes the time to deal with it, but she does it in a very cordial, quick manner so that we can get back on topic." Thus, participants endorsed what they saw as the need for facilitators to have experience working in IPV—this experience was vital to facilitators' ability to effectively relaying information in ways clients could digest, and to keeping the groups running and moving forward. As one participant summarized:

> I think that somebody like [facilitator] that mediates the group well, [and] that is educated in that type of background and can explain things is very important because if it wasn't that, then it would just become a "woman haters" group or something like that, which is not right.

### Facilitator Gender

Finally, participants overwhelming endorsed a female facilitator as being beneficial to the program. Many participants admitted that they initially had reservations about a female being present in the group, "When I learned there was female I didn't know what to think. I honestly didn't know what to think because you are thinking that this is going to be biased. I thought she would be tougher on us." Another similarly stated, "I was a little skeptical at first when I went to group and there was a woman. I was weary that they were going to be preaching instead of teaching." However, upon interacting with the facilitators, participants began to see the value of having a female facilitator. As one participant stated, "At first I didn't really understand that it was a men's group and [facilitator] was in there, but she brings a lot to the group. She adds a lot to it. Her past experiences, her knowledge of the topics." Another participant stated, "It was interesting to say the least. A woman in a men's battering class. I was surprised when I got there. But once she got to talking, I thought, she does have something I can learn from." Thus, most participants recognized that having a female facilitator in the group was ultimately beneficial.

When probed further, however, about their preferences for facilitator gender, overwhelming a majority of clients endorsed mixed-gender co-facilitation. These participants often stated that they valued being able to hear "both points of view" in the group. As one participant stated, "I think it is good having a female and male. Because you can see what the male version looks like, and the female version. So it's straight forward, instead of tunnel vision." Another stated, "You get two different perspectives on everything. The women's perspective is completely different than the guy's perspective. So that was really helpful to get two opinions." Others also described the benefits of what they saw as the male and female facilitators' ability to role model positive interactions. As one participant stated, "They disagreed from time to time. So it showed kind of a positive relationship role model. You need that obviously. Especially if you are here teaching a class like that." Another stated, "It's helpful to have both, they work with each other and show how to work things out and I think that's pretty helpful. So I think that's a good idea." Thus, these participants felt that having mixed-gender facilitated groups allowed them to get the perspective of both a man and a woman, and to witness positive interactions between the two. One participant summarized:

> I would say they are a good team. They each had their own way of leading the group, but they worked together. They were both good at leading the group. [Facilitator] was always there from a woman's point of view. That was alright because we don't get to experience all that.

A handful of participants, on the other hand, felt that groups should *only* be facilitated by women. These participants explained that having a male facilitator present made it more difficult for them to express their feelings. As one participant stated, "You can't really express your feelings [with a guy]. Most guys probably show their emotions more toward a female and not to a man. I couldn't show my emotions to the man because it didn't feel right." Another stated, "I can open up to women more than I can a man. It's easier to talk to a woman. I think I am able to present more on the table talking to a woman than talking a man." Likewise, these participants felt that they could learn more from a woman, than they could a man. As one participant stated, "It is better when there is only a female facilitator. It's easier to learn if you are getting a female's point. It is better run by a woman." Another similarly stated, "I'm learning how a woman thinks about the things that we do there and discuss. I don't think I would get as much out of the class with the male facilitator. I don't think I'd learn as much." These same participants also interestingly felt that the *absence* of a woman in group would make BIPs "one sided." As one participant stated, "If they just had a man in there I wouldn't come. A man would just naturally take sides. It wouldn't work out if a man taught the class." Another similarly offered, "With only a male, it would be one sided. You have a male instructor and a whole room full of males, it's going to be 'Oh yeah, she shouldn't have did this.' Like I said one sided." Thus, a few participants felt that BIPs should only be facilitated by women and that having a man in group deterred their learning process. As one participant stated:

> I think having only a woman is better than having a guy, definitely I feel a little bit more comfortable talking about the situation because she'll give us her side of it and give us a different view because she's a female. A male would only see the male part of it, and we wouldn't really learn anything about how the other person feels.

Finally, two participants strongly preferred male-only facilitation. Both felt only another man would truly be able to understand them and offer insight into how to sort out their problems. One stated, "A male can give it to us from a male perspective. He can tell me from his experiences and what he learned as far as how to deal with it, from a male's point of view." The other similarly stated, "I think it should be just men so we can discuss things in a manly way. Knowing there is the guy that has been through it that can help you, give you some feedback to help that situation out."

## DISCUSSION

As part of our two-year ethnographic study, we interviewed 76 male perpetrators of IPV on their experiences attending a BIP including their perspectives on what they found helpful or beneficial about the group facilitators. Participants endorsed a number of characteristics and attributes of facilitators that fostered their engagement in the program and enabled the learning process. Our study has implications for understanding what components of BIP facilitation might be important for helping to reduce client resistance and for fostering engagement in programs, as well as how facilitators might motivate clients to learn and work toward prosocial behavioral changes as a part of the BIP process.

Participants described facilitators' investment in the program and non-judgmental demeanor as helping to minimize their resistance to the BIP. Our findings are in keeping then with other studies that have similarly shown how perpetrators resonate with facilitators who display a deep concern for men, and/or supportive and non-judgmental attitudes (Boira et al., 2013; Parra-Cardona et al., 2013; Shamai & Buchbinder, 2010; Silvergleid & Mankowski, 2006). Furthermore, research has found that BIP clients often are reluctant to disclose their abusive behaviors in part due to shame, embarrassment, and fear of judgment (Campbell, Neil, Jaffe, & Kelly, 2010). Additionally, trust between facilitators and clients, validation of client experiences by facilitators, and clients' feeling not judged for their behavior have all been found to reduce client resistance and promote openness (i.e., engagement) among perpetrators (Bailey, Eisikovits, & Buchbinder, 2012; Campbell et al., 2010; Chovanec, 2009, 2012; Parra-Cardona et al., 2013; Rosenberg, 2003; Scott & Wolfe, 2000). Taken together with these studies, our findings suggest that developing a supportive and in particular, non-judgmental, environment in which perpetrators feel as though the facilitators are invested in them, and in which they can feel safe may subsequently increase perpetrator receptivity to the BIP process and foster openness in groups. Finally, it is unclear why participants' view of facilitators as "committed" (i.e., working toward ending IPV as a social issue) specifically engendered their participation—it could be that this explanation was used to "legitimate" facilitators and position their concern as "authentic" or "real." Nonetheless, further research is need on the role that fostering a supportive and safe environment may play in reducing resistance and developing a productive working relationship between clients and facilitators.

We also found that participants endorsed the use of non-confrontational strategies to solicit their engagement, while *at the same* time also described facilitators' ability to challenge them on their behaviors as vital to their learning process. Confrontation is a component popularized by the Duluth model; proponents of this model see failure to confront clients' delusions, victim blaming, denial or minimization as a form of colluding with perpetrators (Pence & Paymar, 1993). Thus, confrontation is seen as necessary to disrupt abusive behaviors and assist in reducing perpetrator denial. However, confrontational strategies designed to challenge perpetrators have been somewhat controversial in the BIP literature. On the other hand, some researchers have called into question the use of confrontational strategies and suggested that confrontation only serves to reinforce the dynamics of power and control that are characteristic of abusive men, and reduce facilitators' ability to develop a working alliance with BIP clients, one built on trust and shared goals (Milner, 2004; Murphy & Baxter, 1997). These scholars also argue that confrontation inadvertently increases resistance to the BIP process and thus, decreases the ability of programs to have a therapeutic effect on perpetrators (Mankowski, Haaken, & Silvergleid, 2002; Murphy & Baxter, 1997).

That our participants described both non-threatening ways of promoting their engagement *and* direct challenges to their behavior suggests that perhaps there is room in BIPs for a balance between these two strategies. Indeed, there is support, albeit limited, in the literature for this presumption. For example, Silvergleid et al. (2006) found that their participants reported the need for a similar kind of balance between confrontation and group safety (i.e., listening to men and speaking to them respectfully). Likewise, Holtrop et al. (2017) found that clients reported appreciating facilitators ability to get them to "open up," while also promoting honesty in the group, although some clients felt facilitators pressed "too hard". Boira et al. (2013) also found that clients reported various strategies facilitators used to encourage participation, but also confront clients when need be. Finally, Parra-Cardona et al. (2013) similarly found their participants appreciated facilitators' ability to engage and motivate them, while also challenging them to change. Our research is in keeping with these previous findings and furthermore, suggests that perhaps the use of non-threatening motivational techniques and direct confrontations or challenges to client behavior need not be mutually exclusive strategies. Rather, successful BIPs may need to develop a fine balance between maintaining a safe, non-threatening, but honest and direct environment. However, more research is needed to understand both how to develop that balance within BIPs, and when and how to use confrontation as a mechanism for learning rather than reproach. Furthermore, that participants from both the Duluth based program and the Emerge based program in our study reported that facilitators used this kind of strategy is telling; it suggests perhaps, as others have, that despite many BIPs' adoption of one model or another, most in reality may utilize a combination of approaches in their intervention with men who perpetrate violence (Aaron & Beaulaurier, 2016).

Participants also identified facilitators' expertise, and in particular, their ability to relay information in an easily understood fashion as helping to promote their learning process. To our knowledge, only one other study has reported on BIP clients' perceptions of facilitators' professional skills or expertise. Boira et al. (2013) found that facilitators' professional abilities seemed to play a role in the development of a therapeutic bond between clients and BIP facilitators. Thus, it is unclear to what extent the perception of "expertise" and/or facilitators' skills as therapists play a role in fostering change among perpetrators. However, it does beg the question of who is appropriate to facilitate BIPs and what kinds of training facilitators might need. Current state standards vary on the required education and training for facilitators (Maiuro & Eberle, 2008; Price & Rosenbaum, 2009). Most, at minimum, require a bachelor's degree in a human services field and/or training or experience in the area of domestic violence (Price & Rosenbaum, 2009). However, as Maiuro et al. (2008, p. 145) have pointed out "the development of domestic violence perpetrator treatment specialization continues to remain outside the domain of any particular health care degree or professional discipline." Furthermore, as these authors have pointed out, a professional degree does not necessarily guarantee that facilitators are equipped with the kinds of basic skills that are needed in order to successfully address perpetration of IPV as university curricula may not adequately address IPV (Maiuro & Eberle, 2008). Thus, even with education and appropriate training, some individuals may not be suited to working with perpetrators. Our findings suggest, then, that facilitators may need both expertise and education, *and* interpersonal characteristics that allow them to work closely and with perpetrators, skills that are often not easily "trained." Future research, therefore, should be dedicated to understanding what characteristics, beyond education and training, facilitators of BIPs might need to be successful and if there characteristics that are beneficial that cannot be "trained" (e.g., interpersonal skills, or empathy).

We also found that our male IPV perpetrator participants strongly endorsed having a female facilitator in groups as it provided them a sense of comfortability in terms of sharing their feelings, opportunities to see positive male–female interactions, and an impartial ("both sides of the story") perspective on their behaviors. The use of mixed-gender co-facilitation has been endorsed in state standards (Austin & Dankwort, 1999) and is among the most common model for BIPs (Price & Rosenbaum, 2009). Furthermore, research on BIPs has, traditionally, supported mixed-gender co-facilitation (Adams & Cayouette, 2002; Austin & Dankwort, 1999; Gondolf, 1997; Pence & Paymar, 1993; Roy, Lindsay, & Dallaire, 2013). Proponents of mixed-gender co-facilitation argue that within the context of BIPs, interactions between male and female facilitators can be used to model healthy relationships (Adams & Cayouette, 2002). Additionally, having a female facilitator in-group allows BIP clients the opportunity to interact with women in a healthy manner and practice gender role socialization (Adams & Cayouette, 2002; Price & Rosenbaum, 2009). Furthermore, we found that some participants were weary of having a male-only BIP and felt that it would de-legitimize the work done in the group by making it all "one-sided." Indeed, others have argued that male-only facilitated BIPs is counter-productive to a process that is specifically designed to challenge gender inequitable beliefs, and that not having a female in group runs the risk of failing to give men the chance to engage in constructive dialog about gender, abuse, and so on (Blacklock, 2003). Only one study to our knowledge has examined the issues of facilitator gender from the perspective of BIP clients in depth (Roy et al., 2013). Roy et al. (2013) found that while some participants saw female facilitators as "preachy" or "lecturing," and male facilitators were "too aggressive" and "insistent," overwhelmingly most endorsed mix-gender co-facilitation as the best format. Similar to our study, their participants appreciated the balanced perspective that came from male–female facilitated groups. Furthermore, their participants also recognized the risk of collusion and subsequently superficial therapeutic context that could occur in male-only groups. Our results therefore support the presumption that male–female facilitated groups are favorable, and that furthermore, perpetrators engaged in a BIP are often cognizant of the benefit of mix-gender co-facilitation and specifically, find it useful for helping them to learn during the process. The reality of ensuring a two-facilitator, mixed-gender approach, however, for many programs is difficult. BIPs are often constrained by financial or other issues that may prohibit them from being able to sustain more than one facilitator per group (Morrison et al., 2016). Thus, more effort is needed to ensure adequate support of BIPs, and future research should focus on how BIPs might achieve the desired goals of modeling healthy relationships and promotion of gender equity in absentia of mixed-gender co-facilitation.

## Limitations

This study has several limitations that are worth mentioning. First, due to confidentiality and safety concerns for participating BIP clients, we chose not to collect demographic (e.g., race, age, socio-economic status ) information on clients. Furthermore, the racial demographics of our region primarily consist of White and African American/Black populations, with a minority consisting of Asian, Hispanic, or other populations. Thus, the participants in this study very likely do not encompass a culturally or racially diverse set of perspectives. It is likely that perpetrators from other areas of the country where cultural and racial diversity is greater may have different perspective than those presented in this study. Relatedly, because we did not collect demographic data, we are not able to compare participant perspectives across or between groups of participants (e.g., those responses from men of different racial, age or SES backgrounds). Second, we also chose, for confidentiality purposes, not to collect any programmatic information on clients (e.g., length of time in BIP, IPV charges). Thus, it is unclear to what extent clients' responses would vary given a consideration of those factors. Third, we recruited participants from two community-based BIPs who primarily served heterosexual, adult male perpetrators of IPV who against female partners. Arguably, then, the perspectives of IPV perpetrators who are female, or who represent the LGBTQ+ community may also differ than the perspective presented by our participants. Fourth, the programs in which the participants were recruited from utilized two different curricula or BIP models. Our analysis, however, yielded no differences thematically between participants enrolled in one program or the other. It is unclear as to why this may be the case, and/or if participants enrolled in programs which utilize the same models in other parts of the country would likewise yield similar results. Finally, despite probing for negative or unhelpful aspects of facilitation, our participants overwhelming endorsed only the positive attributes of facilitation, and when pressed identified only factors related to the program at large (and not specific to facilitation) that they disliked (e.g., payment, length of time of enrollment, location). Thus, as is common in qualitative studies, the perspectives presented by our participants and the overwhelming positive response to facilitation presented in this work may be the result of desirability bias, or the participants' tendency in research to share perspectives that they perceive to be "correct" or to position them in a favorable light.

## CONCLUSION

In our two-year study of BIPs, we found that male BIP client participants endorsed a number of characteristics of facilitators that helped to reduce their resistance to the group process and assisted in engaging them in the learning process. Facilitators who were perceived as committed to the program, and who displayed a non-judgmental demeanor helped to minimize client resistance, while those who were honest with clients, challenged them on their behavior and exhibited expertise and knowledge of IPV aided in engaging clients in the learning process. Participants overwhelmingly, as well, endorsed the need to have a female facilitator as part of the group to further promote engagement and learning. This study has implications for thinking about how BIPs can better engage clients in prosocial behavioral changes. In particular, our work helps to identify what components of BIP facilitation might be important for reducing some of the resistance that may lead to client attrition and suggests that clients respond positively to critical feedback when they perceive it as deriving from a place of support and empathy. Training for BIPs may want to consider how facilitators can best balance supportive approaches with those that directly challenge and confront clients. Furthermore, future research should expand on the thematic categories identified in this work, and continue to seek to understand clients' perceptions on what aspects of facilitation are useful for minimizing their resistance. Larger, quantitative studies of clients and their assessments of what they find beneficial among BIP facilitators, in particular, would help to improve program efficacy by ensuring facilitators maximized their ability to engage clients.

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