

Preventing Violence Against Women: Challenges For Feminist Practice

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What we want to do ...

- Introduce DV Vic & Victorian family violence reform process
- Explore dilemmas faced by feminist services in implementing state agendas
- Look at examples of how DV Vic & anti-violence agencies in Victoria are tackling issues of governance & practice in a context of reform and accreditation (drawn from a discussion at the DV Vic AGM 2008)
- Try to find some meaning/learning

A matter of clarification

- Our title: Preventing violence against women.
- The notion of prevention is used here in a generic way, not in terms of primary prevention
- Examples of specific FV (Primary) Prevention activities:
 - VicHealth Framework;
 - A Right to Respect: Victoria's Plan to Reduce Violence against Women 2010-2020

Domestic Violence Victoria (DV Vic)

The peak body organisation for family violence services for women and children in Victoria

To promote, support and advocate:

- for the rights of women and children to live free from violence; and
- for best service system outcomes for women and children experiencing family violence

DV Vic's key activities

- DV Vic acts as a central point for its members for information, analysis and support regarding:
- State and Federal Government policy;
- State, Federal and International developments regarding family violence and associated issues;
- Best practice in responding to women and children experiencing family violence and in service provision

State FV reform – the choice

- Competitive funding submission process by State govt
- ‘As a peak body speaking for the sector, we had to choose between continuing to participate in the ‘community partnership’ with the Victorian Government in order to influence or temper this process, or to protest against the process by leaving the ‘partnership’. We decided to continue but DV Vic members were divided about that decision.’ (Fiona McCormack 2008)

A win for a gendered analysis

- ‘One of the issues DV Vic successfully advocated for was that the criteria for funding include being able to demonstrate expertise in the practical application of a gendered analysis of domestic violence’ (Braaf 2008: 33)
- This win by DV Vic goes to the continuing struggle between the state and women (women’s groups?) as to who names and defines violence and who constructs the response to violence (Orr 1994)

The classic women/state dilemma

- The DV Vic dilemma about partnership with the state is one faced by women's services since their establishment in Australia
- Questions/pressures of mainstreaming, co-optation, disengagement have been canvassed by feminist theorists (eg Adamson et al, 1988)
- Originally presented as a dichotomy – disengagement OR mainstreaming (Adamson et al 1988)
- Relationship with the state is not a one-way street – is 'co-constitutive' (Chappell 2002: 179)
- In Australia, feminists inside the state 'have been able to prise open new avenues for reform' (ibid); feminists have agency and can achieve objectives by engaging with the state

Feminist management

- Hallmarks of feminist management in a DV service (Bartlett et al 2003):
 - Acknowledging domination/submission dynamic in domestic violence; mirroring in organisation
 - Establishing clearly agreed ways of working together, transparency, documented policies
 - Creating a learning organisation environment
 - Acknowledging women's multiple roles; nurturing work environment

Management challenges

- For workers, 'management was still management, whether feminist or not' (Bartlett et al 2003: 39)
- Conflicts need to be 'named and debated openly' (Egan & Hoatson 1999: 405). More hierarchical structures and decision making do not necessarily minimise conflict.

Management challenges – cont-

- Services successful in managing change 'have accepted that flat organisations are no longer effective, negotiated compromises with staff and ensured direction and security without losing integrity and a sense of social justice' (Egan & Hoatson 1999: 411)
- Fight to retain core feminist principles, gender analysis, individual and structural change, diverse strategies (Egan & Hoatson 1999: 413)

Feminist practice 1989

- A group of women organizers in the USA developed a framework for feminist organizing (Mizrahi 1989)
- Methods and approaches include:
 - Emphasis on collective problem-solving
 - Process as part of the product/goal
 - Creating opportunities for leadership and skills development
 - Utilizing consciousness-raising
 - Emphasis on consensus, cooperation, collaboration, coalition building
 - Anticipate conflict and work towards conflict resolution model
 - The use of praxis

Feminist Practice 2008

- DV Vic Code of Practice
- Practice within a context of:
 - Human rights
 - Feminist analysis
 - Social justice
 - Reflective practice

Feminist practice (AGM 08)

- What women said:
 - Women focused
 - Social change: individual & structural
 - Up for scrutiny
 - The personal is political
 - Process is important

Feminist governance (AGM 08)

- What women said:
 - Value driven
 - Personal is political
 - Working to change structural disadvantage
 - Evolving; structural changes over time & taking feminist philosophy with the changes
 - Power is owned and made accountable
 - By women, for women

What does this mean for practice and governance?

- Links & connections between what constitutes feminist practice and feminist governance
- However, whilst inter-related, practice, management and governance are separate functions
- Implications for practice?
- Implications for governance?
- Implications for policy?

State accreditation process for SAAP funded FV organisations

- Has it been a feminist process?
- From Collectives to Boards of Governance
 - Collaborative management
 - Transfer strengths of feminist structures
 - Philosophical changes & challenges
- Awareness of use of (corporate/military) language; eg strategic plan – organisational plan
- Feminist supervision within a traditionally hierarchical organisation

How far have we come?

- Continuum from disengagement from the state and co-optation, rather than a dichotomy
- Services work out what will work best
- Feminist practice is alive and well – but may be called something else?
- In Australia we have always required women on the inside and on the outside to work together
- Fragility of feminist practice and management principles – they can almost disappear under a conservative regime; how can we make them sustainable?
- No-one seems very interested in this as a research area any more – why not?