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Carol (name changed) was a junior at New Canaan High School in Connecticut. Mike (name changed) was a nice guy. “Nothing made me suspect what would come down the road.” The first warning sign appeared when Carol became increasingly isolated from her friends and family. Then, the emotional abuse began, “He started with put-downs.” When Carol tried to break-up with him, he would apologize, buy her gifts, beg her, and promise he would change. The abuse would eventually resume and increase little by little. He was jealous and possessive. “He would hit me, kick me, pull my hair, pinch and twist the skin under my arm, punch my thighs. He never hit me in the face, because he knew I couldn’t hide my face.” He tried to kill her on three occasions. “He would say, ‘I could kill you and bury you and nobody would even notice you were gone, because you’re worthless, you don’t add anything to this world.’ When you hear these things over and over again, you believe them.”

Carol believes that if there had been awareness and education about what is acceptable and unacceptable in healthy dating relationships, she might have been able to get out of that destructive relationship. “The emotional scars are way deeper than the physical ones,” she says. “I’m middle-aged now and I still have nightmares. This guy comes back full-screen, full-color.”

-Westport Magazine, March, 2007 (Prowitt-Smith)

Though dating violence was obscured when Carol was in high school, recent research and victims speaking-out have increased awareness. We now know Carol’s plight is startling common and many victims account mirror stories. Two states, Rhode Island (Lindsay Ann Burke Act, 2007) and Texas (An Act: Relating To Public School Policies Designed To Prevent Dating Violence, 2007), have enacted legislation this 2007 session making Carol’s wish of dating violence education mandatory parts of student curriculum. Connecticut also attempted legislation last session to offer grants to schools who applied to the Department of Education for dating violence prevention programs (Connecticut General Assembly, *An Act Concerning the Prevention of Teen Dating Violence*, 2007). This report documents the vast research recently conducted to break the silence of dating violence, the actions many states have taken to cease its existence, a defense of why dating violence education needs to be included in school curriculum, and a proposed strategy for addressing this once hidden epidemic in Connecticut.

It is important to preface this report by providing the author’s background, as occasional reference will be made to it. The author interned and worked for the Women’s Center of

Southeastern Connecticut, first as a counselor for victims of dating and domestic violence, then as the Education Coordinator of the agency between 2002 and 2007. During that time, she collaborated with several middle and high schools in Southeastern Connecticut to provide education on dating violence and healthy relationships to students.

***What Is Dating Violence and How Prevalent is it?***

Alarmingly, one in five female high school students report being physically or sexually abused by a dating partner (Silverman, Raj, Mucci, & Hathaway, 2001), one in four girls (26%) in a dating relationship report having endured verbal abuse, and 80% of teens regard it as a serious issue for their age group (Teenage Research Unlimited, 2005). According to the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance Survey (Connecticut Voices for Children, Canny, & Beaulieu Cooke, 2003), in 1999 the proportion of youth who reported being victims of physical dating violence was higher in Connecticut than in any other state; 13% compared with 9%, respectively.

Dating violence is defined as a pattern of assaults and/or controlling behavior in an intimate relationship used by one partner over another to gain power and control through physical, sexual, psychological, and/or economic abuse. The term dating violence is sometimes called Intimate Partner Violence (IPV). IPV in adult relationships is commonly referred to as domestic violence. IPV is not limited to heterosexual relationships; studies indicate that abuse occurs in approximately 25 – 33 percent of gay and lesbian relationships (Barnes, 1998).

Physical abuse is any behavior that physically injures and/or has the threat of physical injury. Such behaviors include: hitting, punching, pinching, pushing, shoving, grabbing, slapping, kicking, choking, pulling hair, biting, throwing things, arm twisting, blocking exits, punching walls, knocking things around, damaging or destroying another's property, restraining,

pinning someone to the wall, blocking their movements, stalking, and using weapons (Massachusetts Department of Education, n.d.).

Sexually abusive behaviors include: name calling with sexual epithets, cat calls or other offensive noises or whistling, spreading sexual gossip or graffiti, comments about a person's body, unwanted verbal or written sexual comments, staring or leering with sexual overtones, sexual gestures, forcing obscene materials on others, pulling off or lifting clothes to expose private parts, unwanted sexual touching, rape or attempted rape (Massachusetts Department of Education, n.d.). Rape is defined as forced, manipulated, or coerced vaginal, anal, or oral intercourse.

An abusive relationship does not have to be physically or sexually abusive for it to be considered IPV. Indeed, the bulk of abuse, even in physically and/or sexually abusive relationships, often is psychological in nature. Psychological abuse is a very powerful form of abuse that erodes the victim's strength. If the abuser can maintain power and control through psychological abuse, the abuse may never become physical and/or sexual. Often times, abusive relationships begin with psychological abuse and increase to become physically abusive (Bancroft, 2002). Psychological abuse includes the following behaviors: put-downs, insults, name calling, offensive language, screaming or yelling at another in an intimidating way, and making threats (Massachusetts Department of Education, n.d.).

Though psychological, sexual, and physical abuses have been segregated in this paper, they often mesh and become difficult to distinguish. For example, if a victim is physically damaged in a relationship, the abuse often seeps beneath the skin and becomes psychologically damaging as well. These different forms of abuse serve as tools for those who are abusive to maintain power and control in the relationship (Bancroft, 2002).

Many experts in the field maintain that in incidents of IPV, it is imperative to decipher which partner has the power and control *most* of the time and which partner is scared, intimidated, controlled, and confused. Careful analysis of these relationship dynamics can yield which partner is the perpetrator of IPV and which one is the victim. While some believe that the use of any violence constitutes IPV, most experts make the distinction between violence enforced to obtain power and control and violence used in self-defense or retaliation from abuse (Molidor & Tolman, 1998).

### ***Who Are the Victims?***

Studies vary in their documentation of who are the perpetrators and who are the victims of teen dating violence. Some studies state that girls equally perpetrate dating violence and that boys are just as likely to be victims. Other studies state that girls are three to six times more likely than males to be the victim of IPV (Silverman et al., 2001). Molidor & Tolman (1998) found that while 37.1% of boys and 36.4% of girls experienced physical violence by a dating partner, in the absence of contextual information, these statistics can be very misleading and appear that girls and boys are equally violent. In order to fully understand these statistics, the depth of physical violence, context in which the violence occurred, and the consequences of such actions need to be considered. When asked about their worst incident of dating violence, 90% of boys reported the violence did not hurt at all or hurt a little, while 47.8% of girls said the violence hurt a lot and 33.6% of the incidents resulted in bruises or needed medical attention. Over half of boys reported laughing at the violence and another third reported just ignoring it. Girls, on the other hand, “reactions to the incidents of dating violence indicate that they are perceived as serious assaults having damaging physical and psychological effects” (Molidor &

Tolman, p.190) and girls were more likely to explain their use of violence as self-defense for violence and/or sexual pressure exerted against them (Molidor & Tolman).

Some professionals believe that males are less likely to report incidents of abuse out of embarrassment (Carlson, 2003), while others object to that allegation stating women and girls are equally embarrassed to report abuse (Bancroft, 2002). Some studies state that women are more likely to use emotional abuse than physical abuse, while other experts claim the bulk of male abuse against women takes the form of psychological abuse (Bancroft). The above statistics and conflicting professional viewpoints are not to imply that there are no male victims of female perpetrated dating violence, that victimization cannot occur within same sex relationships, or to minimize the experience of any victim; rather to document that IPV is overwhelmingly a crime of male violence against women (Carlson, 2003; Bancroft, 2002). In fact, according to the United States Department of Justice: Bureau of Justice Statistics (2000), eighty-five percent of IPV victims are women and women are five times more likely than men to be victims. Young women, in particular, between the ages of 16 and 24 have the highest rates of IPV—nearly three times that of other women (United States Department of Justice: Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2001).

### ***Why Don't They Leave?***

The question that is seldom asked, but will be addressed below is, “Why do the abusers abuse? Why don't they leave if they are unhappy in the relationship?” When we ask why victims stay, we inadvertently blame the victim for the abuse. Many teens feel trapped and isolated in abusive relationships. As in Carol's case above, abusers often prevent victims from spending time with friends and family (Prowitt-Smith, 2007). Abuse tends to happen slowly and before the victims know it, they may get caught in a cycle of love for their partner, hope that

their partner will change, and fear for what could happen if they break-up; these dynamics are commonly referred to as the cycle of violence developed in 1979 by Dr. Lenore Walker (1984). The cycle of violence has become a classic model for understanding abusive relationships (Carlson, 2003). The fear many victims feel in abusive relationships is not unfounded. Fully, about one in five teenage girls who have been in a relationship said a boyfriend threatened violence or self-harm when presented with a break-up (Teenage Research Unlimited, 2005) and the most dangerous time for a victim is when the relationship ends (United States Department of Justice: Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2001).

Sara Yezefski, an East Lyme Connecticut native now in her mid-twenties, recalls a physically, emotionally, verbally, and sexually abusive relationship she felt trapped in for three years before her 19<sup>th</sup> birthday:

I fell into the typical trap with my ex-boyfriend, which in social services is called the cycle of abuse. At the beginning, everything was perfect! (After all, if he was abusive from the start, I never would have stayed with him.) Eventually, things got bad. We would fight; he'd call me names and put me down. Then he would apologize and be nice, until it happened again, each time escalating in intensity. Yet, I always forgave him because I believed in my heart that he would change and be that sweet person I originally met.

-Sara Yezefski (Yezefski, 2005)

It is important to note the parallels between Sara's and Carol's stories. Both did not foresee the impending dangers of their relationship. They believed they had fallen in love with caring men. Apologies followed after each incident of abuse, thus reinforcing their will to stay in the relationship (Prowitt-Smith, 2007; Yezefski, 2005). The victim gets conditioned and the abuse gets associated with apologies, niceness, and presents (Carlson, 2003). Many victims explain a sense of traumatic bonding with their abusers as a result, much like Stockholm Syndrome where hostages become attached to their tormentors, the abuse makes the victim feel

they need the abuser more and more (Bancroft, 2002). “When a person, male or female, has suffered harsh, painful treatment over an extended period of time, he or she naturally feels a flood of love and gratitude toward anyone who brings relief...But in situations of abuse, *the rescuer and tormentor are the very same person*” (Bancroft, p.220). Thus, many victims feel caught in “a web” as they experience this cycle of violence in isolation from the social support network the abusers have denied them (Bancroft).

### ***Who Do Teens Turn To for Help?***

How would teens absolve of “the web” when caught in abusive relationships? Who would they turn to? Not adults. Ninety-seven percent of teens involved in abusive relationships did not tell an adult (Public Advocate for the City of New York & Gotbaum, 2005). About 73% of teens said they would go to a friend for help with IPV, yet only 33% of teens who have been in or knew of an abusive relationship ever told anyone (Teenage Research Unlimited, 2005). There are several reasons why teens remain silent. They may not want to lose their new found independence; they may love their abuser and not want their parents to break them up; they may be afraid that they would not be believed; they may be embarrassed and fear being blamed for the abuse; if they are in same-sex relationships, they may fear being outed (Public Advocate for the City of New York & Gotbaum); or the abuser has threatened to harm or even kill them, as in Carol’s case, if they disclose (Prowitt-Smith, 2007).

Amazingly, though teens in abusive relationship often remain silent, one in three teens knew a friend or peer who had been physically hurt by a dating partner (Teenage Research Unlimited, 2005). Even though the peers were aware of the prevalence of dating violence, 81% of parents either believe that dating violence is not an issue or were not aware that it is an issue (Knowledge Network, 2000). Some studies have documented that lack of parental knowledge of



dating violence may contribute to its prevalence (Carlson, 2003). Additionally, many community members are unaware of IPV and how to helpfully respond (Bancroft, 2002).

### ***Breaking the Silence of Teen Dating Violence***

“Dating violence is a silent epidemic,” declared Ann Burke (personal communication, September 16, 2007). She did not know her daughter, Lindsay, a youth from Rhode Island, was in an abusive relationship. She knew something was wrong with her daughter, but didn’t know what. She spoke with counselors, who told her that her daughter was probably on drugs and that she was an overprotective parent who needed to, “get a life.” Ann Burke had earned her Master’s in Health Education and had a degree in Nursing; she was astonished that in both of those fields, she never received any sort of education on IPV. Also disconcerting was the fact that none of the counselors she spoke to about her daughter had any sort of knowledge or background about dating violence. Ann Burke is convinced that if she and other professionals were more knowledgeable about dating violence, the fate of her daughter would have been different.

On September 13, 2005, Lindsay Ann Burke, a twenty-three year-old North Kingstown resident was murdered by her abuser, Geraldo Martinez after a two-year “tumultuous relationship” (Lindsay Ann Burke, n.d.). Lindsay was trying to break-out of the abusive relationship when she was murdered –the most dangerous time in an abusive relationship where victims are at a heightened risk for abuse. She was a recent Rhode Island College graduate ready to begin her career in Education when she was murdered. Her parents, Ann and Christopher Burke, believe that with her love of education, she would have wanted others to learn about the devastating impact of dating violence (Lindsay Ann Burke Memorial Fund, n.d.).

This year, the first year the bill was introduced to the Rhode Island legislature, the Lindsay Ann Burke Act passed into law. The law specifies that all schools must have a policy to deal with teen dating violence. The policies must include a statement that dating violence will not be tolerated, the guidelines for handling at-school incidents, and discipline procedures. The policy must also be published and available in the student handbook. In addition, all staff having significant contact with students (voluntary for other staff) must have training in dating violence which includes basic principles of dating violence, warning signs, and the school district's policy. The training must be offered annually to all new staff. All schools must also provide annual education in their health curriculum for grades seven through twelve which includes defining dating violence, recognizing warning signs, and characteristics of healthy relationships. Students' parents or guardians must be informed of the school's dating violence policy and it is strongly advised that parents receive dating violence awareness education. School districts must report to the Department of Education in their annual health report to assure compliance (Lindsay Ann Burke Act, 2007).

Rhode Island is not alone. Texas also passed school dating violence policy legislation this year. The dating violence policy must include a definition of dating violence as, "the intentional use of physical, sexual, verbal, or emotional abuse by a person to harm, threaten, intimidate, or control another person in a dating relationship" (An Act: Relating to Public School Policies Designed to Prevent Dating Violence, 2007) The Texas law is vaguer than Rhode Island's and provides for more flexibility within each school district. Texas's law merely states each school must have a policy that, "addresses safety planning, enforcement of protective orders, training for teachers and administrators, counseling for affected students, and awareness education for

parents and students,” (An Act: Relating to Public School Policies Designed to Prevent Dating Violence) but the details on how to administer each measure are not provided.

Sadly, as in Rhode Island, the death of a victim of dating violence preceded Texas’s law. On March 28, 2003, fifteen-year-old Ortralla Mosley was stabbed by her sixteen-year-old ex-boyfriend, Marcus McTear, to death in the hallway of Reagan High School in Austin, Texas. She had broken-up with him the day before. Two hours before her death, Moseley confided to teachers that McTear was had become more violent with her and that she was concerned about her safety. The fear of dating violence jeopardizing student school safety mobilized legislative action (California Attorney General’s Office and the California Department of Education, 2004).

California proposed an extensive law this year for school dating violence policy that did not pass. Ann Burke (personal communication, September 16, 2007) believed the reason The Lindsay Ann Burke Law passed so quickly and California’s law stifled, was because Rhode Island’s law did not mandate an allocation of funds for its support, whereas California’s bill requested such funding.

Though not law, Massachusetts’s Department of Education (DOE) (n.d.) developed the Teen Dating Violence Intervention and Prevention Program (TDVIP) which provides funds to public middle and high schools across the state to implement dating violence prevention and intervention programs. Massachusetts recognizes the merit of such programming by stating, “It is clear that dating violence is prevalent among adolescents, and that it can have severe and long-lasting social, psychological, and physical health repercussions for teen victims. There is a pressing need for prevention and intervention with adolescents, and adolescence is a critical time to do so. Because dating is relatively new to adolescents, they are less likely to be entrenched in patterns of behavior, and more open to changing attitudes and behaviors, giving educators a

unique opportunity to provide preventive education around teen dating violence, and to offer safe intervention strategies within the school” (Massachusetts Department of Education, n.d.).

The Massachusetts DOE provide recommendations to schools through their comprehensive guidelines on how to institute dating violence programs. The guidelines advise schools to: establish an advisory board on teen dating violence which includes students, parents, staff, law enforcement, and people from concerned community groups; develop a written school policy of no tolerance for dating violence; provide training for the school community which includes students, parents, educators, administrators, school nurses, and custodial and food service staff to increase awareness about dating violence; develop intervention, resource and referral services; and foster a school climate that has zero tolerance for dating violence (Massachusetts Department of Education, n.d.).

Though Massachusetts’s DOE (n.d.) guidelines for dating violence programs are well-developed, Ann Burke (personal communication, September 16, 2007) believes having a law in place is better. Guidelines merely offer a suggestion that schools provide dating violence policies, but do not mandate their existence; whereas laws require such policies. However, just because there is a law, will schools comply? Rhode Island’s and Texas’s laws provide for no penalty should schools not abide by them (Lindsay Ann Burke Act, 2007; An Act: Relating to Public School Policies Designed to Prevent Dating Violence, 2007). Brownwyn Blake from Texas Advocacy Project was instrumental in Texas’s legislation and mentioned that schools were doing little to enact a comprehensive dating violence policy; they were simply attaching “and dating violence” to any policy which pertained to sexual harassment. To remedy this inadequacy, The Dating Violence Prevention Team, a group of non-profit and governmental agencies developed a document entitled, *A Guide to Addressing Dating Violence in Texas*

*Schools* (2007) (personal communication, October 10, 2007). In the coming years, advocates of these legislative initiatives will need to do careful analysis and monitoring of systems issued to carry-out these laws to determine if the intent of these laws is realized.

It is disheartening to think the death of a victim of dating violence must occur before states feel the responsibly to pursue preventive measures. What about people like Carol who, even years later, have nightmares about their abuser coming back, “full-screen, full-color.” Carol’s testimonial proves that IPV is not a fleeting teenage experience, but leaves permanent psychological and sometimes physical scars. Many would argue subjection to lifelong trauma is as serious as losing one’s life and is reason enough to remedy this devastating social problem.

So, if dating violence is a serious social problem, why has it not been addressed before? Some inaction can be attributed to the perception of teenage relationships. Adults tend to not take teenage relationships seriously and explain the strong emotions many teens feel as “puppy love,” while teenagers are much more likely to perceive their relationships as serious. Adults believe since we do not see dating violence as a problem, it does not exist, and since it is viewed as non-existent, little research or attention has been allocated toward this problem (Carlson, 2003). However, just because adults do not believe teen dating violence exist, the above statistics counter this misjudgment and call for swift action.

Some may question whether or not it the responsibility of the educational system to address dating violence. Should it not be the responsibility of parents to educate their children about relationships? Dating violence initiatives can be seen through many lenses that, when focused in tandem, produce the sharp image that not only justifies legislative initiatives to address and prevent dating violence in public schools, but mandates such initiatives.

**Dating violence through the lens of domestic violence prevention:**

[E]ducation is perhaps the most important function of state and local governments.

-Brown v. Board of Education, 1954 (Carlson, 2003)

Research conducted with adults, shows that dating violence started at a young age is a risk factor for both experiencing and perpetrating IPV (Schechter & Edieson, 1996; Silverman et al., 2001). If left untreated, dating violence can easily transform into domestic violence in adult relationships (Carlson, 2003). Domestic violence is a vast American social problem that has incalculable human and financial costs on physical, psychological and sociological dimensions (Bullock, McFarlane, Bateman, & Miller, 1989; Johnson & Ferraro, 2000; Larkin, Rolniak, Hyman, Macleod, & Savage, 2000).

About one-third of American women (31 percent) report experiencing physical or sexual abuse by a partner at some point in their lives (Scott Collins et al. 1999). A conservative estimate speculates that two to four million women are battered by an intimate partner each year –about 170,000 of those incidents are so severe that the women need to seek medical help (Ashford, Lecroy, & Lorte, 2001). In fact, 22-35 percent of women treated in hospital emergency rooms are there due to ongoing abuse (Davis, 1995).

Survivors of domestic violence are more susceptible than non-abused people to physical injury and mental health problems, such as posttraumatic stress disorder, anxiety, depression, substance abuse and dependence, lowered self-esteem, and suicidal ideation (Larkin et al., 2000; Johnson & Ferraro, 2000). Domestic violence may be a precipitating factor for poverty, as it is a barrier to raising income and employment status. Battering undermines employment by: 1.) Causing repeated absences, 2.) Infringing on women's physical and mental health concentration, and 3.) Lowering self-esteem and aspirations (Johnson & Ferraro, 2000). Furthermore, the majority of welfare recipients have experienced domestic abuse in their adult lives –often

resorting to public assistance after fleeing abusive relationships and encountering a need for financial support (Barusch, 2006). In fact, approximately half of homeless women and children are homeless because they are fleeing from domestic violence (Zorza, 1991). As one can see, IPV is also fiscally expensive -costing the nation an excess of \$5.8 billion each year in direct medical and mental health care services and lost productivity from paid work and household chores (National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, 2003).

Children are also impacted by IPV. It is estimated 3.3 million children each year are exposed to violence against their mothers or female caretakers by family members and an alarming 40%-60% of men who abuse women will also abuse children (American Psychological Association, 1996). Children who witness IPV have exhibited more anxiety, aggression, depression, temperamental problems, less empathy, lowered self-esteem, and less verbal, cognitive, and motor skills than children who have not witnessed such violence. As mentioned above, children who witness IPV are more susceptible to experiencing and perpetrating violence in their adult intimate relationships (Schechter & Edieson, 1996; Silverman et al., 2001).

*Breaking the cycle of domestic violence:*

We can't solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them.

-Albert Einstein

Much of what we believe about IPV are myths that come from the abusers themselves; that the victims provoke the attacks; drugs and alcohol cause the violence; victims lie about incidents of abuse; that women are equally abusive; and that the victims are to blame. Since the majority of abusers are men and since men hold the power in society, their accounts of partner violence receive more credibility than the victims. In addition, most abusers are not mentally ill, but are

products of a society that has a long history of supporting IPV (Bancroft, 2002). Hence, since Americans have synthesized the problem of IPV through a society that is in allegiance with such violence, our solutions to the problem are also developed through that perspective.

The above Einstein quote is particularly applicable when attempting to comprehend America's solutions to ameliorate IPV. Just as the abusers blame their victims for abuse, we as a society also adhere to this ideology and build a simple, one-dimensional "band-aid" solution on that foundation. Our proposition is the victim "should just leave." To accomplish that goal, shelters, support groups, and counseling services have mushroomed in America since the 1970's; these services are necessary, but are all residual and do little to remedy the cause of IPV. American's believe, mistakenly, if only the victim would leave, then IPV would cease to exist. The victim has been afforded all of the responsibility for the problem of IPV and thus, those that are abusive and society at large, have been acquitted of all responsibility.

Contrary to popular belief, many victims do leave their abusers; however, IPV continues to be a social problem. Unfortunately, the majority of abusers, even with treatment, do not change, often become more abusive with time, and perpetrate violence against serial victims (Bancroft, 2002). What is needed is a new way of thinking to eradicate IPV. IPV needs to be addressed at its root and responsibility for change needs to be focused on the abusers and society at large. Adopting this new perspective would make the education system a natural arena to implement a solution to domestic violence.

*The root of IPV:*

When I do hit her, it's with compassion it's not like a blow. Cause, you know, sometimes I do hit her, but I don't go for her nose or her face or something, you know. I do it to get her attention. I'm still rational about it. I don't go crazy to the point, she's never been to the hospital, she's never...I never broke leg or bruised anything, not to my knowledge...

I feel bad and sometimes I apologize, when I hit Tamera, I apologize immediately, and say I'm sorry. But I tell her why. I always tell her why I hit her...



The trouble in our relationship is that we come from two different families. We were raised very differently. And I come from a more patriarchal background. And my father is the head of everything. Everyone comes to my father and they respect him. And he kinda carries the weight in my family...

There's nothing wrong with equality. Tamara's role in this relationship is equally as important as mine, only it's a different role from mine. I think my job is out there going out there winning the bread, let me concentrate on that...

And she doesn't see that if she went along with things, everything would be OK. Sometimes I say to myself, no, there's not ever a time where you should hit a woman, or anyone. But it's just, what should I do? I sometimes think about that captain on a ship. If he doesn't discipline his men, what happens? You know? I mean, we lose the war, because the men didn't listen to, obey his orders? But I'm not saying it's my job to discipline her, but should I let her run all over me?

-Michael (Castelworks, 1996)

In his book, *Why Does He Do That: Inside the Minds of Angry and Controlling Men*, Lundy Bancroft (2002) compares abusers to magicians in that they are easily able to manipulate their victims' and the public's perspective of them through creating confusion about their behavior, thus simulating a smoke and mirrors effect. Through education, however, abusive mentality becomes less of a mystery and abusers begin to lose their power when their behavior is dismantled and understood (Bancroft). What follows below is the unraveling of the abusive mind, which needs to be taught to students in the hopes of someday dissolving the misconceptions which allow IPV to permeate American society.

The above quote is a testimonial from Michael taken from *PBS's In the Mix's* 1996 show on dating violence (Castelworks) and provides a framework for understanding abusive mentality. In reality, Michael probably does not perceive himself as an abuser; in fact, most abusers think they are victims (Bancroft, 2002). In Michael's opinion, Tamara victimizes him because she may question his authority and if, "she went along with things" he would not have to hit her (Castelworks). In actuality, the altercation of the victim's behavior will not terminate the abuse, since abuse is not caused by the victim's behavior, but by the abuser's desire for power and control (Bancroft).

Continually, Michael justifies, minimizes, and denies his abuse, another common characteristic found in those who are abusive. His claim that he hits Tamera with “compassion” serves as a justification to utilize abuse to control his partner. Michael also minimizes the impact of the abuse on Tamera, alleging that it’s not really that big of a deal because he doesn’t, “go for her nose or face,” cause bruises, or send Tamera to the hospital, which is Michael’s definition of a “real abuser.” It is likely that Michael will advance to this level; as once abusers justify one level of abuse, they continue to escalate. Yet, most victims of physical IPV do not present with injuries that can be seen by the public; many injuries are centrally located and can be covered-up with clothes. Indeed, though abusers may appear “out of control” when they are abusive, they are overwhelmingly aware of their behavior, or as Michael puts it, “rational about it.” Often, though their behavior is consciously enacted, the underlying reason for the abuse, power and control, may be not clear to the abuser (Bancroft, 2002; Castelworks, 1996).

Note that a couple of Michael’s messages are contradictory. For instance, Michael states he believes in equality in relationships, but likens his role to a captain on a ship and implies Tamara’s role as the crew; these roles are clearly not equal and depict Michael reserves the more powerful position in the relationship. Michael claims it is necessary for the captain to discipline the crew, and then retracts by declaring, “I’m not saying it’s my job to discipline her, but should I let her run all over me?” Abusers often flip things into their opposites; in doing so, the victim is left in a state of confusion, which allocates power to the abuser (Bancroft 2002; Castelworks, 1996).

Sometimes Michael feels bad and apologizes to Tamera, a common event, as described in the Cycle of Violence (Walker, 1984) above. Apologies serve a couple of purposes; they help the victim feel better, thus securing the victim’s involvement in the relationship, and they also

make the abuser feel better. It is difficult to hurt another human being and not feel remorse; in cases of abuse, the remorse is often short lived and followed by a justification to alleviate this uncomfortable feeling. Directly after Michael apologizes, he shifts the responsibility for the abuse back on Tamera by saying, “I tell her why. I always tell her why I hit her.” In cases where abusers do change, they must first take responsibility for the abuse, not blame the victim in any way, admit the totality of the abuse, and take the steps to change, which often includes a minimum of two years in a quality batterers’ intervention program. Needless to say, this is difficult work and if abusers value power and control, over equally respectful relationships, the probability of change is bleak (Bancroft, 2002; Castelworks, 1996).

In Michael’s testimony, after declaring he does not leave bruises, he follows this minimization by stating, “not to my knowledge.” This statement is a startling confession, which reveals the lack of empathy Michael feels for Tamera. Indeed, if he were truly concerned for Tamera’s well being, would he not inquire about the harm he has inflicted? If he truly felt empathy for Tamera, would not he refrain from abuse all together? The reality is abusers often lack empathy for their victims and are narrowly focused on their own needs, to which they often feel entitled for their victims to also abandon their own needs and cater to the abusers desires (Bancroft, 2002; Castelworks, 1996).

Michael documents the root of his behavior stemming from his patriarchal family background. This sense of male power is even infused in the word, “family.” The word family stems from the Latin word “familia” which means “slaves.” The term was adopted to apply to what we now know as the “family unit” during ancient Rome to give men power over the women, children, and any slaves of the family. Literally, the man had power over, “life and limb” so that he could even kill anyone in the family if deemed necessary with no consequence

(Wilson, 1997). Though this term was adopted centuries ago, its legacy continues.

Unfortunately, one third of women killed in America have been identified as being murdered by their intimate partner; while only 3% of men are subject to such murder (United States Department of Justice: Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2005) and even in those cases, most experts believe it's typically victims who murder their abusers for self-protection.

Most experts agree IPV is a learned, patterned behavior that can be unlearned (Bancroft, 2002; Carlson, 2003). Partner abuse is fueled by abusers' belief that they own their partners and thus, feel entitled to exert power and control over them. This belief and value system may have been established in an abuser's family of origin and is reinforced through cultural messages that condone abuse (Bancroft).

Youth are consistently exposed to a myriad of cultural messages which condone abuse from prestigious and respected venues in American society. It is important to examine American social artifacts, such as the media, because such artifacts are a reflection of cultural values. For instance, the Beatles, Johnny Cash, Jimi Hendrix, Guns and Roses, and more recently Eminem have songs which depict, in an affirmative light, the homicide of women by their partners; Eminem even won a Grammy in 2001 (Bancroft, 2002).

On November 4, 2007, Fox's popular TV show, *Family Guy*, celebrated their 100<sup>th</sup> episode entitled, "Stewie Kills Lois" on prime time television. The show depicts a son plotting and eventually carrying-out the murder of his mother because he felt entitled to her care and was upset because she left for a cruise. He stated that he was going to show that "hussy" to not go on a trip without him by humiliating her through: putting bamboo splinters under all her finger nails, stripping her down and tying her to a bed, making her crawl on her hands and knees while dripping hot candle wax all over her back, keeping her filthy because she's been a bad girl,

gagging her with her own brazier, handcuffing her, calling her a “bitch”, and smacking her “ass” with a riding crop. Stewie eventually kills his mother by shooting her several times. The father ended-up getting charged with the mother’s murder and was given a trial. The father even joked about having purchased life insurance on his wife after he told her he wished she were dead during a fight on the cruise (TV.com, 2007). This show was a comedy, but the mentality presented is horrifyingly similar to the belief system of abusers.

These are just a few examples of the slew of media messages bombarding youth on a daily basis. What are young people to think of these perspectives and behaviors if celebrities are consistently rewarded through media coverage, fame, and money? Indeed, that IPV is normal at least and desirable at best.

Children are indoctrinated into IPV condoning roles at a very young age. Take Disney’s *Beauty and the Beast* (Walt Disney Pictures, 1991) and *The Little Mermaid* (Walt Disney Pictures, 1989) for examples; these movies depict the dynamics of dating violence described in Carolyn’s (Prowitt-Smith, 2007) and Sara’s (Yezefski, 2005) stories above. In *Beauty and the Beast* (Walt Disney Pictures), the main character, Belle, is barricaded in a castle with a frightening lion who she transforms with love into a prince; the change many victims hope for in an abusive relationship. In *The Little Mermaid* (Walt Disney Pictures), the main character, Ariel, is powerless without a voice as she attempts to seduce a prince into falling in love with her; she also gives up her family, friends, and who she is, a mermaid, to be with him—an isolation dynamic all too common in abusive relationships (as cited in Bancroft, 2002).

The social fabric supporting IPV has been tightly woven throughout centuries and will take years to unravel and reweave; relationship education in the schools would be instrumental in this process. *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) defines the following role of education in society,

“It is the very foundation of good citizenship. Today it is a principal instrument in awakening the child to cultural values, in preparing him for later professional training, and helping him to adjust normally to his environment.” The author vividly recalls a response by a student at New London High School in Connecticut in fall 2006 after watching the above Michael interview. The student supported Michael’s (Castelworks, 1996) opinion by proclaiming, “That’s just how it is.” Quickly, the class snapped back by deviating from the student’s view by explaining that Michael’s relationship was not a normal, healthy relationship. Perhaps this was the first time this student ever received this message. Perhaps this was the first step in preventing future IPV.

It is imperative that school systems are proactive in addressing issues of dating violence by offering education and policies for handling cases. When schools do not take this issue seriously, they simultaneously send messages to both the abuser and the victim. The victim’s experience is minimized, which may lead to hopelessness and despair, and in some cases danger. Those who are abusive, “learn that adults and the justice system generally overlook, ignore, or minimize the seriousness of teen dating violence are at a greater risk of carrying over the propensity for violence against intimates into adulthood” (Carlson, 2003, p. 353). In other words, those who are abusive learn their behavior is acceptable and continue their patterns of abuse. It is critical to interrupt this pattern during formative years before youth reach adulthood when the behavior becomes more solidified and difficult to reverse (Carlson).

### **Dating violence through the lens of health:**

In terms of teen health, recent attention has been focused on preventing teen pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), and drug use. However, dating violence has been correlated with all of these problems and without specific attention to its prevention, the impact of efforts to prevent teen pregnancy, drug use, and STDs will be underscored. A recent study

found more than half (51.6%) of girls diagnosed with STD/HIV reported being victims of IPV and that they were 2.6 times more likely to report an STD diagnosis than girls who have not been abused (Decker, Silverman, & Raj, 2005). Alarming, victims of IPV are four to six times more likely to become pregnant than non-abused teens. Sadly, studies have documented abuse either begins or intensifies when boyfriends learn of a pregnancy. Also, teens are more likely to be abused during pregnancy than adult women and, horrifically, up to 37% of pregnant teens are (Wiemann, Agurcia, Berenson, Volk, & Rickert, 2000). The correlation of dating violence and pregnancy has been linked to abusers actively trying to get their partners pregnant by, “manipulating condom use, sabotaging birth control use and making explicit statements about wanting them to become pregnant” (University of California, Davis, Health System, 2007).

Dating violence contributes to numerous other devastating health issues for teen girls. Girls who have been victims of dating violence are at an increased risk of substance use, unhealthy weight control, sexual risk behavior, pregnancy, and suicidal tendencies than girls who have not experienced such abuse (Silverman et al., 2001). The impact of dating violence seeps beyond the skin when emotional abuse is accounted for. Many victims report that emotional abuse is just as traumatizing, if not more traumatizing than physical abuse (Bancroft, 2002).

### **Dating violence through the lens of safety and legal liability:**

In the last decade, recent attention of school violence has focused on school shootings, a relatively rare occurrence compared to the prevalence of dating violence (Carlson, 2003; California Law Center, 2007). While the prospect for school shootings is rare, all schools are likely to have to deal with incidents of teen dating violence. Hence, it is imperative that schools are equipped with proper policies to do so, or they may be jeopardizing student safety and become subject to legal liability.

Schools have the obligation to make sure their students are safe. Since dating violence poses a risk to this safety, schools must implement policies to address it. In addition, since schools often force the contact of victims and perpetrators not inherent in other environments, they have a unique responsibility to intervene with IPV. In most states, students must attend school until their sixteenth birthday and due to districting constraints, most students cannot choose which schools they attend (Carlson, 2003).

In terms of legal liability, Carlson (2003) states three legal remedies, “many schools face significant liability for failure to address dating violence among their student populations, not only under federal statutes such as Title IX and 42 U.S.C. § 1983, but often also through common law and state tort law” (p. 354). Under Title IX, a student can file a sexual harassment suit if the abuse created a hostile school environment and the school was aware of such abuse and did not address the problem appropriately. A student could also file a claim under 42 U.S.C. § 1983, stating that the school acted under color of law and that the student’s constitutionally protected right to be secure in her person was violated. Alternatively, a student can claim negligent infliction of emotional distress by the school district under tort liability (Carlson).

Students have the best chance for success filing claims under Title IX of the Education Amendment Act of 1972, as many of the behaviors in abusive relationships constitute sexual harassment. Sexual harassment is sliced into three categories: physical, verbal, and visual. Physical sexual harassment includes, “standing in someone’s way or standing too close, bumping into someone or brushing against the person on purpose, patting, hugging or kissing [without permission, and] grabbing, touching or pinching [without permission]” (Carlson, 2003, p. 373). Verbal sexual harassment includes “threats, insults, comments about a person’s body, sexual jokes, suggestions or remarks, sexual stories or rumors, [written] notes . . . , pressure to go out on



a date (Carlson, 2003, p. 373).” Sexual harassment can be visual and include “staring at someone’s body, [looking at or drawing] sexual pictures or drawings, mimicking or pantomiming in an insulting way, or gestures or looks” (Carlson, 2003, p. 373). Courts have ruled several times that the intention of the harasser is not what determines what behaviors are construed as sexual harassment, but how the behaviors are viewed by the target of harassment; if a reasonable person would find such behaviors offensive, unwanted, unwelcome, severe, pervasive, and of a sexual nature, then the behavior is considered sexual harassment.

Therefore, since the dynamics of dating violence are patterned and replicate the above dimensions of sexual harassment, schools could be held legally liable for failure to protect victims. Indeed, such a suit was filed against Reagan High School in Austin Texas in the case of Ortralla Mosley described above. The school was made aware of Ms. Mosley’s harassment and did nothing to protect her. The school reached a settlement with Carolyn Mosley, Ortralla Mosley’s mother (Brownwyn Blake, personal communication, October 11, 2007).

### **Dating Violence Education: Does It Work?**

Dating violence education began to surface in the mid-1980s. Unfortunately, few rigorous studies have been conducted to determine efficacy of such programs and it is clear that further research is needed. Yet, in light of this deficit in research, the studies that have been conducted thus far have demonstrated promise and serve to direct future educational endeavors (O’Keefe, 2005).

*Safe Dates* (Foshee et al., 1998) is an example of an integrated community program that proves promising and is one of the largest attempts to evaluate a dating violence intervention (O’Keefe, 2005). *Safe Dates* is a stratified intervention for teen dating violence employing primary and secondary preventive measures. Primary preventive measures serve to prevent teen

dating violence from occurring by increasing awareness of dating violence and healthy relationships through student education. Secondary preventive measures are designed to decrease teen dating violence already in occurrence by creating a school culture and community that is supportive and responsive to the needs of victims and perpetrators (Foshee et al.).

The student education component of *Safe Dates* is targeted at eighth and ninth grade high school students and consists of a play, a ten-session curriculum, and a poster contest. The play depicts a teenage girl involved in an abusive relationship and how her friends support her to reach-out for help. For the poster contest, students may make posters on the prevention of dating violence. Though not all students participate in the contest, all of the students are exposed to the posters, as all students are asked to serve as judges and rank the top three posters. The ten, forty-five minute sessions of curriculum comprise education to influence dating violence norms, offer awareness on gender stereotyping, and provide conflict management skills (Foshee et al., 1998).

*Safe Dates* also addresses the role of community service agencies on addressing incidents of dating violence through education on providing support and referral services for victims and perpetrators. Community service agencies include, “social service, emergency room, health department, mental health, crisis line, and health department staff, school counselors, sheriff’s deputies [Connecticut would be police officers], and officers” (Foshee et al., 1998, p. 46). Support and referral services include: support groups for victims, counseling, and intervention programs for perpetrators (Foshee et al.).

Research to determine efficacy of *Safe Dates* was conducted with eighth and ninth grade students from fourteen schools in North Carolina which were stratified by grade and matched into pairs based on school size. Then, each pair was randomly assigned to serve as a control or treatment group. At the initial follow-up for evaluating the efficacy of *Safe Dates*, researchers

found, “25% less psychological abuse perpetration, 60% less sexual violence perpetration, and 60% less violence perpetrated against the current dating partner in treatment schools than control schools” (p.49). Even after four years post intervention, treatment students reported, “significantly less psychological, moderate physical, and sexual dating violence perpetration” (Foshee et al., 2005, p.8) than the control group.

Since years of socialization are the precursor to IPV, it would be naive to believe that effects of such socialization could be reversed with a simple program. Studies have revealed that effective programs are multidimensional, consistent, coordinated, long-term, and penetrate many systems that work with youth, such as schools, juvenile justice programs, and foster care systems (O’Keefe, 2005). Not only are educational programs important, but policies on handling incidents of dating violence are also imperative, as early intervention is key to ceasing later incidents of IPV (Carlson, 2003; Massachusetts Department of Education, n.d.; O’Keefe). Combining long-term educational programs, such as those mandated by the Lindsay Anne Burke Act (2007), with extensive policies on dating violence, as comprised by the Massachusetts’s Department of Education (n.d.), and an integrated community piece, would be the recipe for a comprehensive IPV intervention.

### **Rhode Island’s Legislative Strategy:**

After their daughter’s murder in 2005, Ann and Christopher Burke spearheaded legislation to break the silence on IPV. Their goal was to raise awareness through mandating education on teen dating violence in health class. Since Ann Burke is a health teacher, she was in the perfect position to initiate such an endeavor (Ann Burke, personal communication, September 16, 2007). Below are the steps that were taken to realize the Lindsay Ann Burke Act (2007).

#### **Step 1: Homework**

Prior to initiating legislation, Ann Burke armed herself with research on teen dating violence and Rhode Island's Health Education Curriculum Framework in a booklet entitled Health Education Literacy, which provides curriculum guidelines for grades k-12 and have all the topics that should be taught. Dating violence was already included in these guidelines; however, the parameters for such education were vague. Ann Burke wanted anyone whom she would try and get to support the legislation to know that the guidelines already provide for dating violence education, that she was not requesting something that was not already supposed to be covered, but that she was simply requesting more thorough standards (Ann Burke, personal communication, September 16, 2007).

### **Step 2: Visit to Office of Progressive Support and Intervention**

Next, Ann Burke visited the Office of Progressive Support and Intervention through Rhode Island's Department of Education, which is in charge of health education standards, to garner their support for the legislation. This Office has several employees, including health education specialists. Anne Burke was successful in soliciting this Office's support and after the legislation was introduced, she met the lobbyist for the Department of Education and also sent correspondence to the Commissioner of Education and his policy practitioners (Ann Burke, personal communication, November 24, 2007).

### **Step 3: Visit to the Rhode Island Department of Health**

After visiting the Office of Progressive Support, Ann Burke visited the Rhode Island Department of Health, because this Department has educational staff who work with the Rhode Island Department of Education in determining what health topics will be taught in the schools. The person in charge of legislation who works for the Rhode Island Department of Health

offered a letter of support and also sent the letter to the State House when the bill was heard in committees (Ann Burke, personal communication, November 24, 2007).

#### **Step 4: Building a Support Base**

The following agencies and individuals offered their support for the Lindsay Ann Burke Act (2007): The Rhode Island Department of Education, Rhode Island Department of Health, National Education Association, American Federation of Teachers, Rhode Island Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance (RIAPERD), a Brown University Professor who had worked with the Department of Health on a dating violence educational program, and the head of Rhode Island Student Assistance Counselors (a nonprofit organization that counsels students in schools who have drug problems or come from families with drug problems, but serves students with a variety of problems as well). Rhode Island Student Assistance Counselors had previously worked with the Brown University Professor and had been trained to deliver a dating violence program to youth. Ann Burke had also contacted the Association of School Superintendents and the Rhode Island Association of School Principals to solicit their support; however, these associations did not outwardly support the legislation, but they did not oppose it either (Ann Burke, personal communication, November 24, 2007).

The bill went to two committees: the House Committee on Health, Education, and Welfare and the Senate Judiciary Committee. Ann Burke was effective in gathering support in the educational community to target these committees. Several health teachers wrote letters of support and testified at public hearings. One health teacher who testified had been a victim of IPV, another grew up in a home witnessing domestic violence, and a third health teacher who had volunteered at the Rhode Island Coalition Against Domestic Violence also testified. An athletic director of one school district who grew up witnessing domestic violence wrote a letter,

along with two principals and a superintendent. Ann Burke contacted students from the University of Rhode Island and Roger Williams University and had them get petitions signed on campus. Several students came to the first hearing at the State House. Even Lindsay Ann Burke's best friend testified at both committee hearings. Several students from three local high schools also testified in support of the bill. In addition, all of the major departments and agencies supporting the legislation wrote letters to the committees who heard the bill (Ann Burke, personal communication, November 24, 2007).

When prompted to describe opposition to the Lindsay Ann Burke Act (2007), Ann Burke responded, "Although some people initially didn't like the idea of the bill, as it gathered more support, they also spoke in favor of it. I would rather not say who was reluctant at first, as the bill was passed and that is what is most important. I would say that one must be aware that not everyone will support it initially, but if handled properly, these groups or individuals could come around and be supportive. This is a political process and must be handled carefully" (Ann Burke, personal communication, November 24, 2007).

### **Step 5: Getting the Attorney General's Support**

Once Ann Burke had a solid support base, she petitioned Patrick Lynch, the Attorney General for the state of Rhode Island, for support. The Attorney General's office agreed to support the legislation and proposed it at the State House. The Attorney General's lobbyist got a state senator to introduce the bill into the State Senate and gathered needed signatures. The lobbyist also got a representative to introduce it into the House and gathered the remaining needed signatures (Ann Burke, personal communication, November 24, 2007).

First the bill was heard in the House's Health, Education, and Welfare Committee. It was then held and not voted on. Ann Burke, Christopher Burke, and their son and daughter-in-law,

along with the Attorney General, three health teachers, several students, the Brown Professor and her graduate student, the head of the Rhode Island Student Assistance Counselors, the Executive Director of the Rhode Island Coalition Against Domestic Violence, the head of the Katie Brown Educational Program, the lobbyist for the Department of Education, and Lindsay Ann Burke's best friend all spoke at that hearing and most of them spoke at the next hearing held in the Senate Judiciary Committee (Ann Burke, personal communication, November 24, 2007).

The Lindsay Ann Burke Act (2007) was overwhelmingly supported in the House and Senate of Rhode Island's legislature. The bill passed in the House by a 58/2 vote (State of Rhode Island General Assembly, *House Journal*, 2007) and in the Senate by a 37/0 vote (State of Rhode Island General Assembly, *Senate Journal*, 2007). On July 3, 2007 the Lindsay Ann Burke Act became law on the grounds that, "The General Assembly hereby finds, determines, and declares that when a student is a victim of dating violence, his or her academic life suffers and his or her safety is jeopardize" (Lindsay Ann Burke Act, 2007). Rhode Island was the second state in the nation to pass such legislation just after Texas's dating violence bill became law on May 18, 2007 (Texas Legislature, 2007).

This fall, Ann and Christopher Burke were invited to Utah for the National Association of Attorney Generals meeting to give a one hour presentation, along with Patrick Lynch, Dr. Jill Murray, and an Executive from Liz Claiborne, to attorney generals throughout the country. The goal of the presentation was to request the attorney generals to pass dating violence policy and education legislation in their home states (Ann Burke, personal communication, November 24, 2007). After the meeting, attorney generals from Ohio, Massachusetts, and Utah declared that they wished to pursue dating violence legislation in their states (Ann Burke, personal communication, December 1, 2007).

Ann Burke also attended a two day workshop in Washington D.C.; she was invited by the federal government, the National Institute of Health, Department of Health and Human Services, Center for Disease Control, and the Department of Justice. The workshop included researchers, practitioners, and a superintendent to discuss how the federal government would spend millions of dollars in research on dating violence and curriculum development and testing. The federal government plans on monitoring the success and/or failures of Rhode Island's legislation and also document initiatives of other states on dealing with teen dating violence (Ann Burke, personal communication, December 1, 2007).

**Texas's Legislative Strategy:**

To acquire Texas's legislative strategy, I interviewed Bronwyn Blake from Texas's Advocacy Coalition. Bronwyn Blake had worked this past legislative session in 2007 on the teen dating violence education and policy bill along with a number of other individuals and organizations. As in Rhode Island, dating violence legislation was also orchestrated by a mourning mother, Carolyn Mosley, after the murder of her daughter, Ortralla Mosley by Marcus Mctear in 2003. Carolyn Mosley, along with Representative Dawnna Dukes, Rae Spence (Marcus McTear's ex-girlfriend who he had also abused before dating Ortralla Mosley), and Shannon Sandra from SafePlace, a domestic violence agency based out of Austin Texas, spearheaded Texas's bill. Representative Dukes had approached Carolyn Mosley and SafePlace concerning her interest in initiating dating violence legislation. Shannon Sandra became instrumental in the advisement of writing the first draft of the bill. Representative Dukes and Shannon Sandra had a personal interest in advancing this legislation as both attended Regan High School as teens (where the murder occurred); both later became involved in planning



events at the school to promote this issue (Bronwyn Blake, personal communication, November 28, 2007).

Texas's legislation for teen dating violence education and policy did not pass the first time it was introduced to the legislature four years ago, as it ran out of time in the committee it was referred to. Since Texas's legislature only meets biannually, the dating violence bill was not presented to the legislature again until this year. This last session, however, the Texas Council on Family Violence (TCFV, the statewide domestic violence coalition) made this bill one of their public policy priorities. In addition to introducing the bill to the House, a Senate sponsor also introduced a sister bill to the Senate. The two bills raced each other, but ultimately the House Bill (HB121) passed (Bronwyn Blake, personal communication, November 28, 2007).

Support for HB121 arose from the sexual assault and domestic violence communities working together through the TCFV. The bill was sent to the House Committee on Public Education. On the day of the public hearing in front of the Committee, there was another bill being discussed on public and private school sports organizations, and to the advantage of advocates, the many school administrators, parents, and students that came to speak on that bill also signed cards expressing their support of HB121. TCFV also organized the following people to speak at the hearing: Mel Wexler, Chief Legal Council for the Austin Independent School District, Carolyn Mosely, and Rae Spence (Bronwyn Blake, personal communication, November 28, 2007). HB 121 passed in the Public Education Committee with eight Ayes, zero Nays, and one absent, and in the Senate Education Committee with six Ayes, zero Nays, and one absent (Texas Legislature, *Texas Legislature Online History*, 2007). The final vote in the House was 141 Ayes, 3 Nays, 2 Present Not Voting (Texas Legislature, *House Journal*, 2007), and in the

Senate a unanimous vote of thirty-one Ayes and zero Nays was achieved (Texas Legislature, *Senate Journal*, 2007).

**Focusing in on Connecticut:**

In the 2007 legislative session, Senate Bill 457 (S.B. 457), An Act Concerning the Prevention of Teen Dating Violence was introduced to the Connecticut legislature (Connecticut General Assembly, *An Act Concerning the Prevention of Teen Dating Violence*, 2007). The bill was a result of a summit sponsored by the Governor and the Office of Child Advocate (OCA) a couple of years ago in which over 350 students, teachers, and policymakers attended. The bill was initiated by the OCA and co-sponsored by Senators Judith Freedman, Toni Nathaniel Harp, and Edward Meyer. The Senators got involved for varying reasons. Senator Meyer represents Guilford which is one of the communities involved in the teen dating violence initiative where a number of students are developing curricula. Senator Freedman became involved after hearing from concerned students at a high school in Norwalk. Senator Harp recognizes that teen dating violence is an immense problem and wanted to be part of a solution (Jeanne Milstein, Child Advocate for the State of Connecticut, personal communication, December 4, 2007).

The initial intention of the teen dating violence legislation in Connecticut was to have all school districts develop curricula, but those spearheading legislation decided the idea was unrealistic in Connecticut and decided to draft a bill that would make the development of curricula voluntary for school systems (Jeanne Milstein, personal communication, December 4, 2007). S.B. 457 proposed legislation allocating the Department of Education to grant money to Boards of Education who applied for them to develop and implement teen dating violence prevention curricula (Connecticut General Assembly, *An Act Concerning the Prevention of Teen Dating Violence*, 2007).

S.B. 457 was first referred to the Select Committee on Children on January 18, 2007 where a public hearing was held on February 6, 2006. The Select Committee on Children developed a community force field analysis of supports and opponents of the bill. The committee listed the following individuals as supporters: Jeanne Milstein, Child Advocate for the State of Connecticut; Elizabeth C. Brown, Legislative Director Commission on Children; Sharon Langer, Senior Policy Fellow, Advocates for Connecticut's Children and Youth; Lori Caswell, MSW Student, UCONN School of Social Work Intern, Hartford High School; Linda Blozie, Director of Public Affairs, Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence; Jillian Spies, Young Women's Leadership Program, Permanent Commission on the Status of Women; Marlene J. Berg, Associate Director for Training, Institute for Community Research; Stephanie Hayes, Clinical Facilitator, SAFE-T Program for Inner City Teens, Hartford; Elizabeth Zuckerman, Law Student Intern, Center for Children's Advocacy; and Laura Cordes, Director of Policy and Advocacy, Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services Inc.. The report stated that there was no expressed opposition (Bishop & O'Connor, 2007). Along with the preceding supporters, the girl scouts, domestic and dating violence advocates, and a high school in Norwalk also offered support of S.B. 457. Though not outwardly projected, it is suspected that the Board of Education lobbied legislators behind the scene in opposition of the bill (Jeanne Milstein, personal communication, December 4, 2007).

S.B. 457 made it out of the Select Committee on Children with a unanimous ten to zero vote on March 6, 2007 (Connecticut General Assembly, *Select Committee on Children: Vote tally sheet*, 2007). The bill was stopped in Appropriations because the State Department of Education proclaimed they did not have the money to develop the curricula for teen dating violence prevention (Jeanne Milstein, personal communication, December 4, 2007).

The future direction of teen dating violence prevention legislation in Connecticut is unclear at this point. Since the 2008 legislative session is a short one this year, those initiating legislation may wait until next year when there is a longer session (Jeanne Milstein, personal communication, December 4, 2007).

### **What's next with teen dating violence prevention in Connecticut?**

Clearly a more scrupulous legislative analysis will need to be conducted than can be presented in this paper; however, the preceding research provides valuable input for future strategies to get teen dating violence education and policy legislation passed in Connecticut. Connecticut is no longer initiating a bill that had not been passed in other states and the victories and lessons learned from Rhode Island and Texas can set precedence for legislation and strategy in Connecticut. Jansson (2008) suggests the following seven steps to boost policy enactment: organizing a team/coalition, establishing policy goals, specifying a proposal's content and getting early sponsors, establishing a style, selecting power resources and framing strategy, implementing strategy, and revising the strategy (Jansson, 2008).

### **Organizing a Team/Coalition:**

All stakeholders who will be impacted by teen dating violence legislation need to be included from the beginning. The coalition can start with prior supporters of S.B. 457 listed above and develop into a diverse coalition, which will increase its strength; conversely, diverse coalitions are vulnerable to splitting and need to be initiated carefully (Haynes & Mickelson, 2006). Leadership needs to be established to help organize the coalition, community, and legislative agenda. Vigilant research and background information on dating violence, dating violence education, policy, and legislation, along with analysis of stakeholders needs to be realized by those initiating legislation before a coalition can form. Prior to enlisting any

organization in legislative efforts, Ann Burke undertook this extensive research and was well equipped when she visited with organizations and legislators (Anne Burke, personal communication, September 16, 2007).

The first place Ann Burke met with was the Department of Education (DOE) and she strongly advises people moving legislation in Connecticut to do the same, along with engaging the Department of Public Health. Extensive research of Connecticut's health education curriculum needs to be conducted prior to meeting with the DOE. Though Rhode Island's core health curriculum already included dating violence prior to legislation (though extremely vague) (Ann Burke, personal communication, September 16, 2007), Connecticut's has no provision for such topic, but one could infer that dating violence is referred to peripherally under some of the standards. For instance, the standards outline students are to "demonstrate strategies to stay physically and emotionally safe...use negotiation and conflict resolution skills (p. 45)...use a variety of strategies to demonstrate respect for and responsibility to others without bias, abuse, discrimination, or harassment, including race, color, sex, religion, national origin and sexual orientation...identify and avoid ways to reduce and/or avoid threatening situations, including sexual harassment, abuse, and assault" (Connecticut State Department of Education, 1998, p. 46).

There are eighteen domestic violence agencies in the State of Connecticut and many of them employ community educators who meet once a month at the Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence (CCADV). Domestic violence advocates and educators could serve as a tremendous power base in mobilizing the community to support dating violence legislation. For instance, educators could collaborate with students in a school to become involved, as well as engage health teachers within their districts to support legislation. Representatives and senators

in whichever committee a dating violence bill is sent to will need to hear from constituents within their community to help develop their support for the bill and since there are domestic violence agencies throughout the State, the agencies within the districts where key representatives and senators live could mobilize the community to call and/or write their legislators and speak at public hearings.

In my time as Education Coordinator for the Women's Center, I was able to successfully get into schools to provide education through those in the school system who saw dating violence as a problem, namely, health teachers, school guidance counselors, and school social workers. Many times these individuals would contact me voluntarily, but at times I would solicit them to provide education. I do not ever recall being denied entry into a school system, and if anything, the education was valued and demanded. I think it would be a fatal error on the part of legislative organizers to assume these individuals would be against dating violence legislation. Indeed, Ann Burke is a health teacher herself and thought mandating dating violence education was necessary and she was certainly not alone in Rhode Island. It is imperative to identify individuals within those communities who would be supportive of such legislation and include their engagement in efforts to enact a bill. Community educators from domestic violence agencies are in a good position to identify and invite individuals from these professions into joining in legislative initiatives. Perhaps those within the school system who support such legislation could be instrumental in mobilizing union members throughout the state to adopt an affirmative position on dating violence legislation. Also important would be the inclusion of the Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents and Association of School Principals in legislative endeavors.

**Establishing Policy Goals and Content:**

Rhode Island's legislation provides guidance on how to develop a dating violence law in Connecticut. In fact, Rhode Island's law is rather strong in that it mandates education annually in grades seventh through twelfth; a much heavier provision than Texas's law which just mandates dating violence education must be covered at some point. Since dating violence takes years to develop and years to reverse, it is essential to have consistent, ongoing coverage in health curriculum and I would suggest such a stipulation in Connecticut's proposed bill. This provision still allows for individual school districts and health teachers to decide how they would like to address annual teen dating violence education.

Of paramount concern for those on Connecticut's Teen Dating Violence Initiative last year who proposed S.B. 457, was opposition from those within the education community to a bill that would propose an "unfunded mandate" for teen dating violence education. Yet, this concern weakened the impact of the proposed bill, as many school systems already provided dating violence and healthy relationship education and only a few school systems would be affected by the legislation. When asked about opposition to Texas's legislative initiative, Bronwyn Blake (personal communication, November, 28, 2007) responded, "No real opposition. Some of the school districts were worried because it is an "unfunded mandate" but that has made them very receptive to our free advice and help." Concurrently, when asked about how to address an "unfunded mandate" with health teachers, Ann Burke (personal communication, September 25, 2007) reported, "We don't need to convince teachers of that....we need to convince them of the importance of teaching the topic...the severity of the topic, that it is a silent epidemic and in many ways is probably the most urgent topic to teach teens about....once you have a law, teachers have to teach it...the key is in training teachers about the topic." The preceding advice from Bronwyn Blake and Ann Burke provide insight on how to address the funding aspect of

dating violence education. Ann Burke was concerned that if funding was requested, the Lindsay Ann Burke Act would have died in appropriations; a valid concern, as this was the case in Connecticut. Ann Burke cited funding initiatives could come at a later date and that it was most important to get the education into the schools first (personal communication, September 16, 2007). I concur with the sentiments of Ann Burke and Bronwyn Blake. With inclusion of all stakeholders from the beginning, education regarding the importance of dating violence education, and allocating free consultation on how to provide education and adopt policy, I believe Connecticut can be successful in securing similar dating violence legislation and perhaps later seek funding for education.

In terms of a policy on handling incidents of dating violence, I would suggest the bill provide for the Connecticut Department of Education (DOE) to establish guidelines for school districts to implement. This was legislated in Rhode Island's bill and Massachusetts's DOE (n.d.), though not legislated, provide extensive guidelines for school districts on handling incidents of dating violence. Connecticut would not have to reinvent the wheel and could look to other states that have unearthed extensive guidelines for reference.

**Establish a Style:**

Unfortunately, a critical component in moving dating violence legislation would be the identification and inclusion of a tragic personal story, as was the palate in Rhode Island's and Texas's legislation. People are moved by personal stories and they serve to put a face on social problems and make them real. Domestic violence agencies often work with people who have loved ones murdered by their abusers and are in a good position to identify stories that would persuade the public and legislators into supporting dating violence legislation.



When asked about engaging the media to garner public support, Ann Burke advised caution. In Rhode Island, the media was not involved in coverage until April, three months before the Lindsay Ann Burke Act (2007) passed. The reason for the delay was the concern that opposition could develop to squander the bill if the media was engaged too early (personal communication, September 16, 2007). Since dating violence education and legislation policy has not been a controversial and divisive issue in Texas, Rhode Island, or Connecticut with the public or with the legislators, it would not be necessary for the media to be overly engaged in the coverage of the bill, as this could harm efforts by making a topic that is not controversial, controversial. A low-key approach should first be adopted and if opposition develops, the media could be used as a tool to mobilize support for the bill.

An alternative to legislation would be approaching Connecticut's Department of Education (DOE) and requesting a willing change in health curriculum guidelines and dating violence policy; however, Ann Burke believes a law is better (personal communication, September 16, 2007). Initiating a law should not underscore the DOE's involvement; in fact, if the DOE is not included and supportive of legislative initiatives, the bill will probably die (Anne Burk, personal communication, December 6, 2007). Perhaps enlisting those in Rhode Island's DOE who were supportive of the Lindsay Ann Burk Act (2007) and organizing a meeting with those members along with members of Connecticut's DOE would be instrumental in garnering the DOE's support of dating violence legislation in Connecticut.

### **Getting Sponsors and Generating Power Resources:**

Another critical component in the survival of a dating violence bill would be the support of the Attorney General, Richard Blumenthal. This would enhance the support of the educational, as well as the legislative communities and the general public as a whole. In my personal

experience in the domestic/dating violence field, Attorney General Blumenthal was very supportive of the Women's Center and attended between one and two of our events per year. Cathy Zeiner, Executive Director of the Women's Center of Southeastern Connecticut (personal communication, December 8, 2007) and Jeanne Milstein (personal communication, December 3, 2007) both agreed that Attorney General Richard Blumenthal probably would be supportive of the legislation. In addition, as mentioned above, the National Association of Attorney Generals is encouraging all attorney generals throughout the country to initiate such legislation (Ann Burke, personal communication, November 24, 2007).

Another key component in securing a power base for legislation would be the inclusion of Connecticut's colleges and universities. Ann Burke stated legislators really want to hear from experts in the field of domestic and dating violence and found that professors from Rhode Island's universities and colleges served as a tremendous resource base. Professors from Connecticut's universities and colleges need to be solicited to attend public testimonies and contact legislators.

Along with garnering power from the Attorney General's sponsor and insight from professors from Connecticut's universities and colleges, the coalition discussed above could also serve as a power base. Domestic violence agencies could help mobilize constituents and students from high schools and colleges into action. The inclusion and support of health teachers, superintendants, school social workers, guidance counselors, principals, Department of Education, and Department of Public Health, along with the already established Teen Dating Violence Initiative could collude to ascertain a powerful resource base.

### **Implementing and Critiquing Strategy:**

Efforts to enlist supporters and establish a coalition should start as soon as possible. Meetings should be regular and a critical critique of Connecticut's legislative endeavors last year needs to be initiated. Clear legislative goals need to be established. The coalition needs to develop a careful force field analysis of legislators to identify which committee the bill should be steered to in order to increase the chances of bill survival and that legislative goals are realized.

My suggestion is that the bill should be introduced to the Connecticut's General Assembly next year in the '09 legislative session for three reasons. First, the '08 session is a short session this year and the bill may need more time to pass through the General Assembly. Second, this would allocate more time to undertake research, establish a coalition, and identify legislative goals and strategy. Third, more time would allow for a careful examination of the successes and challenges of Texas's and Rhode Island's legislations, which would help Connecticut form a stronger law.

**Conclusion:**

In 2005, Sara Yezefski submitted a report to the Connecticut Department of Education entitled, *Healthy Dating Relationship Classes: Why They Should Be Included in the Connecticut State Department of Education's Health Curriculum Framework*. In the report, she convincingly, articulately, and thoroughly argues reasons why dating violence needs to be included in student health education and provides a proposal for doing so. Ms. Yezefski also bravely detailed her own experience as a victim of teen dating violence to utilize as a base for her argument. In a recent interview to find-out the response from her solicitation, she disappointedly stated, "I didn't get a response. They did nothing" (personal communication, October 1, 2007).

It is time for the State of Connecticut to do something. IPV will continue to thrive and impact all citizens of Connecticut unless we take a proactive approach towards its elimination.

Dating violence is not a mystery anymore, as it was in Carol's day; it has been exposed and students have the right to school safety, a quality education unhindered by abuse, and to a future where they can expect to be treated with equality and respect in an intimate relationship.

In the author's time at the Women's Center, people in the community would often reveal shock after learning that the problem of intimate partner violence is not an isolated personal problem, but rather a prevalent social problem with easily identifiable patterned behaviors. People would often revolt, "I wish I knew about this a long time ago! Why isn't this taught in the schools?" The only question left to ponder now is, "Well, why isn't it taught in the schools?"

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