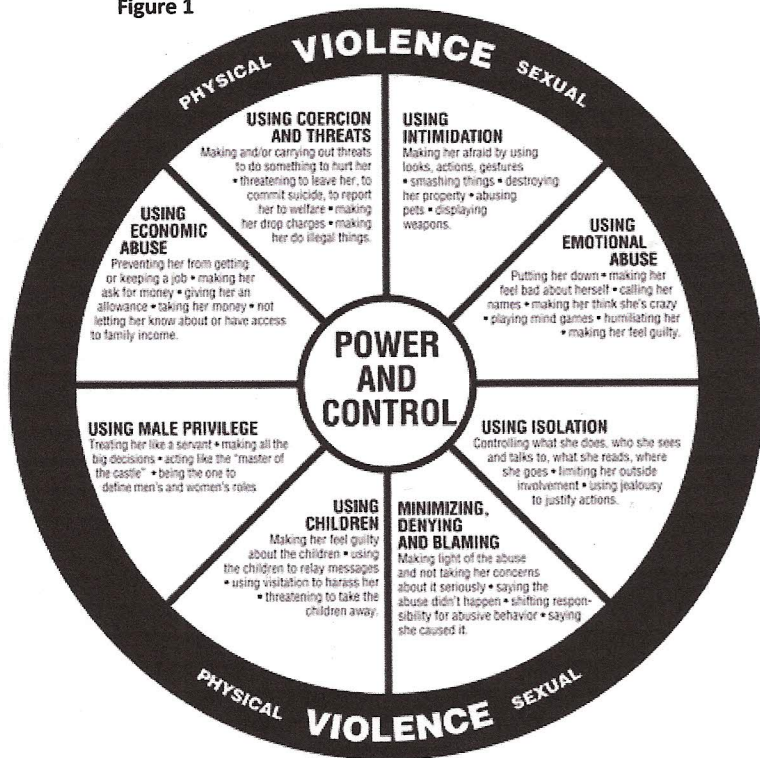


We Can Do Better

“Power and Control” and “Accountability” Wheels for Male Aspiring Allies
By Ben Atherton-Zeman

Figure 1



I’ve had the honor to perform “Voices of Men” in 44 states and other countries. During my travels, I heard from many women about the men who were “aspiring allies” in their communities. Many of these men were creating positive change and being accountable to women – I’ve written about some of these men in my new play, “Men’s Monologues Against Violence.” But many of the men were re-creating the very sexism they said they were trying to undo – interrupting women at meetings, “taking over” and taking credit for women’s ideas, and refusing to be accountable when confronted.

The stories of the men’s sexism were familiar to me, since I had done many of the same things myself. The women’s stories were informative – many of them had such hope for the aspiring male allies in their community that they quickly nominating them to their Board, their Coordinated Community Response team, or as a spokesperson for their newly-created Men Against Sexism group. These men then responded by making embarrassing public statements, taking away scant resources from women’s groups, or committing violence toward the women in their lives.

It seemed that many of us men, in striving to be allies to women in stopping men’s violence, were committing the same acts of sexism and abuse we were confronting in others! When I told Phyllis about my thoughts, she said that many women have known this for years. “Aspiring male allies are not that different from other men.” she said.

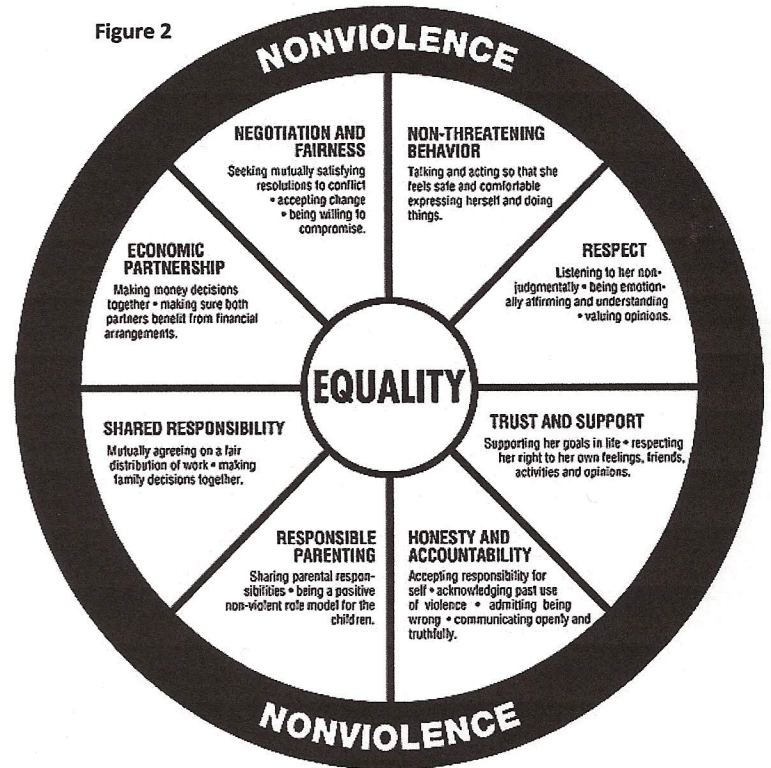
As a younger man speaking out against sexism, I was given lots of credit for doing very little. I had always thrived on the praise of others, and eagerly sought out such praise. I repeated lessons that women had taught me, forgetting to credit the women who had come up with the idea in the first place. When the women spoke, they were criticized, attacked and undermined – when I said the same things, I was hailed as a hero.

Some women didn’t give me unearned credit, and held me accountable for my own sexism. My mentor Phyllis B. Frank and others combined love, generosity, and support with a complete refusal to accept my sexism and male privilege. I usually responded to any such confrontation with defensiveness and attacks, rather than with self-reflection and listening.

For some reason, Phyllis and others didn’t give up on me. Phyllis tells me it’s because I was always willing to help advocates who were doing the work to end men’s violence against women. She noticed that I was willing to do “grunt work” (helping with technology, baby-sitting, registration tables at conferences, stuffing envelopes) when needed, to “pay my dues.”

Rather than take my marbles and go home, I remained working (however awkwardly and imperfectly) on ending men’s violence against women. Under the guidance and mentorship of these strong, smart, feminist women, I learned more and more. I became a community educator for domestic violence programs and rape crisis centers, and wrote the play “Voices of Men” ten years ago.

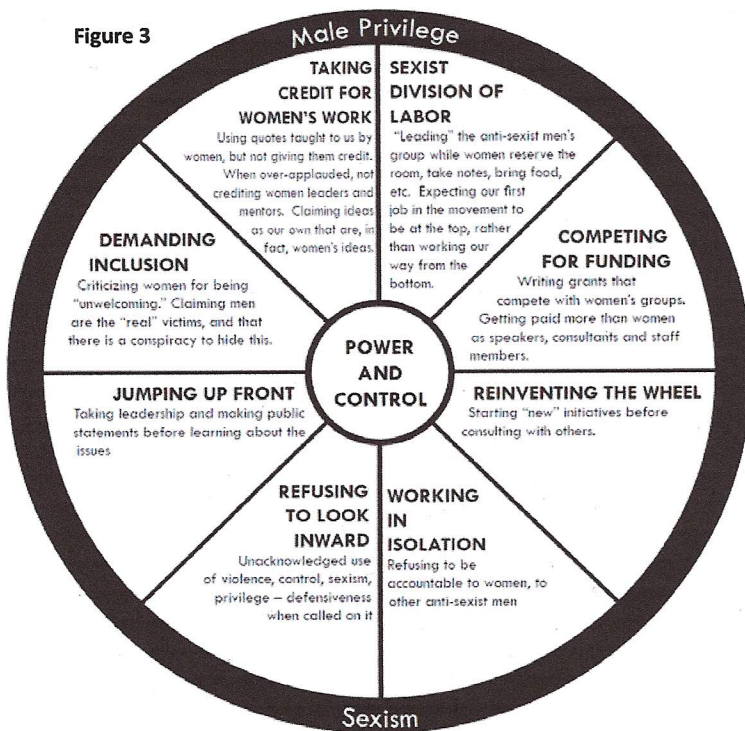
Figure 2



Power & Control Wheel

for men working to end gender based violence

Figure 3



Created by Ben Atherton-Zeman www.voicesofmen.org

Based on the Duluth Model Power and Control Wheel.

Please only use these Wheels alongside the original Power and Control/Equality Wheels.

These new Wheels are works in progress. I'd love input from women who have worked to organize male aspiring allies, and from men who have realized what mistakes they've made. What are some examples of men creating positive, accountable social change in your community? What are some examples of well-meaning men recreating the very same sexism they are supposedly working to end? Please write me with any examples and feedback at benazeman@hotmail.com and I will try to incorporate them into the Wheels.

If the Wheels themselves are useful, feel free to use them – but please use them only alongside the original Power and Control/Equality wheels as requested by DAIP.

On a good day, I keep to the principles outlined in the Accountability Wheel. All too often, I act out sexism and male privilege in ways outlined in the Power and Control Wheel for Men's Involvement. I've met many men who "practice what they preach" quite well. I believe these men would also admit to having a similar relationship with both Wheels – they know that the process of being an ally is unending.

More and more work is being done to involve men to end men's violence. As a movement, let's figure out ways to shape men's involvement to minimize sexism, and to make us better aspiring allies. I've suggested one way – make us learn more and do more work initially before allowing us to take leadership ("Raising the Bar" – NCADV Voice, January 2009). Surely there are other ways, and surely we can work together – people of ALL genders – to reduce suffering and make the world safer.

"The difference we are looking for is men who will listen and hear what feminist colleagues are saying, act on it, and continue to stay in the process."

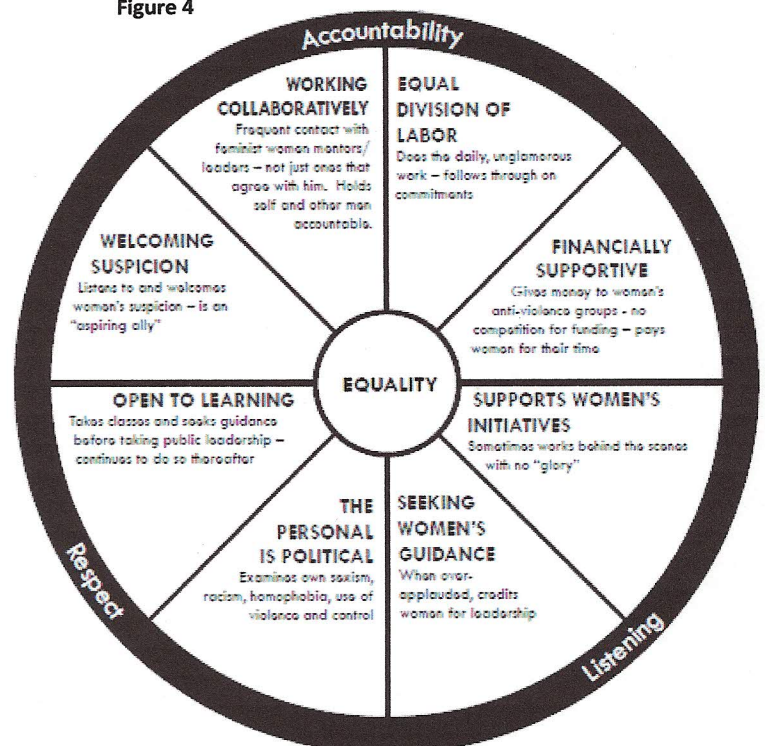
Truly, the sexism that I and other men had perpetrated ranged along the continuum of men's abuse that I had learned in my early volunteer trainings. I sought a model for men's accountability and found a structure in the Equality Wheel (fig. 2). Together with the Power and Control Wheel (fig. 1), these explained both the extent of men's abuse of women, and men treating their partners with respect. They were created by the Duluth Abuse Intervention Project (DAIP) thirty years ago, after a series of interviews with battered women. These women were asked what their partner's abuse and violence looked like, and the Wheels were created.

I contacted DAIP and asked if I could create a Power and Control Wheel for male aspiring allies (fig. 3), along with an Accountability Wheel for the same men (fig. 4). Gathering the stories from women around the country, I made some of the "pie slices" similar to the original Wheels (instead of "Using Economic Abuse" I put "Competing for Funding") and some "slices" quite different.

The kind folks at DAIP responded promptly, suggesting I do some more focus groups of women to gather more data. They were supportive of the new Wheels, but asked that they only be given out alongside the original Power and Control/Equality wheels. I asked Rebecca Harrington at the State University of New York – Oneonta to put the slices in "wheel" form, which she kindly did.

Male Accountability Wheel

Figure 4



Created by Ben Atherton-Zeman www.voicesofmen.org

Based on the Duluth Model Equality Wheel.

Please only use these Wheels alongside the original Power and Control/Equality Wheels.