

engaging men:

strategies and dilemmas in violence
prevention education among men

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Efforts to prevent violence against women will fail unless they undermine the cultural and collective supports for physical and sexual assault found among many men. The overwhelming majority of perpetrators of violence against women are men; a substantial minority of males accept violence-supportive attitudes and beliefs, and cultural constructions of masculinity shape men's use of physical and sexual violence against women. Educational strategies which lessen such social supports of violence are therefore vital. This paper outlines recent Australian community education campaigns directed at men and the dilemmas with which they deal. It then identifies five key challenges in such work.

Violence against women is more likely in contexts in which manhood is culturally defined as linked to dominance, toughness, or male honour (Heise, 1998:277). Where 'being a man' involves aggressiveness, the repression of empathy and a sense of entitlement to power, those men who are violent are acting out the dictates of what it means to be a 'normal' male. At an individual level, some men are more likely to sexually assault women: men who have hostile and negative sexual attitudes towards women, who identify with traditional images of masculinity and male gender role privilege, who believe in rape stereotypes, and who see violence as manly and desirable (Heise, 1998:277; O'Neil & Harway, 1997:192; Scully, 1990; Warshaw, 1988). Men with more traditional, rigid and misogynistic gender-role attitudes are more

likely to practise marital violence (Alder, 1992:269; O'Neil & Harway, 1997:192; Heise, 1998:278).

Violence prevention efforts must address such relationships between violence, social constructions of masculinity and gendered power relations. Formal prevention and control strategies such as sound laws and integrated criminal responses are important. They can make a difference to victims' recovery and to the likelihood of perpetrators' recidivism, and they have symbolic value. But formal control strategies have little to work with in a climate where most women and men do not formally report abusive events, most survivors remain silent (DeKeseredy, Schwartz & Alvi, 2000:921), and dominant beliefs about violence convince many women that their experience was not rape or assault at all or that it was their fault (Kelly & Radford, 1996).

Men have been invited to contribute to the goal of ending violence against women in various contexts: in perpetrator programs, through profeminist men's anti-violence activism (Flood, 2001), through education in such male-dominated professions as the police, law and medicine, and through community education campaigns. The remainder of this paper centres on the last approach. I focus on efforts directed at adult men rather than those among boys for example in schools (Cameron, 2000), although many of the dilemmas discussed are similar.

A significant minority of Australian males agree with violence-supportive beliefs and myths, and males continue to show more violence-supportive attitudes than females. The most recent national survey, in 1995, did find that there have been some broad improvements in attitudes since the last survey in 1987, but this was less so for sexual violence than for domestic violence. Over a third of men (37%) disagreed with the statement that 'Women rarely make false claims of rape'. One-fifth of men (19%) agreed that 'Women often say "No" when they mean "Yes"', and one in six agreed that 'Women who are raped often ask for it' and 'Rape is usually a crime of passion' (Office of the Status of Women, 1995:144-150). Men have narrower definitions of domestic violence than women, they are less likely to include forms of psychological abuse, and they attach a lesser degree of seriousness to most forms of domestic violence (ibid, p11).

About one in seven boys and young men in Australia also express beliefs supportive of sexual violence. A recent national survey of 5,000 young people aged 12 to 20 found that 14 to 15 per cent of males agreed with the statements that 'It's okay for a boy to make a girl have sex with him if she has flirted with him or led him on' and 'It is okay to put pressure on a girl to have sex but not to physically force her' (National Crime Prevention, 2001:64-70). Two earlier surveys found that about a third of boys and young men agreed with such statements (Domestic Violence Resource Centre, 1992; Golding & Friedman, 1997). Young males are less likely than young females to consider particular behaviours to be domestic violence, more likely to see them as normal conflict, less likely to rate a range of forms of violence as very serious, and more likely to agree with statements which condone violence (National Crime Prevention, 2001:58-64).

violence prevention

In Australia only a handful of community education campaigns have attempted to undermine social and cultural supports among adult men for violence against women. A recent NSW campaign is one of the best examples of community education directed at men. The campaign is titled 'Violence Against Women — It's Against All the Rules' and has been

run from 2000 to 2003 by the Violence Against Women Specialist Unit of the NSW Attorney General's Department. The campaign uses high profile sportsmen to deliver the message to young men that violence against women is unacceptable. It is targeted at men aged 21 to 29, and takes the form of posters, booklets, and radio advertisements. The campaign materials borrow common sporting terms in ways which lend support to the idea that violence against women is unacceptable. For example, rugby league player Laurie Daley is shown alongside the words, 'Force a woman into touch? That's sexual assault'. Cricketer Michael Slater says, 'Sledging a woman? That's abuse'. Soccer player Mark Bosnich says, 'Mark a woman, watch her every move? That's stalking'. And Australian Rules player Dale Lewis says, 'Striking a woman? That's assault'.

defining manhood as non-violent

Community education campaigns directed at men have adopted three broad strategies, the first of which is to promote alternative constructions of masculinity, gender and selfhood which foster non-violence and gender justice. This embodies the recognition that men's violence against women is informed by the cultural association between violence and masculinity — by the social construction of violence as a normal, palatable, or inevitable part of manhood. Some campaigns enact this strategy indirectly. The NSW campaign tries to rewrite the cultural meanings given to men's violent behaviour, by linking physical and sexual behaviours to actions on the sporting field which are literally 'against the rules'. Other campaigns try more directly to re-script cultural expectations of manhood or explicitly critique an association between manhood and violence.

Efforts to lessen men's tolerance of violence against women at times have attempted to redefine violence as unmanly or manliness as non-violent, therefore representing violence and masculinity as contradictory. 'Real men don't bash or rape women' was the bold message of some posters in the 1993-1994 national campaign by the Office of the Status of Women (OSW). Similarly, the NSW campaign materials state that 'sports role models can show that a masculine man is not a violent man' (Violence Against Women Specialist Unit, 2000:24). Although the notion of redefining

masculinity as non-violent was not explicit in the NSW posters and advertisements, a quarter of men who had seen the campaign described the main message as being, 'You don't have to be violent to be a real man' (Hubert, 2003:38-39).

Community education campaigns overseas have used similar strategies. The American campaign 'My strength is not for hurting', encourages men to practise consent and respect in their sexual relations. This campaign attempts to reconfigure a trait traditionally associated with masculinity, strength, such that it now embodies non-violence and moral selfhood. Among boys and young men, another American approach asks, 'Are you *man enough* to turn away from violence [or] to stand up to violence?' This draws upon boys' existing investments in male identity and desires to become adult men, in order to invite non-violence. Similarly, violence may be described as 'weak' or 'cowardly', and thus as in opposition to the qualities of strength, bravery, self-control and moral courage associated with 'true' masculinity (Gilbert & Gilbert, 1998:247).

Such approaches represent a strategy of both complicity in and challenge to masculinity. On the one hand, appeals to male identity and stereotypically masculine qualities are complicit in common constructions of masculinity and collude with males' investments in manhood. On the other hand, such appeals also challenge masculinity, in attempting to shift the meanings associated with maleness.

We should be wary of approaches which appeal to men's sense of 'real' manhood or invite them to 'prove themselves *as men*'. These may intensify men's investment in male identity, and this is part of what keeps patriarchy in place (Stoltenberg, 1990). Such appeals are especially problematic if they suggest that there are particular qualities which are essentially or exclusively male. This simply reinforces notions of biological essentialism and determinism, and denies valuable qualities such as strength and courage to women.

Nevertheless, community education addressing males should speak to questions of identity. Boys and young men, in particular, struggle with the formation of their gendered identities, negotiating competing discourses of manhood and heterosexuality. There is often a dichotomy between their

public projection of a confident masculinity and their experience of private anxieties and insecurities (Mac an Ghail, 1994:99). Boys' and young men's processes of identity formation represent a critical opportunity for violence prevention. Education campaigns can model identities based on moral reasoning, justice and selfhood rather than gender-identity anxiety, dominance and manhood (Stoltenberg, 2001).

A strategy of complicity and challenge is an understandable and indeed desirable response to the real challenge of educating men on gender issues. Efforts to reach men must negotiate a tension between two necessary elements: between speaking to men in ways which engage with the realities of their lives on the one hand, and transforming the patriarchal power relations and gendered discourses which are the fabric of those same lives on the other.

draw on masculine culture

It is now firmly established in violence prevention networks that one's strategies must be 'culturally appropriate'. They must be sensitive to the audience's values and needs and draw on culturally specific languages (Moore, Lane & Connolly, 2002). The NSW campaign 'Violence Against Women — It's Against All the Rules' is an ideal example in its use of sporting language, and evaluations of the campaign suggest that men did perceive the campaign as meaningful and clever.

However, there is little discourse among men with which to build a culture of violence prevention, and this poses real difficulties for community education on these issues. The NSW campaign was unsuccessful in encouraging men to talk about violence against women. Ninety per cent of men in the target group who had seen or heard something of the campaign reported that violence against women was not an issue they would talk about with their peers (Hubert, 2003:32-33). Aboriginal men were the exception: they felt that violence against women is an issue that should be discussed by men (ibid, p34). This reflects a growing conversation in indigenous communities about family violence and sexual abuse, and an increasingly vocal invitation to Aboriginal men by leaders such as Mick Dodson to 'take a stand' (Dodson, 2002).

In trying to appeal to and engage with men, education campaigns have drawn on stereotypical masculine culture, and this poses more fundamental dilemmas for violence prevention. The NSW campaign draws on male-focused sports, but sporting culture also contributes to the construction of violent masculinity as a cultural norm. Sport is an important site for teaching boys and men some of the key values associated with dominant masculinity, such as extreme competitiveness, aggression and dominance. The 'combat sport subculture' of games such as rugby melds athleticism, manliness, and violence. Through the ideological and bodily practices of sport, boys and young men are taught to be tough and to bear pain (Bryson, 1990:179; Schissel, 2000). Violence is normalised, naturalised and rewarded in sport (Messner, 1992), and media representations of sport routinely glorify the 'legitimate violence' of male athletes (McKay, 1996). Finally, athletes are over-represented among the men who commit acts of sexual assault and domestic violence. Two American studies found that while sports team members make up two or three per cent of the university population, they are responsible for 20 to 30 per cent of reported incidents of violence against women (Demaue, 2000; Frintner & Rubinson, 1993). Another study found that athletes report significantly greater agreement with rape-supportive statements than men in general (Boeringer, 1999). Cultures of misogyny have been documented in particular sports overseas (Robinson, 1998; West, 1996; Schacht, 1996), and rugby league in Australia may be similar (Halloran & Magnay, 2003).

Despite drawing on feminist analyses of violence, background documents for the NSW campaign are remarkably silent about the gendered and violence-supportive character of sport (Cheetham, 2001:10). To be fair, the NSW campaign may address these issues by simultaneously shifting sporting culture as it shifts the attitudes of men in general, in that the campaign does involve sporting clubs, training of sportsmen as educators and sports sponsorship. In fact, some American violence prevention programs focus on training male athletes as peer educators in violence prevention (Katz, 1995).

This example illustrates the dilemmas in drawing on masculine culture to reach men. Approaches such as those in the NSW campaign and the

American 'My strength is not for hurting' campaign represent a difficult balancing act between complicity and challenge. They collude enough with masculine cultural codes that they engage a male audience, yet hopefully they subvert the association of masculinity and violence enough to make a difference to men's attitudes and behaviours.

men speaking out

The third key strategy in violence-related community education campaigns directed at men is to show men speaking out or standing together against violence. Some campaigns use male celebrities and sporting heroes in their posters and other materials, and others depict 'ordinary' men of the community collectively voicing their concern about violence against women.

There are four rationales for this strategy. First, the men shown are literal representatives of men's intolerance of violence. More importantly, they function as role models. Male 'heroes' and celebrities were used in both the recent NSW campaign and the national campaign 'Stop Violence Against Women' by OSW. These men are deliberately chosen as the figures with whom many men already identify and whom many men wish to emulate, and the hope is that their intolerance of violence against women will also be emulated. Focus group participants for the NSW campaign perceived the sportsmen to be credible and authoritative 'real men' who have the 'common touch' as 'the "everyman" of Australian culture'. But they also praised the fact that these were 'ordinary blokes' with faults and weaknesses, rather than 'gods' like Pat Rafter who probably 'unpacks the dishwasher for his mum' (Hubert, 2003:40-41).

The third rationale for using men in campaigns addressing men is the importance of peer acceptance and collective norms. Scholarship on men and gender documents that men's lives are highly organised by relations *between men*. The performance of manhood is often in front of, and granted by, other men (Kimmel, 1994:128-129). Males seek the approval of other males, both identifying with and competing against them. If men's perceptions of collective masculine norms can be shifted, then individual men may shift as well.

Fourth, ours is a culture in which men's voices are granted greater authority than women's voices. It is probably true that men will listen more to men than to women. We may think it highly desirable that men listen to *women's* voices, to women's stories of the harms done to them by violence, and indeed to women's stories of the joys and pleasures of non-violent and egalitarian relations with men. But it may be more effective to continue to use men to say the things that we wish men could hear from women.

key challenges

There are at least five key challenges in violence prevention work with males, in addition to the overarching one of both engaging with and reconstructing men and masculine culture.

undermine discourses of sexuality

The first challenge is to undermine powerful discourses of masculinity and heterosexuality which support violence against women. For example, some men (and women) subscribe to the idea that male sexuality is an uncontrollable or barely controllable force (Hollway, 1984; Kippax, Crawford & Waldby, 1994:318). Men have a sexual 'drive', which can be set in motion by sexual stimulation in a primitive way and beyond conscious control. This notion has been used to deny, downplay or defend men's sexual violence against women, and to place the burden of responsibility for rape with women. It is up to women not to 'provoke' men, to 'lead them on', as men cannot be held responsible for their actions (Richardson, 1997:161). Such notions are related to a second gendered discourse of sexuality, the idea that women should be the gatekeepers and guardians of sexual safety, with responsibility for both their own and men's sexual behaviour.

A third construction, the sexual double standard, also feeds into sexual violence. This involves two standards of sexual behaviour, in which girls and women who are sexually active or seen to be so gain negative sexual reputations as 'sluts' (or any of a wide variety of other terms), while males are given such positive labels as 'studs', 'legends' and so on. More widely, women's sexual behaviour is highly controlled and harshly judged, while men's sexual behaviour is freer of social constraint.

The sexual double standard controls young women's social and sexual relations, steers them into acceptable forms of behaviour, and limits their power and sexual autonomy (Hillier et al, 1998:26; Holland et al, 1996:242; Kitzinger, 1995). Rape is often excused or denied with reference to women as 'sluts', and young women perceived as 'easy' are likely to be more vulnerable to sexual violence (National Crime Prevention, 2001:43). These constructions must be eroded, through innovative and culturally relevant messages.

teach young men how to do consent

In running workshops with young heterosexual men in college classrooms, I have asked, 'How do you know that you are not pressuring the girl you're with into sex?' (Flood, 2002). Many young men rely on problematic indicators such as the absence of resistance, body language, or previous or current sexual activity. Many have little idea of how to negotiate different forms of sexual activity and are too embarrassed or self-conscious to explicitly negotiate consent. And indeed, some young men simply do not care whether or not the girl is consenting, or even find forced sex arousing. It is vital that we teach young men why consent is important *and* how to negotiate consent.

target masculine bonding and culture

Male bonding feeds sexual violence against women, and sexual violence against women feeds male bonding. The cultures and collective rituals of male bonding among closely knit male fraternities, street gangs and male athletes foster sexual assault of women (Sanday, 1990; Martin & Hummer, 1989; Warshaw, 1988:101-104). In turn, rape can be practised as a means to and an expression of male bonding (Scully, 1990). Especially among young men, attachment to male peers who encourage and legitimate woman abuse is a significant predictor of abuse by men in dating relationships (Heise, 1998:277).

Local violence-supportive cultures are also important. On university campuses with high rates of sexual violence, some of the socio-cultural correlates (especially among male college fraternities) include an ethic of male sexual conquest and 'getting sex', displays of masculinity through heterosexual sexual performance, high alcohol consumption, homophobia, use of

pornography, and general norms of women's subordinate status (Sanday, 1996). Violence prevention strategies among men therefore must also include interventions into male groups and local patriarchal cultures.

address social diversity

Prevention strategies must also address the complex intersections of class, race and ethnicity which shape women's and men's experiences of and involvements in sexual assault. For example, male perpetrators are more likely to be held accountable and criminalised, and their crimes are more likely to be seen as linked to their ethnicity, if they are poor, black or men of color (Russo, 2001:147-162).

Is it possible to acknowledge that males' violence-supportive attitudes are shaped by social variables including ethnicity, without also reinforcing racism? A recent national survey found that among young people aged 12 to 20, about one-fifth agreed with the use of violence by both sexes. These young people were more likely to be male, in the youngest age profile (12-14), of lower socio-economic status, and of Middle Eastern or Asian background. This cluster was also significantly more likely to hold traditional views about gender roles (National Crime Prevention, 2001:81-90).

The ease with which existing racist assumptions can be reinforced was illustrated in the experience of the NSW campaign 'Violence Against Women – It's Against All the Rules'. While more than half of men correctly perceived that the campaign was aimed at men in general, one in eight (12.5%) thought it was aimed at particular ethnic groups (Hubert, 2003:36-37). One man said for example, 'I reckon the campaign is aimed at ethnics (sic) who treat their women like dogs'.

address men's victimisation

The final challenge, perhaps the hardest of them all, is to address men's own experience of violence and to pre-empt the rejection of violence prevention messages associated with not doing so. In evaluations of the NSW campaign, some men responded that men are the invisible victims of violence too, including abuse in their relationships with women. They said that men are waiting to hear their own status as victims addressed (Hubert, 2003:50-51).

There are three ways of understanding this complaint. Perhaps it is a legitimate claim about men's own subjection to violence. Men certainly are the victims of violence, as the majority of the victims of physical assaults recorded by police (Australian Institute of Criminology, 1999) and two-thirds of homicide victims (Mouzos, 2000). But the great majority of perpetrators also are male. Men are most at risk of physical harm from other men, whereas the men in the NSW campaign who emphasise men's victimisation seem to focus on violence *by women*.

This leads to a second explanation, in which this response is an expression of anti-feminist backlash and defensiveness. It represents the success of men's rights and fathers' rights advocates in communicating the falsehood that women are violent to men as much as men are violent to women. (For critiques of this claim, see Flood, 1999 and Kimmel, 2002.) And it is a defensive reaction to the critique of men's violence against women.

However, in a third reading, men's response is an inevitable although misleading extension of feminist successes in re-defining violence. Feminist accounts of domestic violence routinely list verbal, emotional and psychological forms of abuse alongside physical violence. These embody the crucial recognition that men's physical violence to women they know is very often accompanied by other forms of abusive and harmful behaviour (Gamache, 1990:74-79; Macdonald, 1998:27-32). But they also allow men to re-name their own experiences of verbal conflict, name-calling, and stereotypically feminine 'nagging' as 'verbal and emotional abuse' or 'emotional violence'. In many cases, this trivialises the term 'violence' by applying it to instances of their female partners' behaviour which are unpleasant but not particularly harmful. It also represents an ignorance of the real horror associated with the systematic emotional and psychological abuse to which some women are subjected.

Whichever reading we think is most accurate, as the NSW campaign evaluation states, we will need to '[a]cknowledge and place in perspective men's feelings that they are the "invisible" and "unacknowledged" victims of violence' (Hubert, 2003:54).

conclusion

Profound changes in men's lives and social constructions of masculinity are necessary if violence against women is to be eliminated. Community education strategies are a key element in violence prevention. They face particular challenges when they are addressed, as they must be, to men.

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