

Men's Work: Men's Voices and Actions against Sexism and Violence

Rus Ervin Funk

MENSWORK: eliminating violence against women, inc.

SUMMARY. This short article details the initial findings from a 3-month conversation between 21 male activists who work to prevent violence against women. Using Participatory Action Research methodology, this research project investigates what men who do this work would like to learn from other men who do this work. To date, no research has been done that examines what it is that motivates and sustains men who work, as their primary effort, to prevent men's violence against women. This article examines some of the initial findings from this research, and examines the implications for engaging and mobilizing other men to prevent men's violence against women. This article begins with a description of the research project, followed by an overview of the findings, continues with a discussion of the implications from these initial findings for preventing men's violence against women, and ends with some lessons learned from the process of this research project and a brief overview of the next step of this conversation.

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INTRODUCTION

It has become increasingly clear that men have a major role to play in preventing men's violence against women (domestic violence, sexual assault, sexual harassment, stalking, dating abuse, pornography, and prostitution) (Funk, 2006a; Grieg, 2006; Lang, 2002; Berkowitz, 2001; Schwartz & DeKeseredy, 1997). To date, however, little is understood about the men who have committed their lives to this cause. Why are they involved? What does working to prevent men's violence mean to them? How has doing this work affected them?

There is a tension worth noting in this kind of research project—focusing attention on men and inadvertently diverting attention away from women. How do we pay attention to men, while being a part of a broader process, social movement, and work ethic that is focused on empowering women? Yet it seems important lessons that have implications for efforts to recruit and maintain men's efforts as allies may be learned from such projects.

The current project is exploratory and aims to address questions such as: what it means *as men* to focus on preventing violence in general, and men's violence in particular, men's experiences of working with other men on preventing violence, and men's experiences of working in partnership with, and accountable to, women to prevent men's violence against women. By asking men who work to end men's violence against women about our experiences, there is much to be learned about how to effectively prevent violence, how to engage men in working to prevent violence, and what it means to be a preventionist.

What it means to "be a man" is not only influenced by our experiences, but also by our behaviors (Connell, 1995; Byrd & Guy-Sheftall, 2001; Kendall & Martino, 2006). It seems obvious that working to end violence against women would have an impact on how men both understand, and experience ourselves as men. In turn, these understandings and experiences of ourselves as men have an impact on our prevention efforts. Most men have a troubling relationship with sexism and violence (Grieg, 2006). Most men experience men's violence through bullying and other forms of

violence, have perpetrated various forms of violence, have perpetrated various forms of sexism, and benefit from men's violence (Funk, 2006a; Grieg, 2006; Frosh, Phoenix, & Pattman, 2002; Connell, 2000). Men's experiences of violence (as perpetrators, victims, and bystanders) seems to be influenced by a number of factors including our sexual identity, class, and racial background (Funk, 2006b; Kendall & Martino, 2006; Byrd & Guy-Sheftall, 1995), which, in turn, has an impact on our understanding and experience of both masculinities and violence. To prevent sexist violence (or violence in general) it seems critical to examine these issues and explore these implications for violence prevention efforts in our communities.

Being a man working to prevent men's violence impacts men's understanding of ourselves as men (Barker, 2000). As such, it was important to consider a research design that would not only gather *meaningful* data, but which would encourage dialogue among the participants. One of the findings from this research (which echoed the personal experience of the main author) is the degree to which being a man working to prevent men's violence results in some degree of isolation. There are few men who do this work, and most of us who were part of this conversation are single voices in our communities. This being the case, it seemed important to identify a research design that did not exacerbate this isolation. It may ask too much for a research project to break isolation and create a sense of connection and community. But research designs can, to varying degrees, either reinforce or break this sense of isolation (Barker, 2000; Devault, 1999; Frosh et al., 2002). Thus, one of the core components of men working to end men's violence is the notion of empowering men to be involved in this movement by generating a sense of connection to and ownership of the issues related to men's violence (Funk, 2006a). In keeping with that core value, it seemed critical to identify and use a research methodology that was empowering of the men who were involved.

The current article is an exploratory research effort. Exploring what it means for these men to be men who work to prevent men's violence suggests using a research method that provides a means through which participants can identify what they see as important to explore—which in and of itself is valuable data. In this way, the current research project borrows from what Valli Kanuha refers to as "Being Native" (2000). From this point of view, it is important for researchers to openly acknowledge the groups to which we are

a part, and examine those research topics that are seen as critical to these groups or communities. As a man who works to prevent sexism and violence, I am frequently an “insider-outsider”—I am a man, but being openly pro-feminist and working/living to prevent sexism and violence positions me outside of hegemonic manhood; I am closest to women (and in particularly feminist women) and yet I am not a woman. This position provides me a means to critically examine what it means to work to prevent men’s violence—as a man. Thus, a research design that allowed my Self to be involved as much as the other men who are involved was critical. To borrow from Kanuha (2000), I have chosen a research project in which I am “deeply situated” (p. 441). I am what I am researching. As a result, Participatory Action Research (PAR) (McNiff & Whitehead, 2006; Smith, Williams & Johnson, 1997) was chosen as the primary research method. The purpose of this project was to describe, using the voices of men doing this work, key issues for future exploration and thus begin to provide an outline for future research and practice in this area.

METHOD

Procedure

Due to the nature of trying to do a research project across time and space, some modifications to PAR were required, the result being a research methodology that is part PAR and part structured interviews. We used the Internet to gather background information and for identifying the core questions. Once those questions were identified, I, as the core researcher, created a questionnaire and then did one-on-one phone interviews with each participant to get their responses. These responses were then categorized into themes using “emergent coding” (Neuendorf, 2002, p. 194; Mayring, 2000) by myself, and a team of outside reviewers.

Measures

The initial survey tool included 14 questions divided into 3 topical areas: “about the men” (demographic/background information), “about the work” (information about the types of work that these men do to prevent men’s violence), and “about the research” (what

these men wanted to focus on within this research conversation). This tool was used with every one-on-one conversation. The answers that men gave as well as their additional commentary were copied down verbatim. These verbatim transcripts were then coded using emergent coding methodology and the themes that were identified as a result of this coding method were the bases for this article. The results are particularly informative not only of what these men would like for this conversation to focus on, but also on the kinds of struggles, difficulties and successes we are having as men working to end men's violence against women. The four questions asked were: "What would you like this conversation to focus on?" "What research questions would you like to ask of the other men who are involved in this conversation?" "What would you like to learn from, or know about the other men who are involved in this research project?" and "Anything else you'd like to ask or say about this research project?" Conceptually, each of these questions was designed to access a different response and trigger different thoughts among the participants.

Participants

In total, 21 men agreed to participate in the research project (including myself). A convenience sampling method was used, and all of the men involved in these conversations were known to the primary author. Careful attention was made to ensure racial and ethnic, age, sexual orientation, and geographic diversity in this sampling. There was no attempt to ensure a representative sample of broader population of men who work to prevent men's violence. The initial conversation focused on identifying the primary research questions that should be the focus of this project, as well as obtaining background information. Eighteen of the 21 men who agreed to participate in the project as a whole participated in this first round of conversations. Eleven men identified as European-American, two as Latino, three as African American, and two as Jewish. Eleven men identified as heterosexual. They ranged in age from 26 to 60. It should be noted that the process of asking these questions of the men in and of itself resulted in some intriguing conversations that are beyond the scope of this article but that may indicate a part of the self-reflection on masculinity that is so central to most men's experiences of working to end men's violence (Funk, 2006a; Lang, 2002; Pease, 2000; Beneke, 1997). This area of inquiry seems to be particularly rich for further exploration.

In terms of the kind of work the men do, seven stated that they worked primarily in rape or sexual assault, four in domestic violence, and four worked equally on both issues. Interestingly, most of the men felt that this was an artificial distinction and that what they did was work to end all forms of men's violence against women. A substantial minority of the men, through their answers to these questions and their commentary, expressed the understanding that men's violence against women is connected to other forms of men's violence: "I work on all forms of violence—gay bashing, gangs, hate violence, etc., from a social justice framework." "My focus is on [violence] prevention, and engaging men is one component of these prevention efforts." Indeed, many of the men expressly noted that the distinction between rape, domestic violence, and other forms of men's violence is an artificial distinction created largely by funding and governmental policies. These men experience and understand, *as men*, these forms of violence and sexism as inter-related, and strive to work on ending all forms of men's violence and sexism to the degrees that we can in with our work situations. As one man put it, "we can't very well end rape without also ending domestic violence and sexual harassment."

These men work in a variety of ways to prevent men's violence though most of these men focus primarily on education efforts, which may indicate where most funding for men's work may currently exists. The mean number of years the men had been doing the work was 16.25 years (range 5 to 35 years). They worked across a variety of settings including college campuses ($n = 5$), local community settings ($n = 7$), and at the state level ($n = 7$).

RESULTS

Emerging Themes

In analyzing the transcripts and notes from the interviews, the main themes that emerged as areas of primary interest for the men involved were the following (in order of the frequency at which these themes emerged): Personal (i.e., the personal affect of doing this work); Intersections/Connections (i.e., working with men cross culturally, working with these issues at the intersection of racism, sexism, and homophobia); Sustainability (i.e., sustaining our collective efforts); Movement Building (i.e., building this movement); Leadership

(i.e., being in a role of leadership as men); Accountability (i.e., how do we act in ways that are accountable to the women's leadership); Engaging Men (i.e., how do we actually engage other men); Men's Work and a Social Justice Framework (i.e., examining working to end men's violence from a broader social justice or human rights perspective); General/Other (i.e., identifiable issues that did not fit easily into other categories). Within each of these broader themes, sub-themes were identified. Space does not permit a full exploration of each of these themes and the sub-themes. In what follows, the primary areas of interest (as identified by those that were the most common themes) will be discussed in more detail. This list in and of itself, however, represents the breadth of interests of this group of 21 men related to topics in and around preventing men's violence. This list also provides a snapshot of the kinds of issues and dilemmas that these 21 men face as we work to prevent men's violence.

Personal

The most common theme that emerged (stated by nearly every man) focused on personal questions about the other men involved in this conversation (and by extension, other men who do this work) and the personal impact of doing this work. As one man asked, "What tensions do men experience in doing this work?" "What causes this tension?" These types of questions, and the frequency of these questions, suggest the degree to which men who work to prevent sexism and violence, are isolated. Due to the inherently personal nature of working to prevent violence in general, and men's violence in particular, this seems an important area of inquiry and further exploration (with the goal of identifying ways to break this isolation). This theme of inquiry also indicates the degree to which men are personally interested in each other as reflected in their interest in each other's stories. It appears that not only do these men want to have a means by which they can get support, but that they desire a means to offer support to other men who do this work. The sub-themes within this category (listed by order of how commonly they emerged) included: the impact of this work on our relationships (with women and with other men), what our process of change has been, success stories/lessons learned, what sustains us individually, and discrepancies/challenges.

The most common area of interest within the category of "personal" had to do with relationships. Of particular interest within this

broad area, was the question of our relationships with other men. As one man stated, “To what extent do you think about who your friends are (men or women)? And what does this answer to this question mean about your work and your life?” His question, which represents many of the questions in this theme, reflects the degree to which some of us, as men working to prevent men’s violence, feel isolated from other men as well as a desire to have relationships with other men. We are men, but as suggested by one man’s narrative, working to end men’s violence positions us in some ways as “not men.” We are not women, and yet our commitment to this work, passion, and sensibilities positions us to be more closely aligned with women and perhaps feel more comfortable with women as friends than with men. As one man asked, “How do we have friendship with other men in the context of doing a kind of work that implies a distrust of masculinity/other men?” This area of research seems to have critical importance in examining ways to engage other men in preventing men’s violence. Most men appear to value their friendships with other men. If working to prevent men’s violence positions one as being seen as hostile to men and masculinity, what are we asking men to give up to become involved in this work?

The second common sub-theme had to do with our process of change. This was reflected in questions such as “How did we get from wherever we started to where we are now—as male leaders in the movement to end men’s violence.” This question reflects the understanding of this work as growth, and an interest in examining our processes of growth and development. This growth and development may, for some of us, have been a far path. As one man asked poignantly, “How do we best overcome our personal histories (as both abusers/perpetrators/oppressors, and victim/survivors) to move forward and continue our efforts?” This question reflects an understanding that all of us, as men, have some personal history—we have either been abused in some way, perpetrators in some way, or (most likely) some of both. As men who are active and are leaders nationally in the work to prevent men’s violence, how we addressed our own abusiveness and healed from our wounds would have clear lessons for preventing men’s violence as well as engaging other men in this work. This question also reflects a critical understanding of how we as men who work to prevent men’s violence are not significantly different on some levels than men in general and from the men who perpetrate more egregious forms of violence. This seems to hold critical

lessons for our efforts to engage other men in preventing violence, as well as how to effectively work with men who are abusive or violent. Given what we learn from this dialogue, we may come to understand or create ways for men who are currently working to end their own abusiveness (men who batter, men who rape, men who harass, etc.) may have a means to move to become allies in working alongside women and other men to prevent men's violence, thus blurring the lines between tertiary and primary prevention.

One final sub-theme that emerged within the broader topic of personal questions had to do with sustaining our efforts individually. There are not many clear advantages to men working to prevent men's violence, and the work is very hard on many levels. By better understanding how men continue to engage themselves, we not only better understand how we can support each other, but also have a better understanding of how we can more actively support men who are just coming into this work. Again, the theme of men's reflexivity as inherent in this work comes up. As one man stated, "it is really important, in doing this work, for men to reflect on their efforts and how they are doing. What helps you/us be reflexive in our work?"

Intersections/Connections

The second most common theme that emerged relates to the intersections of men's violence with other forms of oppression, violence, or social justice issues. Like connecting the various form of men's violence against women to each other, many of these men identified a connection between sexism (understood as the primary foundation for men's violence) and other forms of oppression, most notably racism and homophobia. For many of these men, working to end men's violence and challenging sexism was inextricably linked to doing other forms of anti-oppression work (i.e., anti racism, work against homophobia, nonviolence work more generally, etc.) yet there were some challenges experienced in trying to actualize this connection. This understanding appears to connect with the work of Kimberle Crenshaw's notion of intersectionality (1991). This is the understanding that how individuals experience their lives (in particular, how women experience violence) is the intersection of their various identities (gender, ethnicity, age, class background, religious belief, immigration status, etc.). This notion seems as important for organizing and mobilizing men for prevention of men's

violence as it is for women who have been victimized. If men have multiple identities at any given moment, then how they experience sexism, male privilege, and men's violence is, at least in part, influenced by the intersection of these identities (Funk, 2006c). The main sub-themes that emerged here included: the importance of working with men cross culturally, connecting sexism and violence to other forms of justice, and personal experiences of these intersections.

The main focus of this research topic had to do with the nuts and bolts of actually working with men multi-culturally. For men of color, however, there appeared to be a different struggle. As one participant eloquently stated,

Do men feel a tension between anti-racism and anti-sexism in their work. For example, as a Black Man, seeing a White Woman walking down the street and see her clutch her purse. How do you/we understand that or explain that—as an act of racism or as fear of men's violence? Or the Kobe Bryant case—part of me thinks that a conviction would have been a good outcome but on another level, I feel some hesitancy about seeing yet another Black Man convicted—especially for an assault against a White Woman. Are there times when you feel conflicted about this work?—for example, do the men of color experience feelings of betraying our community in doing this kind of work (given the racist ways that men's violence has been responded to historically)

For this Black man, being a *man* against sexism and violence, in some ways is made more complex by his Self as African American. From the conversations, it appears that a number of the white and Latino men involved in this project share some of this contradiction, but perhaps not to the degree that this man is expressing it. Men are not a monolithic group (Connell, 1995). To be men working to engage men in preventing men's violence requires some degree of recognizing how different groups of men experience sexism and men's violence differently.

Broader Sustainability of Change Efforts

Fourteen responses from the men indicated that the focus of this research project should focus on sustainability of our collective

efforts. The two main themes that were identified within this answer included: Identifying the barriers to sustaining the collective efforts of men working to end men's violence, and identifying the next steps of our collective efforts. Imbedded in this was a hopefulness found throughout these conversations—a deep-felt belief that our efforts are making a difference, and that (sometimes in spite of the evidence) we are part of global movement that is resulting in substantive social change. Given the number of times that the phrase “movement” was used in this initial conversation, it seems critically important to these men to see ourselves as part of something bigger and identify our efforts as being part of something larger than our individual efforts in our individual communities.

Accountability

A crucial research question that emerged from the men in this conversation has to do with the issue of accountability. Even though this topic did not emerge as a theme based on the research process, the issues of accountability was a frequent topic in the conversations. In particular, there seems to be a great deal of confusion around how accountability is operationalized. The value of men being accountable to women's leadership is without question—both for the men involved in this conversation and in the literature (Funk, 2006a; Funk, 2006c; Lang, 2002; Awkward, 2001; Berkowitz, 2001). This is an important area of further exploration for at least two critical reasons. First, although most men (all of the men in this research project) agree with the notion of accountability conceptually, there is no standard of what accountability actually looks like. As such, each man who works to prevent men's violence is generally left to his own devices (hopefully in the context of his relationship with the women and women's organizations with whom he works) to define and operationalize this concept. This lack of operational clarity adds to the difficulty of men working to prevent men's violence. Second, men do this work because women are harmed by men. It is women's lives that are at stake. In order to make sure what we do to prevent other men (and ourselves) from hurting women and acting in sexist ways, it seems that there needs to be some processes in place to ensure our accountability to the women who are at the forefront of this work.

The question of men's accountability surfaces the inherent tensions that currently exist. Resources continue to be limited at every level

coupled with increasing efforts to professionalize this work. As a result, there are fewer resources for movement building, and less expertise in movement building amongst those of us who do this work. If there is less attention to movement building from women/feminists, how do men act in ways to be accountable? To whom or to what are we accountable? On participant's question, "how do we keep the voices of women survivors in the work we do (the emphasis on women's voices)?" becomes particularly poignant in the current environment in which the voices of women survivors are increasingly silenced.

Another question related to accountability asks men to explore in very concrete ways what this notion means. As one participant asked, "what does respecting women's leadership mean to you and how do you do it?" It is common for men who work to prevent men's violence to talk about the need for men who do this work to be accountable to the women's leadership. And yet, very rarely is that point discussed in any depth. What *does* respecting women's leadership really look like? How do men do it? What are the models that men have of other men truly respecting women's leadership? Within these questions, are dozens of others that have, to date, never been answered in the literature and have not been fully discussed. This research question, and the questions that are related to them, are crucial to the ongoing work of men to prevent men's violence.

Engaging Men

Another common theme that emerged from these men's suggestions of research questions related to engaging men in the efforts to prevent men's violence. These men seem to have as a priority knowing more about what other men have learned related to engaging men. This appeared as a common suggestion for a research topic. The questions that men had for each other had to do with concrete suggestions and ways for men to engage different groups of men (also reflecting the theme detailed above of intersections). For example "How do we replace traditional men's engagement language that is largely based on demeaning women/femininity?" "How do we mobilize men (and women) when there is no pressing crisis?"

Criticisms

There was one participant who overtly expressed a critique of this whole process. The questions that he asked explicitly appeared frequently as a subtext in many of the conversations.

Something like this is a bit of an indulgence. We could all do more in our communities by hunkering down and doing the work, which has more potential for generating more interest and enthusiasm [than this kind of conversation]. I have never seen anything come out of a conversation like this which has a meaningful impact on the local efforts.

This question reflects another tension that exists as men working to prevent men's violence. Although reflexivity is seen as a core and necessary trait, given the amount of work that needs to be done (by men) to actually end men's violence, taking time to reflect on our personal and collective efforts seems to be a bit of a luxury. And yet, how do learn, how do we progress, how do we be accountable if we do not take time to reflect on our efforts, by ourselves, and in conversation with others? This tension will not be answered in this conversation, but it seems one that many of the men in this current conversation are at least familiar with.

DISCUSSION

As an exploratory study the conversations we had were incredibly rich and suggested that this project is tapping into something truly meaningful for the men who participated, as well as providing some preliminary findings are truly significant in terms of lessons for engaging men in this work. One clear overarching theme that emerged was the need for men who work to end men's violence to have more, more sustained, and more structured opportunities for dialogue. A common statement, toward the end of each individual conversation, was something like "how can we do this more often?" "I found this so valuable, we need to do this more." If we truly are to have a movement to end men's violence in this country (and perhaps beyond) it seems clear that we (as men doing this work) need to develop a better sense of community with each other.

The findings, generally, demonstrate the degree to which men working to prevent men's violence against women, demands of men a degree of self-interrogation about what it means to be a man and a re-examination of their conceptualization of masculinity. This conversation did not include (yet) any discussion about what this process of re-examining one's masculinity means for men or how this impacts on their work to prevent men's violence, but it is clearly a common (perhaps the most common theme) that emerged from these initial conversations.

Each of these conversations also included insights on some of the other tensions and struggles that these men face as they work to prevent men's violence against women. As demonstrated here, these men struggle with their efforts to be accountable; the intersections of sexism, racism, homophobia, and classism in doing this work; what it means to be a man in 2006 working to end men's violence; the impact of this work on their personal relationships with other men and with women; and much more.

The study has a number of limitations. This was primarily an Internet-based research conversation. In order for Internet-based conversations to have any depth or meaning, there needs to be some level of connectivity, mutual accountability, and mutual trust among the participants. In this case, however, there was no means for this sense of connectivity, mutual accountability, or trust to occur. As such, the initial responses to this conversation were minimal and fractured. As noted in the introduction, all of the men who participated were men that I knew and with whom I had some level of relationship. This resulted in some limitations to the voices and perspectives that are shared. As noted previously, this group of men is not necessarily representative of the men in general who work to prevent men's violence. Thus, the findings here cannot be generalized to other men working to end men's violence, and certainly not to men universally.

Finally, one of the hallmarks of PAR, and a core principle of being a man working to end men's violence, is the importance of self reflection. In this short section, I offer a brief overview of some of the reflections that I have engaged during this process. I offer this with some hesitation. First, I recognize the challenge that this kind of personal story sharing is to traditional views of research. In most research practices, the researcher is supposed to be an objective non-identity (McNiff & Whitehead, 2006) who simply notices and

tracks the data. However, I am not only the primary researcher in this project, but I am also actively involved in working with men to end men's violence. This work, and this project, had an impact on me and that impact has meaning and is another form of data that is worth examining (McNiff & Whitehead, 2006; Smith, et al., 1997). As Michael Awkward has stated (in reference to using "self-conscious autobiographical narrative") "...explore, implicitly and explicitly, why and how the individual male experience (the "me" in men) has diverged from, has created possibilities for a rejection of, the androcentric norm" (Awkward, 2001, p. 178). Doing self-reflection doing it publicly is a source of rich data with implications for our efforts to prevent men's violence.

In this research project, being accountable to women and women's leadership was raised often by the men in terms of what they would like this research project to explore. That being said, this research project itself did not come from the suggestions of women. Although there were feminists who assisted me in identifying next steps in this process and who helped by providing critical feedback throughout the process, it seems critical to expand my efforts to engage more women's leadership in a more active way (without diverting their attention away from the critical work of saving women's lives) in this ongoing conversation.

As indicated in the introduction, this is an ongoing conversation. Plans are currently in place to hold a gathering of the men who participated in this conversation in the fall of 2006 or early spring of 2007 in order to engage in an in depth conversation that would include all of us simultaneously. Due to lack of funding, no face-to-face meeting has occurred as yet. One purpose of this conversation, as the findings suggest, is to build our movement of men to end men's violence. Based on the preliminary data from this research project, one key way of doing that is to create a means by which the men in this conversation, and other men who are doing similar work around the country can connect, share information and resources, support each other, and create a true movement of men. Men's violence will not end through women's behavior—it requires that men be a part of the solution, and a part of the sustained, grassroots efforts to end men's violence. Asking the men who are involved at various levels in the work to end men's violence seems like a natural place to go to identify lessons to learn about how to more effectively mobilize and organize more men in these efforts.

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Rus Ervin Funk, MSW, is a consultant and activist based in Louisville, KY. He currently sits on the Boards of Directors of the Indiana Coalition Against Domestic Violence, the National Resource Center on Sexual and Domestic Violence. His latest writings are “Queer Men and Sexual Assault: What Being Raped Says about Being a Man” in C. Kendall and W. Martino, *Gendered Outcasts and Sexual Outlaws* (2006, Haworth Press); and *Reaching Men: Strategies for Preventing Sexist Attitudes, Behaviors and Violence* (2006, Jist Publications).

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