

## **A response to Bob Pease's "Engaging Men in Men's Violence Prevention"**

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### **Introduction**

I want to start by affirming Bob's contribution. Bob's paper offers a series of valuable criticisms of aspects of the understandings and practices of violence prevention efforts addressing men, particularly in terms of their neglect or simplistic analysis of men's patriarchal interests and resistance to change. Both are useful correctives to overly optimistic and naïve perceptions of work to engage men in ending violence against women.

### **We agree that...**

Bob and I, and I would say many violence prevention advocates, are in firm agreement:

- Men's violence prevention must be grounded in feminist principles.
- It must address men's patriarchal investments in the status quo and men's resistance to change.
- There are real dangers to men's involvement and in some cases they have been realised.

However, there are also some ways in which we differ. I want you to take as given that I believe there is much in Bob's paper which is valuable, as I will focus on where I disagree.

### **1. Primary prevention**

#### **Primary prevention can, and does, address structural gender inequalities**

Bob offers a valuable critique of a focus on attitudes and values in much of contemporary prevention work. I very much agree that we must also address structural inequalities, gendered power relations, and the material and collective underpinnings of men's violence against women. Changing attitudes *is* primary prevention, but it is not all there is.

However, public health approaches are much more open to "interventions into structurally unequal gender relations" (4) than Pease allows. For example, the most prominent public health framework for the prevention of violence against women at the moment is VicHealth's *Preventing violence before it occurs: A framework and background paper to guide the primary prevention of violence against women in Victoria*. This framework clearly identifies male dominance and gender inequalities as key determinants of violence against women. And its first theme for action, "promoting equal and respectful relationships between men and women", identifies strategies to address structurally unequal gender relations as central.

#### **In defense of a feminist ecological framework**

Bob writes that we must ensure "that a feminist analysis remains as the central underpinning of violence prevention" (13), and as part of this, he makes some criticisms of an ecological model of violence and its prevention. He writes as if feminist and ecological models somehow are incompatible, and here I think that he is mistaken. Feminist authors such as Lori Heise would argue that theirs is a *feminist ecological* model: it addresses determinants of men's violence against

women at multiple levels of the social order, while taking as given that gender and gender inequalities are central across these.

In fact, it is not entirely clear to me whether Bob sees violence against women as explained entirely by gender and gender inequalities. I do not. I absolutely agree that feminist scholarship must be central to our analysis of violence against women, *and* I see this as compatible with the recognition of other determinants of or influences on violence against women which are not reducible to gender.

## 2. Evaluating men's violence prevention: Too critical and not critical enough

The paper warns of a number of important dangers in men's anti-violence work. These dangers are routinely identified in the writings of those advocating engaging men in violence prevention work, but it is worth being reminded of them here. So, to what extent have these actually been realised? While Bob's paper states that it is *not* an evaluation of actual efforts or programs, the discussion does in fact offer a range of evaluative comments. I believe that Bob's paper offers an evaluation that is both too critical and not critical enough.

Let's look first at where Bob's paper, in my opinion, is too critical. I start with the specific dangers or criticisms identified.

### Too critical

- Mainstreaming gender and reducing women's services?

Bob writes that "gender mainstreaming and targeting men has led to women's services being cut back" (8). Feminist assessments of gender mainstreaming are more ambivalent than this. Feminist advocates and scholars around the world note that gender mainstreaming has brought important achievements in awareness of, laws and policies in support of, and resources for gender equality. At the same time, the impact of gender mainstreaming is mixed and in some cases negative.

I do not believe that there are any examples in Australia of violence prevention work with men directly taking away funding from work with women. One *could* argue that directing resources to work with men takes resources away from work with women by definition, given a limited funding pie. And assessing the implications of this would then be a matter in part of assessing their relative value and effectiveness in ending violence against women.

- Weakening the feminist orientation? Or exemplifying it?

Yes, involving men may dilute feminist agendas. At the same time, involving men can be seen to *exemplify* a feminist agenda. There is a long history of feminist women and organisations calling for violence prevention efforts to directly address men and men's roles, right back to Andrea Dworkin's historic call to men in 1983 for "a twenty-four-hour truce in which there is no rape".

- Taking over the campaign? I wish.

What about men taking over campaigns against men's violence? First, while there are international examples of men taking over programs on gender, I do not believe that there are any examples of men taking over women's or feminist violence prevention campaigns. Men often argue for their right to involvement e.g. in Reclaim The Night marches, and often argue against campaigns and efforts focused on violence against women rather than 'against everyone', but such arguments rarely if ever come from men involved in violence prevention itself.

I think that the more important danger here is not about male involvement, but about *lack* of male involvement: that too few men will become involved. Too few men join efforts to prevent violence

against women. Rather than taking over the campaign, I am concerned that men won't take *up* the campaign.

- Rhetorical rather than real support from men

However, Bob and I probably would agree that there is a real danger that men's support will be rhetorical rather than real. That men will make token efforts, basking in the pride of their paltry involvement.

- Failing to earn women's trust? Or receiving it too easily?

Another danger that Bob notes is that men's violence prevention efforts will fail to earn women's trust. In fact, I suspect that men's efforts at present receive women's trust too easily. This is in line with Bob's earlier point, and mine too, that men involved in this work receive praise out of proportion to their efforts. For very understandable reasons, some women have too much hope, too much faith, in violence prevention efforts addressing men.

(There are various further evaluations of particular strategies which I won't address.)

### **The real achievements of men's violence prevention thus far**

In many ways, I do not recognise contemporary violence prevention in Bob's paper. There are significant achievements in men's violence prevention which deserve mention:

- Raising public and political awareness of the role of men and boys in ending violence against women.

The growing emphasis on involving men in violence prevention represents one of a number of significant shifts in this field. And we should not underestimate what a profound achievement this is. Yes, there are dangers and downsides, but on the whole this is a very valuable achievement. It locates the problem of violence against women firmly with men: men's attitudes, behaviours, and relations.

The White Ribbon Campaign, in its newly invigorated form, is perhaps the best Australian example of this. It has achieved very substantial institutional presence and support, as well as significant media coverage and community awareness.

- Mobilising men in groups, networks, and campaigns

Another significant achievement, evident in Australia and internationally, is the mobilisation of men in groups, networks and campaigns.

- Shifting the attitudes and behaviours which lead to or constitute violence against women (through education and social marketing)

It is remarkable that in this paper there is little or no mention of the now substantial body of evidence that violence prevention programs among men can make a difference. That, done well, education programs can shift the attitudes among boys and men that lead to physical and sexual violence, that they can shift behaviours – that they can lessen males' actual perpetration of violence.

Bob writes that "evaluations of men's violence intervention campaigns... have not addressed the impact that men's involvement has had on reducing violence or challenging patriarchal gender relations". This is incorrect.

A wide range of evaluations of violence prevention education, delivered in schools and universities in particular, document that they can have positive effects on participants' attitudes towards and participation in intimate partner violence (Flood 2005-2006). Male school and university students who have attended rape education sessions show less adherence to rape myths, express less rape-supportive attitudes, and/or report greater victim empathy than those in control groups. True, far too few interventions have been evaluated, existing evaluations often are limited in methodological and conceptual terms, and few explore impacts on actual perpetration or victimisation (Cornelius and Resseguie 2007). However, education programs which are intensive, lengthy, and use a variety of pedagogical approaches have been shown to produce positive and lasting change in attitudes and behaviours (Flood 2005-2006).

A recent international review by the WHO, titled *Engaging Men and Boys in Changing Gender-Based Inequity in Health* (2007), documents 57 interventions with evaluations. It reports that well-designed programs *do* show evidence of leading to change in behaviour and attitudes (WHO 2007: 4). Programs which are gender-transformative – which seek to transform gender roles and promote more gender-equitable relationships between men and women – had a higher level of effectiveness, as did programs which were integrated within community outreach, mobilization and mass-media campaigns and thus reached beyond individuals to their social contexts (3-4; 11).

- Involving, and shifting, powerful masculine organisations and workplaces

Another significant achievement is the involvement and support of powerful masculine organisations and workplaces in violence prevention. Important examples in Victoria for example include the AFL and the trucking company Linfox.

- Forging partnerships between women's and men's networks and organisations

Bob's paper notes some accounts of women's problematic experiences of working with men in violence prevention. Such stories should be told. But so should the other stories of productive and inspiring partnerships.

### **Not critical enough**

I believe that Bob's paper offers an evaluation that is not critical enough. For example, his paper could have noted that:

- Existing efforts to mobilise men as activists and organisers in grassroots anti-violence groups have been small and scattered. For example, Men Against Sexual Assault groups in the early to mid 1990s suffered the same fate as many volunteer-based, grassroots groups, losing members and momentum after several years.
- Face-to-face education programs directed at boys and young men are scattered and under-developed, and few have been well evaluated. (This is changing however.)

To focus on the White Ribbon Campaign for a moment:

- The WRC's media materials (TV and print advertisements) over the past three years are vulnerable to the criticism that they were ineffective or even damaging. There was particular controversy over the 2006 ads produced by Saatchi and Saatchi, and more recent efforts have not been much better. This represented a lost opportunity to produce effective and appropriate social marketing campaigns.
- The WRC has not done enough to foster local and community take-up of the campaign, relying more on top-down approaches (although community development and community mobilisation approaches are challenging and labour-intensive).

- The WRC, and ‘White Ribbon Day’ (as it’s been termed in Australia), in some ways has come to overshadow the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women (IDEVAW). Perhaps this is one example of the male ‘takeover’ about which Bob warns us, albeit a *discursive* one. IDEVAW increasingly is seen *as* WRD, rather than the WRD falling on IDEVAW. Combined with the fact that in general women are more likely than men to support any campaign on men’s violence against women, this has had a problematic consequence. It means that the White Ribbon Campaign increasingly is being understood as a campaign for *anyone* to wear a white ribbon, rather than a campaign focused on men.
- The WRC’s ‘big tent’ approach has been politically controversial, particularly when socially conservative figures such as Cardinal Pell have become ‘Ambassadors’ for the campaign.

However, perhaps the most significant criticism I can make of men’s violence prevention is that it is so small.

- Few men actually take up the cause of preventing violence against women
- Relatively few men are advocates for the prevention of violence against women.
- The number of men who are actively campaigning *against* feminism (and its various efforts, including to prevent and respond to violence against women) is at least as large, if not larger, than the number of men campaigning for feminism.

Bob’s paper acknowledges this, in noting the desirability of “involvement of a core group of men and “support and commitment from men in leadership positions”.

### **3. Benefits to men: some preliminary comments**

I want to turn now to the most challenging aspect of Bob’s paper, involving questions of men’s interests and benefit to men.

#### **Benefit to men is not part of, or at least not central to, the rationale for involving men**

Bob writes that, “A part of the rationale for involving men in violence prevention is that men will benefit from being involved.” (6) I’m not sure about this. I don’t see benefit to men as a key reason for involving men in violence prevention. Instead, it is a bonus, a spin-off. And yes, it is one of the typical rhetorical appeals made to men regarding why they should be involved, while others concern ethical principles, benefit to women, and so on.

#### **Yes, an emphasis on benefits to men is dangerous.**

However, I agree that there is an excessive emphasis on benefits to men in some violence prevention discourse. And that focusing on men’s benefits or interests runs the risk of compromising women’s interests and progress towards gender equality and of neglecting the very real benefits to men of violence and of gender inequality.

#### **Yes, men also will lose from the elimination of violence against women and the establishment of gender equality.**

Yes, men also will lose from the elimination of violence against women and the establishment of gender equality. Efforts to involve men in violence prevention must acknowledge the *costs* to men of undermining the patriarchal privileges which underpin men’s violence against women.

#### **However, benefit to men *should* be part of our appeal to men.**

However, our efforts to engage men in violence prevention work should include an emphasis on the benefits to men.

#### **4. Interests and benefits: Implications for engaging men**

For me, the implications of Bob's comments are not clear. Should we ever talk about the ways in which men might benefit from a non-violent future? Should we always portray progress towards a non-violent and gender-equal future as necessarily a zero-sum game in which men will lose and women will gain?

I think this would be a mistake. It would hinder our efforts to end violence against women. I will try to offer, briefly, a way to work with interests and benefits.

##### **Acknowledge costs *and* benefits.**

- Including the costs, and benefits, of both involvement in violence prevention work and of a world free of violence against women.

Our efforts to engage men should acknowledge both costs and benefits. And these should relate to the costs and benefits of direct involvement in violence prevention work, *and* of the future for which we work, a world free of violence against women.

For example, men and boys who engage in violence prevention may be ridiculed or harassed for lack of conformity to hegemonic masculine norms, and when attempt to intervene in violence, may even be assaulted (Crooks *et al.* 2007: 231).

My reasons here are political: to end men's violence against women, we will need to secure the support of at least some men. And to do that, we will need to appeal, *in part*, to the ways in which they will gain.

##### **Appeal to, and intensify, men's reconstructed or anti-patriarchal interests.**

There appears to be a contradiction in Bob's argument. He writes, "To involve men in changing unequal gender arrangements, we must persuade them that the costs associated with the current system outweigh the benefits" (11).<sup>1</sup> However, he has been arguing all along that contemporary society involves systematic privileges granted to men, which outweigh the costs. I agree with this. So, given this, persuading men that the costs outweigh the benefits would be to fool them, to persuade them to believe a lie.

However, there are a couple of ways out of this. The first is to abandon any emphasis on benefits, such that our appeal to men is purely altruistic: take part in the effort to end violence against women, although there is no benefit in it for you. I've already argued that this would be self-defeating. The second relates to a distinction mentioned in Bob's paper between men's patriarchal interests, and their reconstructed, anti-patriarchal, or emancipatory interests. I want to explore it further. The third is to forget about interests and just force men to change, and I return to this below.

Men do have interests in the patriarchal status quo, in various forms of unjust privilege. But men also have, and can be invited to recognise, their interests in a non-patriarchal future. One reason for men to support an end to violence against women, really the primary reason, is an ethical or moral one: this violence is unjust. Men have an ethical obligation to act in support of the elimination of violence against women.

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<sup>1</sup> He also writes, "In light of the privileges men receive, I have become increasingly doubtful about our ability to convince many men that they will gain benefits from gender equality that will outweigh these privileges." (11)

However,

to sustain their involvement, it is important for men to see their stake in feminist futures. For as Brod (1998: 199) argues, ‘self-sacrificing altruism is insufficient as the basis for a political movement’ and there is ‘a moral imperative to go beyond mere moral imperatives’. (Flood 2005)

### **Investigate and intensify men’s anti-patriarchal attitudes, behaviours, identities, and relations.**

We need to know much more about how and why some men come to anti-patriarchal identities and relations: why some men are resistant to patriarchal masculinities, others condone them, while others are their shock troops. We need to know much more about *how* we shift men’s sense of their interests, and *how* men’s interests can and do change.

- Explore why some men do *not* use or support violence.

On this note, I am troubled by Bob’s opposition to any claim that ‘most men do not use violence’. He writes that this claim often follows, and necessarily undermines, the point that violence is perpetrated primarily by men. I see the statements as compatible. Yes, the former statement can weaken the rhetorical impact of the second, but in the circumstances where it is true<sup>2</sup>, it is also both honest and politically useful. Yes, stating that ‘most men do not use violence’ can neglect the wider patterns of coercion and control perpetrated by men. But it would be a mistake to assume therefore that men’s involvements in violence, coercion and control are homogenous and uniform.

Furthermore, there is a valuable question here, regarding diversity in men’s practices and social relations. Whether a majority of men or only a minority do not use violence, surely it’s valuable to know how their non-violent practice has come about, to try to foster non-violence more widely? And to examine the social conditions which foster non-violence.

There are further strategies which are relevant, including the following.

- Develop critical pedagogies.
- Use innovative and engaging techniques to foster men’s support for and commitment to gender equality.

These might include exercises in gender reversal or ‘walking in women’s shoes’, listening directly to women’s experiences, local stories and examples, personalising women’s suffering by drawing on men’s relationships with women in their lives (mothers, sisters, aunts, daughters, and so on), making comparisons with other forms of inequality or unjust power, drawing on culturally appropriate texts and stories in critiquing gender inequality such as religious texts, local myths and fables, and, on the other hand, using the language of human rights, fairness, justice, and so on.

### **Be prepared for, and respond to, men’s resistance.**

We must be prepared to respond to men’s reactions of defensiveness and hostility when they do occur, and more generally to forms of resistance – delaying tactics, lip-service, tokenism, and so on (Ruxton 2004: 224). Resistance represents the defence of privilege, but also can express men’s fears and discomfort regarding change and uncertainty (Greig and Peacock 2005: s1.4). Incidentally, Pease’s proposed human rights framework will not make this defensiveness go away.

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<sup>2</sup> In some countries and contexts, in fact the *majority* of men have used physical or sexual violence.

I've written elsewhere of the strategies we can use to respond to men's organised anti-feminist activism, such as to discredit fathers' rights groups, produce critiques of their lies, and co-opt the new politics of fatherhood.

### **Provide small steps for well-meaning men to become involved and take action.**

One of the reasons why men do not join the anti-violence movement is patriarchal investment and resistance, but it is not the only reason. Further important reasons include a sense of helplessness, a lack of knowledge about how to help, and a fear that they will not be welcome (Crooks *et al.* 2007: 219).

I worry that we expect men to have completed a thorough self-evaluation and reconstruction *prior* to their involvement in anti-violence work (Crooks *et al.* 2007: 223), and to come with an already sophisticated understanding of gender equality, violence against women, and power and control. That is, we may adopt unrealistic standards.

- Get men to take specific actions.

Instead, give the average man an identifiable action list. Get men to take specific actions which, in turn, will alter their attitudes to masculinity and raise their awareness of gender issues (Crooks *et al.* 2007: 224).

- Engage well-meaning men.

Engage 'well-meaning men', who sit in a middle ground between violent and profeminist men (Crooks *et al.* 2007: 224). I am thinking here of 'nice guys', who are not directly involved in perpetration of obvious physical or sexual violence, who profess at least some basic support for gender equality, and commitment to reasonable treatment of and respect for the women in their life.

### **Provide positive reinforcement for engagement in violence prevention.**

Rewards for the behaviour can be intrinsic or extrinsic (Crooks *et al.* 2007: 234). Extrinsic awards might include initiatives like leadership awards night. Intrinsic or inherent rewards can be provided for example by establishing groups with positive identities (whether school clubs or community mobilising), including reinforcing group dynamics (Crooks *et al.* 2007: 234).

### **Force men to change, by changing social contexts and structures.**

In any case, as I also mention below, is an appeal to interests the *only* way in which we can prompt change among men? Are there other mechanisms, processes, and structures through which or because of which men may change?

To make a further, more substantive theoretical point, I do not believe that mobilising men's reconstructed sense of self-interest is the only basis for change. I have argued for example that it may be appropriate to adopt other strategies which *force* men to change. For example, violence prevention efforts should include efforts to change the structural and institutional conditions within which men make choices about how to behave. I.e., change the structure of costs and benefits, and not just men's calculation of them. One obvious example of such an effort is to increase the criminal justice system's policing and punishment of men's violence against women. Others include empowering women, decreasing their economic dependence on men, and raising their expectations of men, as well as changing laws and policies, workplace and sporting cultures, and so on.

To summarise: There is much I support in Bob's paper. At the same time, I believe that it presents an inaccurate picture of men's violence prevention work. And I feel that it prioritises the



theoretical purity of this work over its actual political effectiveness, its effectiveness in ending men's violence against women.

## Appendix

### Online resources on men's roles in stopping violence against women

#### (1) Readings

XOnline includes a substantial collection of over 100 accessible articles on men, gender, masculinity, and sexuality, here: <http://www.xonline.net/articles.shtml>. It includes key articles on men's work in helping to stop violence against women, here: <http://www.xonline.net/articles.shtml#Violence>

The site also includes critiques of 'fathers' rights' and 'men's rights' claims about family law, violence, custody, etc., here:

<http://www.xonline.net/articles.shtml#Violence>

And here: <http://www.xonline.net/articles.shtml#father>

#### (2) Web sites

XOnline also includes a substantial collection of links to other websites on men and masculinities, here: <http://www.xonline.net/links.shtml>.

This includes links on men's anti-violence work, here:

<http://www.xonline.net/links.shtml#2>

Australian websites on violence against women:

<http://www.xonline.net/links.shtml#ViolenceAustralia>

International websites on violence against women: <http://www.xonline.net/links.shtml#12>

#### (3) Academic references

The Men's Bibliography is a comprehensive bibliography of writing on men, masculinities, gender, and sexualities, listing over 20,000 books and articles. It is free at:

<http://mensbiblio.xonline.net/>.

The bibliography includes a substantial section on men's anti-violence work, here:

<http://mensbiblio.xonline.net/violence2.html#Antiviolenceactivism>

The bibliography also includes a substantial section on violence prevention, here:

<http://mensbiblio.xonline.net/violence3.html#Violenceprevention>