

Addressing intersections of social disadvantage and privilege in engaging men in violence prevention

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I'm going to focus on engaging men in prevention in intersectional ways.

The context

I want to start with some brief comments on the context for this discussion.

I focus on *men's violence against women* – on the various forms of violence and abuse to which women are subjected by men, including domestic, family, and partner violence, sexual violence, sexual harassment, and other forms of violence and abuse.

I focus on the *primary prevention* of this violence, that is, on efforts to prevent initial perpetration and victimisation, and more widely, to change the drivers, determinants, or causes of this violence – I'm thinking here, particularly, of systemic gender inequalities, inequitable power relations, constructions of masculinity and femininity, and male peer relations.

And within this, I am focused particularly on how to engage *men* in prevention. In the violence prevention field, there is an increasingly visible emphasis on how to engage men – not only men as perpetrators, but men as bystanders to other men's violence and violence-supportive attitudes and behaviours.

I have written widely on men's roles in ending violence against women and in building gender equality. I'm going to take for granted, although in some contexts we cannot, that work with men must be *feminist*. It must be guided by a feminist agenda and have feminist content. It must be done in partnership with, and be accountable to, women and women's groups.

Today, however, I want to explore how work with men, like all violence and crime prevention work, must also be *intersectional*.

An intersectional analysis of men and masculinities

Here is a lightning-quick account of an intersectional analysis of men and masculinities.

An *intersectional* feminist approach rests on the fundamental insight that gender intersects with ethnicity, sexuality, class, age, and other forms of social difference and social inequality.

So we can apply this intersectional feminist approach to men. This leads to three insights.

(1) Men's lives (like women's) are structured not only by gender but by various other forms or axes of social division and difference such as race and ethnicity, class, and sexuality.

(2) Dominant images of masculinity involve a white masculinity.

The dominant image of masculinity with which we in Australia are presented, is of a *white* masculinity. Popular culture places the lives of white, Anglo men at centre stage, while those of other men are marginalised or made invisible.

(3) Men in different social locations have differential access to social resources and social status.

Gendered power is intersected for example by race power and class power. Men share very unequally in the fruits of patriarchy. Any particular group of men will be privileged on some axes of inequality (including gender), and may be disadvantaged on others. Thus, particular groups of men may be both *oppressed* and *oppressing*, for example in oppressive relations with women.

An intersectional approach to men's violence against women

So let's move to an intersectional approach to men's violence against women

Focusing on men, and focusing particularly on race and ethnicity rather than *other* forms of social difference, here are three ways that intersections of gender and ethnicity shape men's relationships to violence against women.

(1) Men's violence-supportive attitudes are shaped by gender, ethnicity, and other factors.

We know that community attitudes towards violence against women are shaped above all by gender. The strongest predictors for holding violence-supportive attitudes are being male, and having low levels of support for gender equality.

But, attitudes also are shaped by ethnicity. Attitudes towards some aspects of men's violence against women are poorer in some CALD communities than in Australia overall.

For example, people from certain CALD backgrounds show far less recognition of rape in marriage and intimate relationships, and greater willingness to see rape as an expression of an uncontrollable need for sex. At the same time, women in both the general community and selected CaLD communities have better attitudes than men in either.

(2) Some men's use of violence is shaped by immigration and resettlement.

Experiences of immigration and resettlement can shape men's *use* of violence, their actual perpetration.

For some men, the changes in women's social and economic status which resettlement brings feed into relationship conflict and a felt sense of disempowerment, and some men respond with increased efforts to maintain or regain control, including through violence (Flory 2012: 8).

In refugee communities, in the context of shifts in their dominant status within families, men may use violence in efforts to make their wives and children obey and show respect. Men may fear separation and divorce from their wives. And as a result of war trauma, they may respond more readily with violence.

(3) How male perpetrators are treated and viewed is shaped by race/ethnicity.

Male perpetrators are more likely to be held accountable and criminalized, and their crimes are more likely to be seen as linked to their ethnicity, if they are poor, black or men of colour. On the other hand, white men are less likely to be held accountable, less likely to be arrested and charged, and their use of violence is less likely to be seen as linked to their ethnicity and cultural heritage.

More widely, community understandings of and responses to men's violence against women are shaped by race and racism. For example, we have seen moral panics in Australia linking particular groups of men to crime and violence, such as the moral panics linking gang sexual assaults to Arab-speaking or Muslim men.

What we can see among men, therefore, is the workings of both multiple forms of privilege (male, white, heterosexual, etc.) and disadvantage.

With any group of men (or women)

What does this mean for work with men? Again, I will focus this on questions of culture and ethnicity.

Everyone has culture. (Everyone speaks with an accent. Everyone has culturally specific norms, traditions, and ways of viewing the world.)

Everyone has culture. Take for granted that all men have ethnicity. All men have culture. Every one of us speaks with an accent. It is racist to assume that only men from minority communities have some kind of cultural specificity, while Anglo, English-speaking-background men somehow are generic. Men like me have culture – specific forms of language and norms, traditions, ways of viewing the world, and so on – just as much as other men.

There are specific cultures of gender and sexuality in every group and community.

In working with *any* group or community of men, one of the first steps is “to map their gendered and sexual culture, in order to see what aspects of this culture contribute to violence against women and what aspects can be mobilised in support of non-violence” (Flood 2005-2006: 31).

There is not only cultural diversity, but material and structural inequality.

There is not only cultural diversity, but material and structural *inequality*. We must recognise the facts of racism, of systemic inequalities, of structural patterns of privilege and disadvantage.

Intersectional approaches in violence prevention work with men

To what extent is an intersectional approach visible in men’s anti-violence work? Just to offer some brief commentary here:

- Much of the prevention work in the Global North historically has assumed a homogenous male constituency. Much has assumed that its participants are heterosexual, and neglected inequalities of race and class.
- There has been little empirical investigation of how to tailor efforts to men in particular populations or communities, although this is far less true of the wider violence prevention field.

There are some positive signs too...

- Some of the best work on men’s roles in violence prevention comes from countries in the Global South – from Brazil, India, the DRC, and so on.
- Leaders and advocates in men’s anti-violence work e.g. in the USA do show signs of recognition of the challenge of intersectionality, e.g. of how poverty and racism complicate efforts to engage men (Casey et al. 2013).
- There are a small number of efforts focused on questions of diversity, such as the Australian White Ribbon campaign’s diversity initiatives, including tailored programs, resources, and community campaigns.¹
- There is a rapidly developing scholarship on formations of men and gender in particular contexts, e.g. with important to challenges to Anglo-centric and even racist discourses

¹ See <https://www.whiteribbon.org.au/stop-violence-against-women/what-white-ribbon-does/working-diverse-communities/>.

regarding men and violence has come from South Africa (Morrell, Jewkes, & Lindegger, 2012) and elsewhere.

Engaging men in immigrant, refugee, and ethnic minority contexts

So, if violence prevention is taking place for example among immigrant, refugee, ethnic minority, or indigenous men, what should it look like?

There are some principles which receive consistent emphasis here. Primary prevention in immigrant, ethnic minority, and indigenous communities should be based on community ownership and engagement, cultural appropriateness, and building community strength or capacity.

What about among men in particular?

Improve the social and economic conditions of men and communities

First, there is a strong argument that improving the material conditions of ethnic minority and Indigenous men and communities also will feed into lower rates of intimate and family violence. Community education work with newly arrived men from immigrant and refugee communities should address their pre-arrival experiences of war, torture and trauma (Flory 2012: 56).

Include culturally relevant content.

We need culturally relevant interventions. Overseas research does suggest that in work with racially diverse groups of men, culturally relevant interventions are more effective than 'colourblind' ones. Cultural relevance extends from the use of local educators, to local figures in marketing materials, to the use of culturally specific and significant appeals and narratives in communications campaigns.

Acknowledge racism and intersectional disadvantage

Violence prevention with men from ethnic minority and indigenous backgrounds should highlight the links between racism and sexism and between racist and sexist violence. It should address common racist and sexist myths about violence.

Our work should be sensitive to multiple forms of social difference and inequality, engaging men in conversations not only about privilege but about disadvantage.

Address culturally specific supports for violence and gender inequality.

Violence prevention efforts also should address culturally specific supports for violence and gender inequality. This might include:

- theological or faith-based defences of male authority;
- appeals to 'culture' and 'tradition'; and
- forms of violence-supportive media such as music and film that are popular in particular communities.

Draw on local resources and texts in promoting non-violence and gender equality.

Efforts in particular communities also should look for and build on local resources, texts, and norms in promoting non-violence and gender equality.

Engage men through the leadership of women.

One strategy sometimes recommended in the literature on violence prevention in ethnic

minority communities is involving community and religious leaders. Most community and religious leaders are men, and both they and their institutions may be poorly placed to show leadership in addressing men's violence against women. Instead, we should engage men through the leadership of women

Address men's experiences of changing gender dynamics in families.

Finally, another key task is to address men's experiences of changing gender dynamics in families, including shifting dynamics of work, education, and power.

Conclusion

So, in violence prevention, we must move beyond simplistic notions of "white men saving brown women from brown men". Women from CALD and indigenous communities are not necessarily hapless victims, and nor are immigrant and refugee men any more sexist or violent than their English counterparts. In any context – rich or poor, Anglo or otherwise, newly arrived or fifth-generation – work with men must recognise the intersections of race, class, and sexuality which shape men's lives. An intersectional approach requires attention to both disadvantage *and* privilege – whether among white, heterosexual men or among other men in marginalised communities – and attention to the links between violence against women and other forms of social injustice.

Further reading

Key, recent pieces by Michael Flood:

- Work with men to end violence against women: A critical stocktake (journal article, 2015). URL: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/282305552_Work_with_men_to_end_violence_against_women_a_critical_stocktake.
- Preventing Male Violence (book chapter, 2015). URL: https://www.academia.edu/10441436/Preventing_Male_Violence
- From Working With Men and Boys to Changing Social Norms and Reducing Inequities in Gender Relations: A paradigm shift in prevention of violence against women and girls. (With Rachel Jewkes and James Lang). URL: https://www.academia.edu/9526624/From_Working_With_Men_and_Boys_to_Changing_Social_Norms_and_Reducing_Inequities_in_Gender_Relations_A_paradigm_shift_in_prevention_of_violence_against_women_and_girls
- Current Practices to Preventing Sexual Violence and Intimate Partner Violence (book chapter, 2014). URL: https://www.academia.edu/7095750/Current_Practices_to_Preventing_Sexual_Violence_and_Intimate_Partner_Violence
- Men's Anti-violence Activism and the Construction of Gender-equitable Masculinities (book chapter, 2014). URL: https://www.academia.edu/10441399/Men_s_Anti-violence_Activism_and_the_Construction_of_Gender-equitable_Masculinities

Other scholarship:

- Academic references on violence prevention in Indigenous, immigrant and refugee, and culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities: <http://xyonline.net/books/bibliography/27-violence-and-responses-violence/s-violence-prevention/bibliography-20>
- Academic references on domestic, family, and sexual violence in Indigenous, immigrant and refugee, and culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities, here: <http://www.xyonline.net/content/8-violence-against-women-and-its-prevention-indigenous-immigrant-refugee-and-culturally-and->

Michael Flood's further writings & publications: <http://www.xyonline.net/category/authors/michael-flood>

Articles and resources on engaging men in the prevention of men's violence against women: <http://www.xyonline.net/category/article-content/violence>.