

Chapter 10

Concluding Critical Commentary: Men's Experiences as Agents of Feminist Change



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10.1 Introduction

There has been an increasing visible politicisation of masculinities in many countries over the past several decades. One important dimension of this is the emergence of groups and networks of men seeking to act as agents of feminist change. Many such efforts focus on men's roles in preventing and reducing men's violence against women (Flood 2018), while others address gender inequalities and sexism in general or more specific domains such as fathering (Hassink and Baringer 2015) and sexual health (Hook et al. 2018). In this chapter, we explore the challenges faced by men who adopt explicitly profeminist forms of political advocacy, drawing selectively on the preceding chapters in this book as well as other recent scholarship among male advocates as examples.

Community and political attention to the 'problem of men' is certainly not new, and there are other times and places when debates over men's and boys' lives and relations have consumed public attention. Yet the present moment shows a particularly energetic and widespread politicisation of masculinities. There are at least six overlapping signs of this. First, in the earliest sign of this politicisation, men's groups and networks with a self-conscious focus on men and masculinities emerged in many countries in the 1970s in the wake of second-wave feminism (Flood 2007). Their numbers were small, they spanned the political spectrum from anti- to pro-feminist, and their fortunes have ebbed and flowed over the past five decades, but they have continued to contest the meaning and organisation of masculinity. Second, a field of 'engaging men' or 'work with men and boys' has developed, involving gender-con-

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181

scious initiatives and interventions aimed at men and boys in relation to violence prevention, sexual and reproductive health, parenting, education, and other fields (Flood 2015a). Third, there is intensified public attention to ‘men behaving badly’: in the context of the #MeToo movement, to men’s perpetration of sexual harassment, rape, and abuse (Gill and Orgad 2018; Kunst et al. 2018), and more widely to men’s sexist and patriarchal practices, for example in discussions of ‘mansplaining’ and ‘manspreading’. Fourth, perhaps particularly in the last five or so years, there has been frequent public debate over men’s lives and relations, dominant constructions of masculinity, and efforts to restore or reconstruct these. Recent expressions of this in 2018–2019 in Western countries included community and media commentary and disputes over the American Psychological Association’s new guidelines on working with men, Gillette’s “We Believe: The Best Men Can Be” advertisement, and ‘toxic masculinity’. Fifth, feminist politics itself has seen a ‘turn to men’, a proliferation of popular discourses of male feminism and male allyship (although this sits alongside, and indeed may express, an increasingly depoliticised feminism) (Flood 2017). Sixth, the range of social problems where masculinity is seen to be implicated is expanding. While masculinity has long been identified, at least by scholars and activists, as implicated in men’s violence against women, men’s health, parenting, and boys’ education, other social issues are being added to the list. There has been recent scholarly and media attention, for example, to the links between masculinity and climate change and environmental destruction (McCright and Dunlap 2011), men’s violence against other men (Ratele et al. 2010), meat-eating (Sumpter 2015), and violent extremism and terrorism (Möller-Leimkühler 2018).

One of us, Flood, has been paying attention to public debates over men and masculinities since entering profeminist men’s advocacy 32 years ago and, while this does not comprise hard data, it does seem to us that men and masculinities are now on the public agenda – in ways both progressive and regressive – to an unprecedented extent.

Before examining men’s profeminist anti-violence advocacy, let us first sort out the various terms circulating here.

10.2 Masculinity and Politics, Political Masculinities, and Masculinity Politics

Focusing first on masculinity and politics; masculinity is embedded in conventional politics in a range of ways. As Connell (1995, p. 204) noted over two decades ago, “Politics-as-usual is men’s politics”. In the first instance, parliamentary politics is structured as much by men’s dominance as by women’s marginalisation and underrepresentation (Bjarnegård and Murray 2018a, p. 264). Men, and particularly privileged men, monopolise political leadership (Bjarnegård and Murray 2018b; Childs and Hughes 2018). The practices and discourses of politics typically are shaped by male norms and masculine codes of behavior (Galea and Gaweda 2018), and systems of formal and informal power privilege masculine character traits, customs, and operating procedures over feminine ones (Francis 2018). Elections involve

gendered attacks on and policing of female political leaders, gendered slurs against opposition parties and candidates, and contests over the performance of particular forms of masculinity (Carian and Sobotka 2018; Messner 2007). As Donald Trump's victory over Hillary Clinton in the 2016 U.S. presidential election demonstrated, voting patterns are shaped by sexist animus (Francis 2018), and perceived threats to masculinity inform some men's votes for masculine candidates (Carian and Sobotka 2018). Right-wing, anti-feminist, homophobic, and fundamentalist political parties and movements draw support and strength from appeals to masculine values (Mellström 2016). Media and news representations of formal politics reinforce gender inequalities and conflate masculinity and the political (Bjarnegård and Murray 2018b; Francis 2018). And masculinity often is embedded in the workings of war and militarism, citizenship and nationhood, foreign policy, and political movements (of various persuasions) (Starck and Sauer 2014).

In short, gender inflects the organisation and meaning of politics, the activities associated with the use and achievement of formal power and governance. In this context, the term 'political masculinity' has emerged, denoting any kind of masculinity constructed around, ascribed to, and/or claimed by 'political players'. The latter includes any individuals or groups who are part of or associated with the 'political domain', such as politicians, but also members of political movements (Starck and Sauer 2014, p. 6).

In practice, the concept of 'political masculinity' has been productive in highlighting how formal politics, and other realms of political contestation, are characterised by competing discourses of masculinity, structured by relations between men, and intersect with other masculinised domains and institutions (Starck and Sauer 2014). At the same time, the concept of 'political masculinity' is vulnerable to three criticisms. First, the term's use is diverse if not fuzzy, applied to such varied phenomena as groups of men, male-dominated political parties and movements, gendered ideologies or discourses, and even institutions and structures. Second, it is not clear what makes any of these a 'masculinity' – is it that they comprise men, invoke notions of masculinity, contribute to men's power over women, or something else? Here, the use of the term 'political masculinity' echoes the diverse and contradictory ways in which the term 'masculinity' itself has been deployed (Flood 2002). Third, in a sense, *all* masculinities are political, in that all are implicated in gendered power relations, for better or for worse. A recent account acknowledges this point, emphasising that the concept of political masculinities can be applied to "instances in which power is explicitly either being (re)produced or challenged" (Starck and Luyt 2019, p. 5), but this still does not sufficiently demarcate a sufficiently distinct field or set of phenomena.

Another term visible in discussions of men, masculinities, and politics is 'masculinity politics', defined by Connell (1995, p. 205) as "those mobilizations and struggles where the meaning of masculine gender is at issue, and, with it, men's position in gender relations". 'Masculinity politics' thus refers to organised, public contestations of the meaning and organisation of men's lives and relations. These express themselves in men's groups, organisations, and networks and in public debates and controversies. The terms 'masculinity politics' and 'political

masculinities' thus cover overlapping phenomena, in that the latter term has been applied in part to groups and organisations contesting the meaning and organisation of masculinity.

At least five major forms of masculinity politics have been visible in Western capitalist countries such as the USA, UK, and Australia. Moving from least feminist to most feminist, and somewhat simplistically, these comprise (1) men's rights and fathers' rights, (2) men's liberation, (3) spiritual and mythopoetic approaches, (4) Christian, and (5) profeminist (Flood 2007). Gay male activism too is identified as a form of masculinity politics in some accounts (Connell 1995), given its challenges to hegemonic constructions of heterosexual masculinity. As this account suggests, the political agendas of different instances of masculinity politics are diverse and, in some cases, bluntly at odds.

There are of course many other forms of organised political activity which invoke and contest notions of masculinity, whether one thinks of Jihadist groups in the Middle East (Messerschmidt and Rohde 2018) or white supremacist groups and right-wing militias in the USA (Ferber 2000; Kimmel and Ferber 2000). However, arguably these are not forms of masculinity politics as such, as the meaning and organisation of masculinity are not defining of their politics.

One valuable model of how to position specific formations of masculinity politics in relation to each other is given by Messner (1997). Outlining what he calls a model of the "terrain of the politics of masculinities" (Messner 1997, p. 11), he offers a triangle with one of the following three themes at each corner: institutional privilege, the costs of masculinity, and differences and inequalities among men. Particular instances of masculinity politics then can be mapped within this triangle and located within the wider terrain of gender politics depending on how they understand and organise on behalf of men's interests.

Here, we focus on one particular form of masculinity politics, characterised by feminist or profeminist¹ political agendas. We examine the experience of men as deliberate agents of a progressive masculinity politics, drawing both on the chapters in this collection and on a wider field of research among male advocates and activists. We make particular use of qualitative studies undertaken in postgraduate research and available as PhD or Masters theses, as they are rich but neglected sources of data among male anti-violence and pro-feminist activists. While the chapter focuses on men as agents of change, it also draws on some studies in which men are more the objects of change, e.g. as the targets of education and social marketing programs.

Male agents of change's own negotiations and contestations of gender are the focus of the remainder of this chapter. There is, however, a wider scholarship on the impact and significance of the 'engaging men' field which bears mentioning. This includes two sorts of literature. First, there is a growing number of impact evaluations of programs and interventions seeking to engage men, and several narrative

¹There are debates both within and outside this politics over whether men should use the term 'feminist' for themselves, or adopt other terms of support such as profeminist, anti-sexist, and so on.

reviews of these (Edström et al. 2015a; Flood and Greig 2019). Second, there are political and conceptual assessments of the field of work with men, signalling both critical reflexivity about this 'field' itself, and growing awareness of the political and practical complexities of this work (Flood 2015b; Flood and Greig 2019; ICRW 2018; MenEngage Alliance 2016).

While this is a 'close focus' examination of men's experiences as agents of change, it must be acknowledged that this experience is structured by wider, contextual factors. One key influence is, of course the, character of gender relations and the extent and nature of feminist influence. For example, in countries where there is a consensus on the normative value of gender equality and state feminism is well established, there may be a broadly positive place for men in feminism (Holmgren and Hearn 2009), while in other countries, entrenched patriarchal constructions of masculinity and pervasive gender violence make it difficult for men to adopt alternative attitudes towards violence and gender (John-Kall and Roberts 2010).

There are persistent challenges in men's efforts to take up profeminist politics. Here we focus on four: overcoming one's own sexist and violence-supportive attitudes and behaviours; considering one's own perpetration or perpetuation of sexism and violence; living gender-equitably; and resisting everyday privilege.

10.3 Addressing Sexist and Violence-Supportive Attitudes

There are well-known barriers to men's receptiveness to profeminist initiatives and campaigns. I reviewed this with reference to violence prevention initiatives, in particular, noting the influence for example of men's sexist and violence-supportive attitudes and norms, overestimation of other men's sexism and support for violence, fears of others' reactions to intervention, loyalty to other men, negative perceptions of violence prevention efforts, and lack of knowledge of or skills in intervention (Flood 2018). Focusing on the first, men have systematically more sexist attitudes and beliefs than women, as a wealth of studies have documented (Drury and Kaiser 2014; Kågesten et al. 2016). These then play themselves out in how men perceive and respond to campaigns seeking to engage them in building gender equality. Three studies of men's responses to sexual assault prevention campaigns indicate that dominant, patriarchal scripts of gender and sexuality structure men's responses to such efforts.

In the UK, a campaign addressed to men aged 18–24 by the Liverpool City Council aimed to reduce rates of alcohol-related rape. Comprising posters and beer mats placed around university and city centre areas, the campaign sought to clarify the definition of consent and raise awareness of the impact of rape on girls and women (Carline et al. 2018). Surveys and focus groups among men did find some sympathetic responses among young men to the campaign, with many recognising that sex without consent is rape and that individuals may be so intoxicated that they cannot consent to sex. At the same time, some men offered only weak and uncertain understandings of consent, endorsed negative and presumptive conceptions of

consent (in which consent is signalled unless otherwise demonstrated, and taken as given in the context of other or previous sexual activity), and described persuading women to engage in sex.

The belief that sexual assault of women is ‘women’s problem’ – that it is women who should be responsible for avoiding rape – is a common one among men. A significant proportion of respondents in the study above argued that the campaign should focus primarily upon women’s victimisation, and only a minority supported its male-as-perpetrator focus. Indeed, a significant proportion of participants conceptualised the campaign itself as primarily concerned with the behaviour of women – as providing warnings to young women and advising them on how to maximise their safety. They argued that female-as-victim focused campaigns are a logical and essential approach to rape prevention and should also encompass factors beyond intoxication, specifically women’s attire (Carline et al. 2018). These accounts suggest that many young men continue to construct sexual assault as predominantly an issue for women.

Similar discourses of responsabilisation and victim-blaming emerge in two other studies among university students. In a Canadian study, first-year students aged 17–22 at an Ottawa university were shown public communication posters and pamphlets about sexual assault distributed on campuses, commenting on them in mixed- and single-sex focus groups. Both male and female participants saw women as responsible for preventing sexual assault, associating sexual assault prevention with how women can protect themselves. Students described sexual women as ‘teases’, at fault if sexually assaulted as men cannot control themselves when women express sexuality (Finestone 2011). In a US study, asked whether men should be responsible for rape prevention, only 11 percent agreed, 25 percent argued that women and men are equally accountable, and 19 percent focused on how women can avoid victimisation (Rich et al. 2010).

The normalisation of men’s violence against women structures men’s responses to violence prevention campaigns. In South Africa, the NGO Sonke Gender Justice has implemented One Man Can (OMC), a masculinities-focused, gender-transformative education program. The workshops typically comprise five to 30 participants, with two to three facilitators, and run over 1–3 days. Data from participant observation, focus groups, and interviews finds both encouraging and discouraging patterns among the participants. On the one hand, men who took part in the One Man Can workshops did show some signs of questioning dominant formations of masculinity. They noted the impact among men of traditional masculine norms, including in violence, the repression of emotion, and multiple sexual partnering, and some agreed that men’s sexual assault of women arises from expectations of masculinities. On the other hand, many participants and practitioners supported the notion that women’s behaviour or dress is a cause of violence, thus locating blame and responsibility with women (Graaff and Heineken 2017).

Hostility to feminism also structures men’s responses to violence prevention and gender equality campaigns. Some men perceive feminist events and campaigns negatively, as man-hating and hostile, and they avoid and disparage them, as do women to a lesser extent. Participants in the focus groups in Ottawa above associated

feminism with man-hating and men felt uncomfortable with the thought of attending a feminist event, anticipating that they would encounter women talking negatively about men (Finestone 2011).

A widespread belief that enables men to dismiss the reality of men's violence against women is the notion that many women's allegations of sexual and domestic violence are false. In the UK study of men's responses to the Liverpool City Council campaign, some participants emphasised the likelihood of a false allegation, perhaps as a way to reduce male responsibility and protect a sense of masculine self (Carline et al. 2018). Studies in the USA and Australia find widespread support for the inaccurate belief that women often make false allegations of rape and domestic violence (Flood 2019).

If the first obstacle to engaging men as progressive agents of change is that men in general often have sexist and violence-supportive understandings, a second is in persuading men to look at their own involvements in sexism and violence.

10.4 Considering One's Perpetration and Perpetuation

To make progress in preventing and reducing violence against women and other oppressive practices, men themselves will need to acknowledge and address their own involvements in these practices. Yet many men are highly resistant to doing this. They resist attention both to their direct *perpetration* of violence and abuse and their more indirect *perpetuation* of these.

Men's resistance here takes two forms. While both are based on the claim that the men who perpetrate violence are 'other', the first represents a comfortable distancing of oneself from perpetrators, while the second represents a more defensive protest. First, some men assume that violence prevention campaigns are irrelevant to them, and indeed not addressed to them, as *they* would never rape or assault a woman. They may even see such campaigns as desirable, in doing something about 'those men' out there. This pattern was visible for example among young men in the UK who were asked to consider the Liverpool City Council's campaign. Many drew on common myths that rapes are by strangers to the victim and that rapists are readily identifiable, monstrous and predatory others (Carline et al. 2018). Similarly, in a survey among Canadian first-year students, many young men perceived the men who perpetrate rape as strangers to the victim, psychotic others who are unstoppable and divorced from the remainder of the university community (Finestone 2011). Such men therefore simply do not see themselves as the targets of violence prevention campaigns. In both cases, these men engage in processes of 'identity work' whereby they strive to protect their good masculine selves from the figure of the menacing rapist (Carline et al. 2018).

This 'othering' at times is informed by racist and classist stereotypes of the men who use violence against women. For example, race and racism shape community and institutional understandings of and responses to men's violence against women, including stereotypes of black, migrant, Arabic, and Muslim men as more violent or

patriarchal than other men (Flood 2018). While ethnicity and class do indeed shape patterns of violence victimisation and perpetration, associating violence against women only with ‘other’ social groups obscures how domestic and sexual violence are embedded in gender relations that cross classes and communities.

The second form of ‘othering’ is more defensive, in which men protest that ‘not all men’ perpetrate violence. In this case, they *do* recognise violence prevention campaigns as addressed at them, but see this as unfair, hostile, and accusatory. In the survey among Canadian first-year students, some young men emphasised that they – and the men similar to them – are good, know that sexual assault is wrong, and do not sexually assault women (Finestone 2011). Some men feel patronised and insulted by campaigns focused on male perpetrators (Finestone 2011), while others co-opt feminist language to describe such campaigns as ‘sexist’ towards men (Carline et al. 2018). Indeed, men’s protestations of “Not all men” had enough currency that this phrase became a widely circulating hashtag in 2015, and criticised by feminist advocates as a defensive side-tracking of attention to men’s violence (Plait 2014). Such reactions among men are also informed by resistance to the idea that men’s violence against women is a structural problem, linked to gender inequality, sexism, and men’s daily practices of domination, and sexism, and a preference instead for individualised and depoliticised accounts of this violence (Göransson 2014). This preference was visible among men who took part in an anti-violence ‘Slutwalk’ event in the US, in that most did not make the connection between the sexual assault of loved ones and cultural definitions of masculinity that valorize competition, aggression, and the sexual conquest of women (Barber and Kretschmer 2013).

Given the prevalence of the idea that violence against women is perpetrated by a tiny minority of mad bad men, perhaps it is not surprising that men involved in pro-feminist advocacy also may draw on comforting distinctions between themselves and ‘other’, violent men. Three studies from three countries find such narratives. In the US, a study among male anti-violence activists found that many made distinctions between ‘us’ and ‘them’, between ‘well-meaning men’ or ‘men of conscience’ and those ‘other’ men who assault women (Macomber 2012). In Australia, some male anti-violence advocates position themselves as ‘good men’, offering a simplistic dichotomy between perpetrators and good men where the latter’s relations with women are beyond critical assessment. In the UK, as Burrell (this volume) notes, some men disassociate themselves from other men, from men’s violence, and from the relations of patriarchy. Indeed, communications campaigns intended to engage men also may appeal to men’s desires to feel good about being men, construct male activists as virtuous or better men (e.g. as ‘strong’ or ‘courageous’), and emphasise participants’ involvements ‘as men’ (Macomber 2012).

While such accounts are visible in men’s pro-feminist and anti-violence activism, there are other norms in these groups and networks which run counter to them. First, it is widely assumed that men involved in this work must address their own involvements in sexist and abusive practices and relations. Second, profeminist men tend to take on the feminist recognition of a continuum of forms of violence and abuse by men against women, making it harder to claim that they and many other

men have never perpetrated these. Third, there is a general acceptance of more structural and political accounts of men's violence against women, in which this violence is recognised as the expression of structures, practices, and ideologies of gender and power in which all men are implicated. Fourth, particularly among more experienced profeminist activists, there is a general norm that being a 'male ally' is not an end-state but a process. That is, for men engaged in feminism, personal change is ongoing and lifelong (Burrell, this volume). Finally, there is a widespread acknowledgement that men's lives are structured by patriarchal privileges, that all men are the recipients of unearned advantage, and that such privileges also shape the organisation and reception of this work (Flood 2005; Göransson 2014).

Men's resistance to considering their own roles as potential perpetrators is serious enough that the literature on engaging men tends to argue for positive, strengths-based approaches which address men as allies and bystanders (Flood 2018). Approaches which center on addressing men as perpetrators or potential perpetrators are said to provoke resistance and defensiveness, so much so that this gets in the way of effective engagement. While I have argued therefore that initial approaches to men must center on their potential positive roles (Flood 2018), we must also address men as potential perpetrators of violence against women and expect men to work towards gender-equitable forms of personal practice.

Some efforts seek to minimise or avoid men's resistance by appealing to men's existing investments in masculinity and drawing on normative masculine representations. Some do so in explicit ways, appealing to 'real men'. In Australia for example, a national poster campaign in 1993–94 by the Commonwealth government's Office of the Status of Women included the message, "Real men don't bash or rape women". Other campaigns draw on masculinity in more implicit ways, appealing for example to traditionally male qualities such as strength, such as Men Can Stop Rape's "My Strength is Not for Hurting" campaign (and, arguably, seeking to redefine such qualities in the process). Focusing on a recent example of a campaign aimed at 'real men', "Real men don't buy girls" is a US-based, celebrity-driven campaign on the issue of human trafficking. The campaign consisted of nine short ads played across the US on TV, online websites and social media. The public service announcements (PSAs) consisted of comedic skits starring famous celebrity men who represent 'real men', depicted engaging in feminine tasks (cooking, ironing, shopping, etc.), with these tasks represented as highly masculine, for example with a man shown shaving his face with a large chainsaw. The campaign centered on the message that 'real men do not pay for sex with girls'.

The "Real men don't buy girls" campaign received a series of criticisms. It was described as driven by the promotion of particular celebrities rather than a substantive challenge to trafficking. It neglected the conditions in which trafficking occurs and did not acknowledge the trafficking of men and boys. Participation in the campaign was largely symbolic rather than practical, with little call to action to engage in specific behaviours to prevent trafficking. The men who *do* buy sex from girls and women are 'othered'. Sex buyers are invisible, with their masculinities presumably 'false', leaving 'real' masculinities untainted and unquestioned (Steele and Shores 2014, 2017).

Men engaged in profeminist politics are expected to participate in both personal and social change. Beyond ceasing the perpetration of sexism and violence, they are expected to adopt a gender-equitable practice. This requires learning not only to ‘talk the talk’ but also to ‘walk the walk’.

10.5 Men Walking the Walk

Profeminist masculinity politics typically involves a ‘prefigurative’ politics, in which men are expected to live the change they intend to see in the world – to practise gender equality or gender justice in their own lives and relations. This reflects the insight pioneered by second-wave feminism that ‘the personal is political’: personal life and personhood are structured by wider relations of domination and subordination (Heberle 2016), and while gender politics is not reducible to personal practice, this practice does have political significance.

To what extent, then, do profeminist male advocates ‘walk the walk’ of profeminism? I reviewed the literature on this several years ago, concluding that, “Men who participate in men’s anti-violence activism do move towards counter-hegemonic masculinities. At the same time, this research also shows evidence of men’s ongoing complicity in patriarchal privilege” (Flood 2014, p. 43). Drawing now on a range of further studies among male advocates, including two in this volume, again we find signs of both the emergence of alternative or anti-patriarchal practice and of patriarchal complicity.

Some men engaged in profeminist men’s advocacy clearly do adopt robustly anti-patriarchal forms of personal practice, as two North American studies document. Powerful forms of personal change and reflection were visible among 11 men (and one woman) involved in men’s work in Canada (Rosenberg 2012). They offered rich, nuanced narratives of their efforts to connect the personal and political. Recruitment for the study required that participants have experience in men’s work committed to intersectional feminist values and practices, generating a pool of 12 activists, with an age range of 27–45, all involved in grassroots organising. These activists spoke of developing insight into how they have been affected by oppressive systems and how they have impacted others; recognising the hidden reproductive labour of organising; learning how to navigate emotions and develop an emotional fluency; challenging masculine habits of hypersexualising and objectifying women; and overcoming their socialised arrogance and entitlement. They were keenly aware of common traps in profeminist men’s advocacy, such as only intellectualising and not also embodying feminism, adopting a ‘saviour’ mentality, taking up disproportionate space, assuming an entitlement to leadership positions, and basking in undue reverence and respect (Rosenberg 2012). In a US study among six male undergraduate students who had had a sustained involvement in men’s violence against women prevention for over one academic semester, the young men’s accounts suggested that feminist allyship had become integrated into how they understood themselves and their roles in the world (Minieri 2014). The men described progressive shifts in

their social and sexual relations with women, intentions to continue their activism beyond their university studies and connections with other forms of social activism. In an Australian survey of male 'Ambassadors' for the White Ribbon Campaign (Bell & Flood, this volume), men reported change towards more gender-equitable relations, with women but more so with other men, noting for example that they were now more likely to challenge other men's sexist behaviour.

On the other hand, other studies in this volume highlight how men's notionally profeminist advocacy may be weak, ambivalent, or even destructive. The Israeli Ministry of Education in 2004 sought "men committed to the topic of gender equality", putting them through a program of feminist education to then deliver an intervention program among boys in Israeli schools. Schwartz (this volume) interviewed 18 men, ages 25–40, who worked in the programmes over 2004 to 2013. As he documents, much of the men's actual teaching practice condoned and even reinforced patriarchal masculinity and sexism. The male teachers overlooked the boys' and young men's sexual violence and gender policing, encouraged homophobia and avoided discussion of homosexuality, legitimated the use of pornography, and failed to offer clear messages supporting gender equality and criticising patriarchal behaviour. Two dynamics informed this. First, faced with boys who were disinterested in if not hostile to explicitly feminist teaching, the moderators abandoned the feminist content of the curriculum, Second, because they felt that being perceived as legitimate role models among the boys required this, the moderators adopted performances of normative, heterosexual masculinity. To gain the boys' trust and acceptance, they strove to be accepted as 'manly' men by displaying their knowledge of and achievements in sport and sex, and indeed some sought to prove that their masculine credentials were greater than the boys'.

Men who ostensibly advocate for feminism may at the same time show ambivalent or contradictory performances of gender, as two chapters in this volume show. Thym describes two autobiographies by men in leading positions in the financial sector who came to question and contest sexist gender relations. Neither man is involved in grassroots profeminist advocacy, but both have published books criticising the hegemonic masculine cultures of the finance industry. Yet, as Thym describes, one of the authors also affirms and naturalises aspects of hegemonic bourgeois masculinity, while the other is ambivalent about aspects of patriarchal masculinity in the finance sector, at times feeling uncomfortable but playing along. Men who adopt progressive positions on gender may oscillate between feminist and patriarchal practices in their day-to-day lives, as a UK study reports (Burrell, this volume). Ambivalence emerges as a theme also in a third study, among male allies involved in a violence prevention program in the informal settlements of Dharavi in Mumbai, India. Men in the focus groups offered fluctuating accounts involving condemnations of violence against women and girls as wrong, assumptions of women's responsibility for domestic labour, and benevolently sexist justifications of violence (Chakraborty et al. 2018).

Among men more generally, ambivalent and equivocal stances towards feminism have been documented in other studies. For example, UK research finds that some men offer two competing accounts of feminists and feminism, one in which

feminism simply wants equality and with which they agree, and another ‘extremist’ and ‘unreasonable’ feminism which they reject (Edley and Wetherell 2001). In Iceland, in a context where feminism has become normalised and ‘fashionable’, young men show ambivalent positions on feminism, neither fully showing support nor openly talking against it (Sigmarsson 2014).

There are dilemmas in balancing the personal and the political in profeminist men’s work. On the one hand, personal work is vital, to acknowledge and change one’s own perpetuation of gender oppression and to forge a gender-equitable practice. As the social justice activists involved in men’s work in Rosenberg’s (2012) study emphasised, male allies’ political work will be weaker if they do not examine their own experience of and place in oppressive systems. This, therefore, requires processes of critical reflection, consciousness-raising, or conscientisation, including through participation in structured workshops and groups (Flood 2018). On the other hand, personal work by itself will make only small contributions to wider social change, and collective public advocacy also is vital.

10.6 Resisting Everyday Privilege

The type of political project in which male advocates of feminism engage is a fundamentally delicate, even fragile one. As I wrote elsewhere,

it involves the mobilisation of members of a privileged group in order to undermine that same privilege. This activity is one instance of what has been termed ‘ally politics’, in which members of privileged groups take action to undermine that same privilege (Flood 2018, p. 91).

Male allies face at least three key challenges in seeking to advance gender justice: (1) undoing the privilege they and other members of their social category share; (2) negotiating their political position; and (3) resisting everyday invitations into sexism.

First, unlike the participants in other social justice and civil rights movements who seek to empower their social group and liberate themselves from oppression, profeminist men seek to divest themselves and other men of unfair privileges. While it is too simplistic to describe this as a project of ‘disempowerment’, it does involve different articulations of identity and social location. Profeminist men cannot see themselves as victims, or at least only as victims, of the patriarchal gender order, as they are also its beneficiaries. At the same time, this predicament is common to other social justice advocates as well. Members of oppressed groups involved in movement advocacy increasingly are compelled also to address their own privilege. For example, with the growing influence of intersectional approaches in feminism, many women in feminist activism also now work to address the privileges they and other women receive as white, heterosexual, economically privileged, able-bodied, and so on. In any case, profeminist men face common traps in adopting a politics of allyship: exceptionalising themselves as different from other men, making only

rhetorical rather than real change, taking up undue space in feminist circles whether in person or online, using feminism as an alibi for sexism (Sigmarsson 2014), and so on. Ally politics and 'call out' culture may breed some unhelpful forms of personal practice among aspiring allies, such as the hyper-vigilant self-regulation described by some male advocates in one study, a fear of making mistakes and the public criticism this would bring that in fact stifled activism (Rosenberg 2012). In addressing their own and other men's privilege, profeminist men also must navigate progressive political circles prone sometimes to the excessive policing of language, groupthink, and mob justice (Ahmad 2015; Pipyrou 2018).

Second, ally politics involves distinct challenges in negotiating one's political position among one's ideological allies. There is an understandable suspicion and scepticism among feminist women about profeminist men and profeminist men's initiatives. As organisers involved in grassroots men's work in Canada reported, women's mistrust of feminist men is often grounded in prior disappointing and hurtful experiences with such men, exposure to men's violence against women, and broader questioning of whether men can truly resist the patriarchy (Rosenberg 2012). Given women's lifelong experiences of men's dominating behaviour, and feminist women's intensified awareness of this, it is not surprising that some are sceptical and distrustful of self-reported male allies. In any case, feminist scrutiny of profeminist men is not unfair but reasonable, representing the holding of such men to standards of feminist practice (Rosenberg 2012). Feminist distrust also comes from perceived or actual competition over resources, funding, and leadership.

Feminists and women's organisations have expressed concerns about the impact of growing efforts to engage men, fearing that they may contribute to "the dilution of the feminist content and orientation of services, threats to funding and resources for programs and services directed at women, and the marginalisation of women's voices and leadership" (Flood 2018, p. 90). Studies among practitioners and advocates in various countries in both the global South and North find that some feminists and women's organisations fear that efforts to work with men and boys will divert funds away from women's rights work and from service provision to the female victims of violence (Barber and Kretschmer 2013; Colpitts 2014; Göransson 2014; John-Kall and Roberts 2010; McGraw 2013).

Profeminist men thus must manage distrust and cynicism from (female) feminist peers and women's organisations. As Bell and Flood (this volume) report, male anti-violence advocates in the Australian White Ribbon campaign negotiated both their own and other, feminist reservations about the coordinating organisation. Managing feminist distrust can play out in paradoxical ways. In Iceland, in a qualitative study among young men aged 18–26 who identified as feminists, some men discussed not being comfortable with disclosing their feminist status to women as they did not feel they could understand the experiences of women and oppression (Sigmarsson 2014).

At the same time, profeminist men also may experience a 'pedestal effect', in which they receive levels of praise and status well beyond their actual accomplishments and contributions (Messner et al. 2015). Writing about housework, Hochschild described an "economy of gratitude", in which husbands often were given more

gratitude for their household labour than were women, systematically ‘over-thanked’ for engaging in work that was seen as not required of them. In being over-thanked, male allies too receive the message that the work of gender equality is not their work (Bridges and Pascoe 2013). As Rosenberg (2012) documents among Canadian male allies, men also may experience rapid, even premature, escalation to positions of leadership and public visibility, receiving material opportunities and social capital. Such dynamics also mean that men’s voices and ideas may be heard more than women’s, reinforcing male dominance and women’s invisibility (Messner et al. 2015). There are, however, ways for feminist men to minimise such dynamics, such as referencing and recognising women’s contributions, passing appreciation to women, and stepping back from rewarding and recognised positions (Peretz 2010).

A third challenge among male allies is resisting everyday invitations into sexism, and one important setting for this is in men’s relations with other men. First, it is well documented that men’s peer relations with other men are an important influence on the maintenance of gender inequalities. DeFillipo (this volume) describes how patriarchal masculinities in Thailand, based on the sexual objectification of women and on intra-male hierarchies, are produced in part through homosocial spaces and groups. Other scholarship has documented men are more likely to perpetrate sexual violence against women if they have male friends who themselves endorse or perpetrate such violence (Swartout 2013).

Male-male peer relations, predictably then, also shape the impact of interventions among men in communities. For example, Gibbs et al. (2018) report on the impact of an intervention among young men in South Africa, intended to transform masculinities toward more gender equitable relations and strengthening men’s livelihoods and in particular to reduce HIV risk behaviour and intimate partner violence. The intervention combined two existing programs, Stepping Stones and Creating Futures, and comprised 21 three-hour sessions of participatory education. Interview and focus group data from the participants found that men’s peer relations with other men were a particularly important obstacle to change, while female sexual partners were supportive of change and families generally were supportive (although neither supported radical reconstructions of masculinity). Young men reported that their male peers discouraged progressive change, even actively resisting it through violent punishment (Gibbs et al. 2018).

Male-male relations also constrain men’s enactment of anti-sexist behaviour. As I have documented elsewhere (Flood 2018), men often refrain from intervening in other men’s sexism or violence because of concerns about loss of status among male peers. Other studies continue to show that gender policing constrains men’s ability to act as progressive agents of change. In a US study among six male undergraduates involved in anti-violence advocacy, the men described the negative consequences of sharing minority perspectives or ‘tattletaling’ such as speaking up against violence against women, including being mocked and isolated, having their gender and sexuality questioned, and being assaulted (Minieri 2014). In the Netherlands, the “Beat the Macho” campaign aimed to transform inequitable gender norms, by involving boys and young men in workshops inviting critical reflection on gender inequality through interactive, small-group, male-only strategies

(Cense et al. 2016). Boys aged 14–20 participated in the workshops, the storyboards they produced were transformed into online comics, and these and online discussions then formed the basis for a social marketing campaign involving a hip-hop song by two popular Dutch artists. However, male-male peer pressure was an important obstacle to gender transformation in the workshops, in that if the atmosphere was not safe, boys easily slipped back into performing macho behaviour to ensure their social position in the group. In Iceland, young men who identified as feminist reported challenges in confronting their friends about sexist behaviour, with complicity a tempting response (Sigmarsson 2014). More generally, living and moving in mainstream male culture was hard at times, e.g. with few heterosexual male friends. In South Africa, in a qualitative study among nine men, participants reported that men who are involved in gender-based violence prevention are met with allegations of failing to be “real men”, particularly from other men but also from women (Göransson 2014). Men and boys who *do* adopt more gender-equitable practices may be criticised, mocked, and policed by male and sometimes female peers, family members, and others (Dworkin et al. 2015; Edström et al. 2015b).

At the same time, clearly, some men manage to resist the pressures of sexist male peers and others, adopting persistent anti-sexist ways of being. Building communities of support – with both women and men – is an important strategy for enabling this. Indeed, profeminist male advocates argue that building alternative, anti-patriarchal friendships and peer groups with other men can be vital for men in sustaining their advocacy (Rosenberg 2012).

Beyond the challenges discussed thus far, there is the overarching challenge of making social change. After all, profeminist men's advocacy is intended to contribute to the elimination of societal gender inequalities – to put it in activist terms, to ‘smash the patriarchy’. This is no small task. Individual activists sometimes feel that they are not doing and cannot do enough, that the task of undoing oppression is overwhelming (Rosenberg 2012). There are important strategic questions which do, or should, preoccupy profeminist male advocates. What strategies for and approaches to social change are most effective? Which feminisms should we advocate and be accountable to (Burrell and Flood 2019)? What are the best targets for our efforts: which men, which institutions, which dimensions of gender inequality? What are the key entry points, life stage transitions, or means of leverage among men (Tolman et al. 2017)? How can we reduce and prevent anti-feminist backlash (Flood et al. 2018)?

The heightened attention to men and masculinities in countries around the globe represents a pressing opportunity for progressive social change. There is real value in *politicising* masculinity – in bringing to public attention the gender injustices driven by dominant constructions of manhood and the patriarchal organisation of men's lives and relations. This should focus on the links between masculinity and the gender inequalities which privilege men and disadvantage women, although it should also address constraints imposed on men and boys and the harms of gender binaries and hierarchies. To politicise masculinity is to continue a longstanding feminist project. Indeed, the contemporary politicisation of masculinity rests on and is possible only because of decades of women's rights and feminist advocacy. While

there are growing networks of profeminist men's advocacy, productive community discussions, and other signs of shifts towards gender equality, certainly there is no inevitability to progress. Patriarchal movements, leaders, and policies are resurgent in various nations (Mellström 2016), and sometimes they win. It is thus all the more urgent that men act, in alliance with women, as agents of feminist change.

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Contents

1	Only for the Brave? Political Men and Masculinities: Change Agents for Gender Equality	1
	Russell Luyt and Kathleen Starck	
2	The Politics of Absent Men or Political Masculinities Without the Polis.	15
	Jeff Hearn	
3	Male Agents of Change and Disassociating from the Problem in the Prevention of Violence against Women.	35
	Stephen R. Burrell	
4	Change among the Change Agents? Men’s Experiences of Engaging in Anti-Violence Advocacy as White Ribbon Australia Ambassadors.	55
	Kenton Bell and Michael Flood	
5	Men in Finance for Emancipatory Social Change?	81
	Anika Thym	
6	At Odds with Feminism? Muslim Masculinities in the Swedish “No Handshake” Debate in Newspapers	99
	Joakim Johansson and Mehrdad Darvishpour	
7	“Men Have the Power”: Male Peer Groups as the Building Blocks of Political Masculinities in Northern Thailand.	119
	Cassie DeFillipo	
8	“I Present a Role Model of Fluid Masculinity...”: Gender Politics of Pro-Feminist Men in an Israeli High School Gender Equality Intervention Programme	133
	Yaron Schwartz	

9 The Masculinization of Gender Equality: How Efforts to Engage Men May “Throw Women’s Emancipation Overboard” 157
Iris van Huis and Cliff Leek

10 Concluding Critical Commentary: Men’s Experiences as Agents of Feminist Change 181
Michael Flood and D’ Arcy Ertel

Index..... 201