

Engaging Men and Boys in Violence Prevention: Towards an Intersectional Feminist Social Justice Approach

Dr Michael Flood
Queensland University of Technology, Australia
m.flood@qut.edu.au
@MichaelGLFlood

Citation: Flood, M. (2020). Engaging Men and Boys in Violence Prevention: Towards an Intersectional Feminist Social Justice Approach. Keynote address, 20th Annual Diverse Voices Family Violence Conference, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, November 12-13, 2020.

Engaging men and boys

- There is an increasing emphasis on engaging men and boys in prevention
 - An increase in projects and initiatives aimed at men and boys
 - A proliferation of organisations
 - Growing attention in the violence prevention plans of state and national governments
 - An international field of 'engaging men' or 'work with men and boys'
 - MenEngage Global Symposium, November
 - A growing body of scholarship
- The rationale for engaging men and boys in prevention...

Features of violence prevention work with men and boys

- Much of the work is conducted by feminist and women's rights organisations and networks
 - Although emerging programs, campaigns, and organisations may not have feminist agendas or ties
- Prevention activity is siloed: separation between efforts addressing sexual violence and efforts addressing intimate partner violence
 - Although these forms of violence overlap, co-occur, and have shared risk and protective factors
- Little attention to industries identified in some feminist work as key sites of violence and exploitation: prostitution and pornography
- Much of the work comprises face-to-face education
 - E.g., respectful / healthy relationships and sexual consent programs
 - Also: Social marketing and communications

Violence prevention as a social justice project

- Social justice = fairness
 - The fair distribution of opportunities, rewards and responsibilities in society
 - Narrow and broad views...
 - Requires addressing social and economic inequalities and seeking to eliminate discrimination and oppression

Men's violence against women is a social justice issue

1. Is an issue of gender injustice
 - It causes harm to women's physical and emotional health
2. Is fundamentally linked to power and inequality
 - Men's violence both expresses, and maintains, men's power over women and children.
3. Is a barrier to gender equality
 - Men's violence:
 - is a threat to women's autonomy, mobility, self-esteem, everyday safety
 - harms women's health, restricts women's sexual and reproductive choices, and hinders their participation in political decision-making and public life
 - limits women's human rights and their rights to full citizenship

Feminism and social justice

- We are here because of feminist advocacy
- Feminisms are diverse, and not all embody a social justice approach
- Some strands of feminism are at odds with social justice approaches
 - Liberal feminism is focused on individual empowerment and formal equality rather than structural and systemic change
 - While both radical and socialist feminisms criticise socio-political structures
- Social justice approaches and movements are not necessarily feminist
 - Still, there are important alliances

A feminist and social justice approach to violence prevention

- 1) Addresses domestic and sexual violence as a social injustice
 - 2) Addresses the social inequalities at the root of this violence
 - 3) Works for change through social action, including community empowerment and liberation
- So how do efforts to address domestic and sexual violence, and to engage men and boys in prevention, measure up?

A social justice approach: 1) Domestic and sexual violence as a social injustice

- DV often is framed as an issue of public health
 - Some influential frameworks show a **feminist public health** approach. E.g., Our Watch's *Change the Story* framework (Australia)
- Efforts to engage men and boys in prevention endorse that this work must be feminist
 - But few organisations or projects focused on engaging men have well-developed feminist theoretical frameworks

A social justice approach: 2) Addresses the social inequalities, and especially gender inequalities, at the root of this violence

- Prevention should aim to change patriarchal structures, norms, and practices
- Feminist approaches provide the common foundations of much violence prevention work
- But often focused more on individuals and relationships rather than institutions and structures
 - Perhaps especially in the global North

Does 'engaging men' work address gender inequalities?

- Influential curricula and programs in the field show feminist agendas, content, and impacts
 - A feminist social justice framework may include approaches that are positive, strengths-based, and begin with personalised appeals
 - Some programs fall short of feminist principles
- Feminist attention to patriarchal inequalities also is visible among leaders and representatives of organisations that engage men and boys
- Progressive and social justice orientations are a common influence on men's pathways to involvement

Does 'engaging men' work address gender inequalities? *Cont'd*

- However, structural-level interventions are rare
 - Too much focus on the harmful aspects of individual male beliefs, roles and behaviors, and not enough on the systemic and structural forces that produce these
 - Masculinities are collective and structural
 - Risks in pinning hope for changes in gender "on the shoulders of individual men instead of helping to shift structures that shape masculinities"

'Gender-transformative'

- The field's feminist orientation may have increased with the growing emphasis on a 'gender-transformative' approach
 - Efforts intended to transform gender inequalities and generate more gender-equitable relations
- But let's:
 - Use the term precisely
 - Recognise a continuum from least desirable to most desirable approaches
 - See not only if interventions intend to transform, but **do** transform
 - Not use it as a rigid standard for inclusion
 - Be brave enough to use the term 'feminist'
- Educational interventions will only make change if:
 - They meet standards for effective educational practice (whole-of-institution, theory of change, sufficient duration, interactive, etc); and
 - They are complemented by wider efforts at social change

Addresses social inequalities *cont'd*: Intersecting inequalities

- There is widespread acknowledgement of the need for an intersectional approach, including recognition of men's diverse experiences of power and privilege
- Limitations:
 - Focused particularly on ethnicity, while neglecting class and sexuality
 - Focused on disadvantage and neglects privilege
 - E.g., how white men's experiences are structured by privilege
 - To the extent there is attention to privilege, it is to privilege largely as men, and not also to...

Intersecting inequalities *cont'd*

- Attention to male-male violence and hierarchies
 - Neglect of homophobic bullying and harassment and gender policing in their own rights
- "What about women's violence?" Debates over domestic violence and gender
- Growing attention to sexual violence against boys, and against adult men
 - E.g., to male victims of conflict-related sexual violence
- We need:
 - A gendered approach
 - Robust and careful methods for measuring violence

A social justice approach: 3) Taking social action

- In violence prevention, community-level strategies of community development and community mobilisation are rare
- Community-level strategies are a vital next step in prevention
- Community mobilisation: bringing individuals and groups together through coalitions, networks, and movements

The engaging men field: 3) Taking social action?

- Men's anti-violence advocacy has increased considerably in the past 4 decades
- Men often make positive personal change as part of their participation
- There is a widespread emphasis on accountability to women's and feminist constituencies
 - Although the practice is less well established

The engaging men field: 3) Taking social action?

- There are important limitations to community mobilisations among men for violence prevention:
- Few men are involved
 - Difficulties in getting men to 'do the work', or even just to turn up
 - When men *do* participate, their understandings and activism may be limited
 - But there have been substantial or widespread collective anti-violence mobilisations among men
- There has been little attention to powerful men and institutions
 - The work often is with men with little institutional power (e.g. students) or privilege
 - There are few efforts aimed at men with institutional and structural power
 - There has been little challenge to collective and institutional actors, particularly governments, and their perpetration of collective violence
- There has been little alliance with other social justice movements
 - Although there are growing calls for these, and they seem stronger in the Global South

Next steps

- Some key tasks:
 - Maintain a feminist agenda: Seek to transform patriarchal systems and structures
 - Work in partnership with women's rights and movements
 - Link gender justice to other forms of justice (Flood, 2019)
- The future of work to engage men is influenced by wider social and political forces, both good and bad
- We can make a difference
- Let's refine our practice, extend our reach and impact, and contribute to progress towards gender justice

Resources on engaging men

- Engaging men in violence prevention: A massive collection of resources: <https://xyonline.net/content/engaging-men-violence-prevention-walking-tour-some-xyx-content>
- Free book, *Engaging Men and Boys in Violence Prevention* (Flood, 2018): <https://xyonline.net/content/new-book-engaging-men-and-boys-violence-prevention>
- Men building gender equality: <https://xyonline.net/content/men-building-gender-equality-guide-xyx-content>
- Dr Michael Flood's publications: <http://www.xyonline.net/category/authors/michael-flood>
- Contact: m.flood@qut.edu.au