Messaging Healthy Masculinities?

Dr Michael Flood

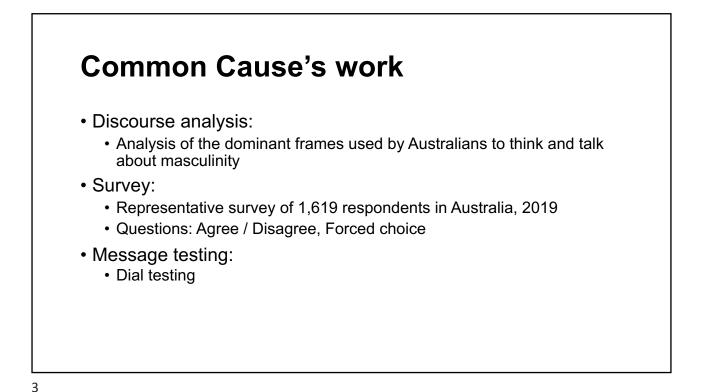Queensland University of Technology

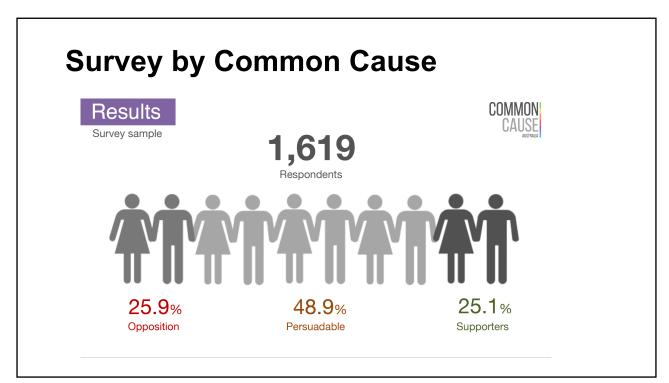m.flood@qut.edu.au

@MichaelGLFlood

Citation: Flood, M. (2020). Messaging Healthy Masculinities?. *WHISE Webinar: Healthier Masculinities and Values-Based Messaging: In Theory and in Practice*, Melbourne: WHISE (Women's Health in the South East), April 8.

1

Context: VicHealth's work on healthier masculinities

- Stakeholder and expert consultations
  - Healthier Masculinities for Gender Equality roundtable event, July 2018
  - Stakeholder workshop, VicHealth, June 24 2019
- Report: *Healthier Masculinities Scoping Review* (August 2019)
  - A review of efforts to promote healthier masculinities
- Framework: *Healthier Masculinities Framework for Gender Equality: A framework to guide health promotion action when working with men and boys* (November 2019)
- Messaging work, by Common Cause
- Message Guide: Under development

2

Common Cause's work

- Discourse analysis:
  - Analysis of the dominant frames used by Australians to think and talk about masculinity
- Survey:
  - Representative survey of 1,619 respondents in Australia, 2019
  - Questions: Agree / Disagree, Forced choice
- Message testing:
  - Dial testing

3

Survey by Common Cause

Results

Survey sample

COMMON CAUSE
AUSTRALIA

1,619

Respondents

25.9% | 48.9% | 25.1%
Opposition | Persuadable | Supporters

4

The three segments by sex and age

Attitudinal groups by gender/age

COMMON CAUSE
AUSTRALIA

	Opponent	Persuadable	Supporter
Women	**16.0%**	**51.3%**	**32.7%**
Women < 18	16.9%	42.5%	40.6%
Men	**35.6%**	**46.8%**	**17.6%**
Men < 18	36.8%	43.2%	20.0%
Total survey	25.9%	48.9%	25.1%

5

Findings: a consistent gender gap

- Men's attitudes to gender are consistently less progressive than women's
- Men are:
  - Less likely to see sexism against women as extensive and systematic
  - Less supportive of principles of gender equality
  - More likely to endorse male dominance: in workplaces, politics, and in relationships and families.
  - More likely to have violence-supportive attitudes.
  - Less aware even of the constraints of masculinity on men themselves.
    - Less aware of the pressures on men of, and impacts of conformity to, masculinity

6

Findings: Framing matters

- When statements on gender are framed in <u>progressive</u> terms, the opposition agrees as much as persuadables. E.g.;
  - Endorse a social constructionist understanding of gender
  - Recognise the pressures on boys and men to act in certain ways and/or the harms of traditional gender stereotypes
  - Call for opening up gender roles and/or moving past gender stereotypes
- When statements on gender are framed in <u>regressive</u> terms, the opposition differs from persuadables, and even more from supporters. E.g.;
  - Praising traditional masculinity
  - Suggesting there is a 'war on men':
  - Supporting male dominance and control in relationships
  - Endorsing biological essentialism
- These patterns do not map straightforwardly onto the <u>domain</u> or <u>dimension</u> of gender under discussion

7

Findings: Patterns of attitudes

- The social construction of gender
  - Broad support for an understanding of gender as socially constructed – for the understanding that boys' and men's lives and relations are shaped by social messages, by gender socialisation, as much as they are by biology.
  - But also support for the notion of 'natural' differences between men and women
- The harms of traditional masculinity
  - Widespread agreement that traditional gender stereotypes are limiting and harmful, for boys and men and for children in general
- Opening up gender roles
  - Widespread recognition of the need to open up gender roles for men, particularly with regard to gender roles that constrain males' own health and wellbeing

8

Findings: Patterns of attitudes

- Compulsory heterosexuality and homophobia
  - Are weak
  - Weak endorsement of masculinity as requiring the rejection of all things feminine (but not tested much)
- Men dominating and controlling women
  - Strong rejection of this, except among opponents
- The language of 'masculinity'
  - Whether this is understood as referring simply to 'men' or 'what men are'

9

Findings: Patterns of attitudes

- Being a good man or a good person
  - Question of whether people are endorsing male definitions of personhood, or degendered standards for personhood
- Men's roles in positive change
  - Almost universal agreement that men can play a role in preventing violence against women
- A war on men
  - Widespread support for anti-feminist messages

10

Findings: Responding to frames (Dial testing)

- 5 frames
  1. <u>Free Men</u>: Men and boys are restricted by masculine stereotypes and should be freed from them.
  2. <u>Man Made</u>: Socially constructed models of manhood are unhealthy for men, and we should build new, healthier models of how to be a man.
  3. <u>Context Matters</u>: Masculine traits are suitable for some times and places but not others, and we need more flexible models of manhood.
  4. <u>Gender Bender</u>: Men and boys should be freed from gender stereotypes and gender binaries, to be good human beings / people.
  5. <u>Opposition</u> Message
- Opponents' level of support for the first four messages is reasonably high
  - They act like a persuadable audience when we put forward our case
- Persuadables will support anti-feminist messages to some extent

11

Social marketing

- Definition: The use of marketing to influence behaviours that benefit individuals and communities for the greater social good.
- More:
  - Applies marketing principles and techniques to create change for social, environmental and public health problems
  - Intended to promote positive social change in the individual, community, and society at large

12

Effective practice in social marketing: 4 principles

1) *Informed:* Based on a sound understanding of both the problem and of how it can be changed.
   - Has both an appropriate theoretical framework for understanding the issue and a theory of change

2) *Comprehensive*: Communication and social marketing interventions have greater impact if they:
   - Are more intensive
   - Involve exposure to messaging through more than one component, and/or
   - Are complemented by on-the-ground strategies

13

Effective practice in social marketing: 4 principles

3) *Relevant:*
   - Based on understanding of the audience
     - Audiences are seen as an active and dynamic part of the process
     - Example: "Freedom From Fear", Australia
   - Relevant to the communities and contexts in which it is delivered

4) *Engaging:*
   - To the intended audience
     - Generate familiarity, or "social self-identification"

14

Developing a SM campaign

- The campaign should:
1) Be based on understanding of the audience, aim to influence specific behaviours, address what motivates people to make changes, and offer benefits to assist them
2) Make changes in attitude and behaviours
   - It must be clear what the audience is expected to do.
3) Involve a benefit
   - Something appealing, to get people to give up or modify an old behaviour or accept a new one

15

Developing the message

- How do we choose the message or framing to use?
  - That it fits our change agenda. It is gender-transformative
  - That it is relevant to and engaging for the intended audience
    - What will generate responsiveness among the target audience?
- 'Get the right message' and 'get the message right':
  - Understand how people can be motivated to try to change behaviour
  - Find effective ways of communicating the identified motivators
- More considerations:
  - Anticipate likely reactions and resistance
  - Pilot and test your messages
    - Stay within the target audience's 'latitude of acceptance' (Henley *et al.* 2008)

16

Developing the message *cont'd*

1) Clearly communicate the values of the campaign
   - Personally relevant messages
   - Reinforce positive behaviour
   - Inform the audience about what to do and how they can do it
2) The message should offer consequences and solutions
   - The result or benefit
   - Connect people to communities
3) Campaign messages should speak positively
   - E.g., engage men as allies
   - Reflect their language and concerns

17

Messages for men?

- Offer a positive message to men.
  - E.g., Men as part of the solution. Men as having something to gain
  - Build on strengths
  - Show what men can do to change; Affirm that men can change; or Show men changing or acting in positive ways
  - Model the desired behaviours
- Some positive framings (Common Cause materials):
  - Find your own path. Never follow (The Line campaign, 2019)
  - Comparison
  - Hu-man
  - Etc.
- Do we draw on masculine culture?
  - There is a tension between complicity and challenge…

18

Campaign appeals: Possible benefits to men?

- E.g., regarding domestic and partner violence:
  - Positive relationship incentives
  - Appeals stressing the negative impact on children, or the positive value of being a good parent and partner
  - Ethical and moral appeals: violence and abuse is morally wrong

19

Messaging: Some approaches or framings to <u>avoid</u>

- Gender-exploitative frames that perpetuate gender inequalities, e.g. reproducing and entrenching harmful masculinities
  - Appeals to 'real men' and unhealthy masculine norms (Fleming *et al.* 2014; Robinson & Robertson, 2010)
- Framings which portray men and women as equally constrained by gender
  - Because this is inaccurate and dangerous
- Framings which direct critique biologically essentialist or determinist understandings

20

Messaging: Things to <u>avoid</u> *cont'd*

- Framings that include or seek to rebut regressive / opposition messages. I.e. approaches focused on negating opposition frames.
  - E.g., biological essentialism / determinism, a feminist war on men. And perhaps on the value of traditional masculinity
  - Including 'myths and facts' approaches
  - Likely to activate and strengthen regressive frames
- Language in which the problem is 'all men'
  - Take care in using the term 'masculinity'. And perhaps 'toxic masculinity'
- Framings which deny that there are differences between men and women, e.g. in how they think and act
  - Gender neutral framings may attract less support. Though such framings also can be valuable.

21

Messengers: Who should deliver the message?

- The key question: Who will your audience listen to most?
- Knowledge and trustworthiness are critical.
  - Rather than likeability or familiarity
- Use influential messengers
  - Do we use high-profile men?

22

Other questions

- How do we portray the undesirable forms of masculinity. Unhealthy? Outdated? Patriarchal?
  - 'Outdated' may work well with younger men.
- The opposition:
  - How consistent an opposition is it?
  - How homogenous an opposition is it? 'Hard core' opponents versus more persuadable ones?

23

Resources

- Men and the Man Box: a commentary: https://xyonline.net/content/men-and-man-box-commentary
- FREE Book, *Engaging Men and Boys in Violence Prevention* (Flood, 2018): https://xyonline.net/content/new-book-engaging-men-and-boys-violence-prevention
  - See Chapter 7 on social marketing and communications,
- Engaging men in building gender equality: A massive collection of resources: https://xyonline.net/content/men-building-gender-equality-guide-xys-content
- Bibliography – Working with men: https://xyonline.net/books/bibliography/bibliography-12
  - Including small sub-section on social marketing to men
- Bibliography – Working with boys and young men: https://xyonline.net/books/bibliography/bibliography-11
- Dr Michael Flood's publications: http://www.xyonline.net/category/authors/michael-flood

- Contact: m.flood@qut.edu.au

24