
Masculinities and Violences: Interventions for Violence Prevention Programs.

In this article I plan to look at explanations of male violence in the hope of finding some ways of intervening in the lives of men who have committed acts of domestic violence, in order to help them change their abusive behaviour.

In the past 10 years or so there has been a noticeable change in the attitudes of most of the professionals dealing with domestic violence. The feminist movement has successfully lobbied the authorities to make sure that domestic crimes are taken more seriously. Zero tolerance campaigns, soap opera storylines, police procedures, have all helped to raise awareness and let women know that there is help out there. At the same time new discourses around masculinity have produced optimism that men can change and avoid some of the abusive behaviours that have caused so much damage to so many families.

The feminist movement, and the pro-feminist men's movement, have allowed men and men's lives to become visible, to be the focus of study, and to be seen as something other than the natural, 'universal', norm by which all other categories were judged. Suddenly masculinity is in crisis. Despite the benefits that patriarchy brings to ¹men, there's been a realisation that there are costs too. Men die younger than women, commit more suicides, traditional male employment is changing as heavy industry dies, many boys are failing in schools, men commit the vast majority of crimes and fill the prisons. Attempts to change men using the same consciousness raising strategies used by women and ethnic groups are ridiculed in the media, and the same old macho masculinity is still touted by Hollywood as the predominant role model for young men.

There is evidence that the women who support victims of domestic violence are starting to soften their resistance to effort being put into changing men. Despite scepticism about the claim that violence prevention programs really work, organisations such as Women's Aid are at least pleased that men are being held responsible for their violence and abuse.

Violence prevention programs of various sorts have been running in Britain now for 15 years, both voluntary and statutory, and they have been the focus of much development and research. The history of violence prevention groups, in Britain, can be traced back to the refuge set up for battered women by Chiswick Woman's Aid in 1972. As the Women's Aid movement grew in the USA, and men became involved, the first group for perpetrators was formed in Boston in 1977, called EMERGE. This was as a response to the frustration felt by women's aid workers that so many women from the shelters were returning home to more abuse. Also that certain violent men were moving on to abuse in other relationships. In the next five years many new projects were formed. "Perhaps the best-known project,

and certainly one of the most highly thought of in feminist circles, is the comprehensive and highly developed Domestic Abuse Intervention Project (DAIP) in Duluth, Minnesota." (Hague & Malos, 1998, p.183)

The Duluth model, and the program manual; *Power and Control, Tactics of Men Who Batter. An Educational Curriculum* (Pence & Paymar. 1986), have been the basis of most of the programs used in this country. In Britain there are two types of domestic violence prevention program: the statutory sector, usually run by the probation services and dealing with court-mandated men, and the voluntary sector, where men are referred by doctors, social services, police, solicitors, other voluntary agencies and themselves. Some of the statutory programs also take voluntary referrals. STOP (Start Treating Others Positively) and BRAVE (Bradford Reducing Anger and Violent Emotions), are both local voluntary agencies funded by lottery money. STOP was founded 13 years ago under the name of Leeds Domestic Violence Group, and originally staffed by volunteers. Since 1997 it has been run as a full-time project, and has three violence prevention groups for men, an anger management group for women and support services for women. BRAVE was founded in 2001 using STOP as a model, and is funded by NOF (New Opportunities Funding) as part of a men's health project. It runs a group for men and a support group for women. Both agencies run groups based on a 13 week rolling program, although many men choose to stay much longer. I began working at both agencies in 2001, initially as a volunteer, now as a paid group facilitator.

This is the definition of domestic violence that I have used throughout this article:

It is frequently assumed by many that domestic violence is only physical abuse. In fact it is considerably broader than this and covers verbal, emotional, psychological, sexual and financial abuse. (Waring & Wilson, 1990, p.9)

I am aware that violence towards women and children is not the only form of abuse within the home, anyone can be the perpetrator of abuse, and anyone can be the victim. However the vast majority of perpetrators are men (Dobash et al. 1992), and as a man I feel a responsibility to help men change their abusive behaviours.

Explanations of male violence fall into three very broad categories, with many overlaps; I will call the categories the biological, the psychological and the social.

The Biological

The biological category includes genetic explanations, the influence of genetics, hormones and of brain structure, and it draws on translations from animal behaviour and evolutionary psychology. These subjects have formed the basis of much of the popular literature, journalism and TV programming about gender difference. Programs such as *Why Men Can't Iron*, books like *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus*. (Gray. 1992) and *Why men don't listen and women can't read maps*. (Pease. 2001) use explanations based on biological differences between men and women.

The explanations of violence often include claims to man's 'natural' aggression and use metaphors about the explosive cocktail of adrenaline and testosterone which sends young men off the rails. Although research has found connections between aggression and testosterone, it is far more complex than the cause and effect reasoning of popular culture.

It has not been difficult for critics of biological determinism to critique these explanations, but the appeal for popular discourses has been harder to combat. Many social scientists are aware that the appeal of such explanations lies in their claim to be 'science', and that in the hierarchy of 'knowledges', science carries weight in our education system and media. But as Connell argues in *Masculinities*, natural science itself has a gendered nature. He sees the scientific knowledge of masculinity as compromised as any powerful institution examining itself, like; "a science of race created by imperialists or a science of capitalism created by capitalists." (Connell, 1995, p.7)

The Psychological

Psychological explanations of male violence stem from the child's responses to parenting. There is little disagreement that the differing ways that boys and girls negotiate identifying with, and splitting from, their parents has profound effects on how they live their gendered lives. This is the theme behind Adam Juke's book *Why Men Hate Women* (1993), in which the relationship between the boy and his mother is the cause of fear and hatred of women for all adult men.

R.W.Connell is not alone in identifying Freud and his work as the starting point into inquiries into gender. "He (Freud) disrupted the apparently natural object, 'masculinity' and made an inquiry into it's composition both possible, and, in a sense, necessary." (Connell, 1995, p.8)

Freud's explanations for personality development; the 'Oedipus complex', male terror of castration, our constitutionally bi-sexual nature, the internalised prohibitions of the 'super-ego', the universal death-wish, all gave the explanations of gender identity a complexity which his followers interpreted in various ways. Later debate was on the nature of femininity with masculinity a minor sideline. The course to adult male heterosexuality was presented as unproblematic and 'natural'.

Certain of the post Freudian theorists have influenced current thinking about gender. Jung took the theory of the bisexual nature of men to develop the idea of the masculine persona and the feminine anima being balanced within us. This has appealed to some among the men's movements, (mythopoetic movement, men's rights groups) who claim that feminism has tilted the balance too far from the 'deep masculine'.

Much of psychoanalytic theory sees aggression as a natural drive that can lead to violence, so it's important to explain how such impulses are controlled by the individual. For explanations analysts have looked to attachment theory (Bowlby 1969, 1973), and faulty ego development (Erikson 1950), but more recently to male socialisation.

The Social

The brevity of the last two sections reflects my belief that the hope for change lies in the arena of the social.

In 1991 Michael Kaufman was one of a handful of men in Canada who started the White Ribbon Campaign to challenge violence against women. On the campaign website he structures his explanation of male violence as 'the seven P's of men's violence'. I will follow his structure.

P.1. Patriarchal power:

Men's violence towards women can only be as prevalent as it is because society condones it, or even encourages it. The gender-power structures in our society persevere because of the benefits to men, what Connell calls the 'patriarchal dividend.' "Men gain a dividend from patriarchy in terms of honour, prestige and the right to command. They also gain a material dividend." (Connell, 1995, p.82)

Gender relations, and the ordering of society along patriarchal lines, are constantly changing, and are negotiated daily at all levels. But historically, to maintain the levels of male supremacy within patriarchy requires force. This structural analysis of violence is not to argue that each event can't be analysed in terms of the individuals involved, only that there are wider social contexts for all acts of violence

Patriarchal societies not only give men power over women, but also set up hierarchies among men. Violence can be a way of organising such hierarchies among boys and young men, and among adults in certain communities. There is a pecking order of fighting.

One result of this is that men 'internalise' violence – or perhaps the demands of patriarchal society encourage biological instincts that otherwise might be relatively dormant or more benign. (Kaufman, 2001, p.40)

What is also internalised is the sense that all relationships are hierarchical. Many men find it impossible to conceive of their relationships with women in terms of 'partnership', they fear that if they are not in control, their partners will be. Being seen as 'under the thumb' is a very real threat to traditional forms of masculinity.

Many other aspects of patriarchy and the inequalities of gender are played out at individual level. Men's use of coercive power is reinforced in Western cultures; in business and sport aggression is rewarded, as it is in policing and the practice of law. Women's behaviour is also policed by language and attitudes. They are seen as aggressive when similar behaviour by men would be seen as assertive. They are called 'loose' and 'easy' when similar sexual behaviour by men would be admired.

All the institutions of patriarchy give out strong messages to individuals. Some of those messages tell us of the male and female qualities:

- men think/women feel
- men are strong/women are weak
- men are active/women are passive
- men are rational/women are emotional
- men are independent/women are dependent
- men are brave/women are frightened
- men are secure/women are vulnerable

but also that being able to think, being strong, active, rational, independent brave and secure are positive 'human' qualities. (Young, 1996, p.214)

Research has shown that violence is most prevalent in households where the family norms are most patriarchal. This research points to a patriarchal sub-culture where men are socialised into keeping their partners in order using any means available.

However, there are dissenting voices out there, the idea that we live in a patriarchal society is not accepted by all. Neil Lyndon (1996) lists the ways that men are disadvantaged and believes that it is wrong to call such a society patriarchal.

P.2. The sense of entitlement to Privilege

As an individual man commits an act of violence towards his partner, he is probably not consciously trying to maintain 'patriarchal power.' It is more likely to be his sense of entitlement to certain privileges that has been thwarted. Dobash & Dobash (1979) found that the main triggers for partner violence were: jealousy, his perception that his partner wasn't performing household duties adequately, and her challenging him about money matters. However, Adam Jukes, in his work with violent men, found drawing up lists of trigger events fruitless; "Men who are violent will always find a justification, no matter what lengths a woman might go in adapting her behaviour..." (Jukes, 1999, p.121)

P.3. Permission.

Until recently domestic violence was seen to be a private affair, and in policing terms such incidents weren't taken seriously; 'only a domestic.' Pressure by feminists has ensured that the issue is much more in the public eye, and that police forces are setting up units to deal more effectively with domestic violence.

Why do men beat their wives? The feminist theoretical position that has emerged from paying close attention to women's experiences is that they do it because they can get away with it. (Hanmer, 1990, p.33)

Policing has been described as keeping public order, feminist analysis has pointed out that men are more at risk in public, women more at risk at home, despite media stories of 'dangerous strangers'. In 1988 the Chief Constable of West Yorkshire pledged to treat violence in the home as seriously as violence elsewhere, and in 2001 special domestic violence courts were set up in Leeds. The latest suggestion has been a register of offenders along the lines of that for sex-offenders.

P.4. The Paradox of men's power:

The very ways that men have constructed their social and individual power is, paradoxically, a source of enormous fear, isolation and pain for men themselves. (Kaufman, 2001, p.41)

The experience of Susan Faludi spending a year in a violence prevention group in California is described in *Stiffed* (1999). Her experience is close to mine, that men who come to such groups certainly do not feel powerful, they often feel like victims. This is not the experience of Adam Jukes however. His adherence to the idea of power and control is explained by his assumption that men feel like victims when their expectations haven't been met (Jukes 1999).

But Kaufman sees the damage of trying to live up to the internalised expectations of a traditional or 'hegemonic' masculinity.

The personal insecurities conferred by a failure to make the masculine grade, or simply the threat of failure, is enough to propel many men, especially when they are young, into a vortex of fear, isolation, anger, self-punishment, self-hatred and aggression. (Kaufman, 2001, p.41.)

There is a need to construct a façade, a personal suit of armour to keep others from knowing that you don't really measure up. To maintain that emotional distance, which facilitates power and control over others, makes it hard to let down the façade in order to give and receive intimacy. Men's perceptions of their lack of power in the public realm makes threats to their power at home more alarming to them, such threats can be repulsed by violence and abuse.

P.5. The Psychic armour of manhood.

In many cultures raising boys to become men means toughening them up. In many early child-rearing environments fathers and adult men are absent, or at least emotionally absent. In Freudian terms, when the young boys reject their mothers, they reject the feminine along with the qualities of nurturing and care-giving. The boys learn how to be men by copying the available role-models, and succumbing to cultural influences. This state of emotional distance can create 'rigid ego barriers' (Hearn 1998), or in metaphorical terms, 'living in the bubble' (Jukes 1999), 'locked out of their own experience' (Seidler 1997), wearing a 'strong suit of armour' (Kaufman 2001).

"We are so used to controlling our emotions through suppression that sometimes as men we no longer feel them at all." (Seidler 1997 p.129) Much of the work of Victor Seidler has been about constructions of masculinity where men identify with reason and separate themselves from their emotional lives. He examines how the universality of the rational tradition impersonalises men's experience, how this prompts men to speak in a universal moral way, and not to be aware that he is really telling how it is for *him*. Seidler explains that men often fail to see that their perspective is contingent on cultural and historic connections, and how this distancing from personal experience as a source of knowledge leads to a denigration of emotions, and a denigration of those who live in an emotional world, often women and children. It also makes it difficult for men who discount their own emotional needs, to respond to the emotional needs of others. Empathy is not something that works in a rational way. Lack of empathy certainly makes violence more possible (Seidler 1997).

P.6. Masculinity as a Psychic Pressure cooker.

Many of our dominant forms of masculinity hinge on the internalisation of a range of emotions and their redirection into anger. (Kaufman, 2001, p.42)

Part of how we raise our sons, e.g. 'big boys don't cry', is giving the message that to be a man is to be strong and in control, not to show weakness. A whole range of negative emotions is off-limits, *unmanly*. But it is socially acceptable for men and boys to be angry, and it is thought healthy to vent that anger, often in an active way, often violently. Much of this learning is essential for survival in some sub-cultures.

In blocking the areas of vulnerability in men's lives we have also blocked a huge area of communication (Seidler 1997). Men think twice before communicating their negative feelings for fear of being seen as weak, not coping, less manly. We come to believe that it is *others* who have needs, we like to think that we can manage on our own, even that asking for help shows inadequacy. So much of this emotion is funnelled into a more acceptable route; anger. When men feel sad they get angry; embarrassed, they get angry; afraid, they

get angry. While this funneling is not unique to men, nor is it the case for all men, violent responses to fear, hurt, rejection pain, belittlement or shame are not uncommon.

P.7. Past experiences.

People who grow up in violent homes begin life thinking that violence is the norm. It is one of the ways of solving problems, of getting what you want, a way of communicating. The prevalence of abusive men who have experienced violence in the family of origin has been well researched, and findings range from 24% to 81%, which leaves me with little confidence in the research. The observation of violence by children has more consistently predicted violence by men towards their partners than experiencing abuse themselves (Edleson & Tolman 1992).

Much of the research about the consequences of witnessing abuse comes up with the following conclusions:

The first is that firsthand abuse experiences, or even witnessing of abuse, increases one's chance of becoming violent. The second is that the majority of abused children *do not* go on to become abusive themselves. (Dutton, 1995, p.123)

The most commonly quoted positive mitigating factors are; having at least one consistently emotionally supportive adult in an otherwise hostile environment, being in an emotionally supportive family as an adult and some form of therapeutic intervention as an adolescent or young adult (Dutton 1995).

Both psychoanalytic and social learning theories refer back to the importance of past experience, specifically childhood experiences. However the former constructs violence as internally driven, the latter construct it as externally driven.

Conclusions

Much of the work that goes on in violence prevention groups is about raising beliefs and attitudes to consciousness. If a man wants to change he is made aware that it isn't just a matter of learning anger-management skills, he must change some of his more damaging beliefs. Bringing those beliefs out into the open to be examined also gives men a language and a framework for self-reflection. It is also important to give the men in the groups a language of emotions. This can help them to finally see the consequences of their abuse on others. As men become more aware of themselves they realise that their violence is a choice. They may choose to continue their abuse, with all its consequences, but they can no longer deny that it is a choice, and very much their own responsibility. A close examination of the ways that they were socialised into becoming men will surely help the process of change.

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