

Men as Allies in Preventing Violence against Women: Principles and Practices for Promoting Accountability

White Ribbon Research Series

Bob Pease and commentary by Ann Carrington

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White Ribbon Australia

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**Men as Allies in Preventing Violence
against Women: Principles and Practices
for Promoting Accountability**

Bob Pease

Introduction

This paper explores the implications of the increasing role of men in violence prevention work for the women's services sector. There are many different ways for men to work with women in violence against women prevention campaigns. The language of male-led campaigns, partners in violence prevention, bystanders, male champions, male allies, aspiring allies and solidarity activists are but a few of the roles that have been identified for men. However their roles are defined, as men have become more prominent in violence against women prevention work in recent years, the issue of men's relationship with women against violence services has become a subject of ongoing concern for many feminist anti-violence activists, practitioners and scholars. This paper aims to explore the nature of those concerns and the various ways in which activist men and the organisations they work within, or are auspiced by, have responded to them.

A key issue in these discussions is whether men involved in violence prevention work should be accountable to women against violence services in some form or not. How men themselves respond to this issue is related to a number of questions. What are the motivations for men to get involved in violence prevention? How do men understand their own positioning within relations of gender inequality? What knowledge do they have of women's involvement in violence prevention work? How do they understand feminism and how do they engage with it? Many men who get involved in violence prevention will not necessarily have a political analysis of gender inequality or a profeminist commitment to transforming patriarchal gender relations. They may get involved because a woman in their own life has been the subject of men's violence and they want to play a part in ending it. As children, they may have witnessed their father's violence against their mother. Alternatively, they may just be shocked by media reports of increasing levels of men's violence against women. These men are at the beginning of a journey in terms of their understanding of patriarchy and their place within it. The purpose of this paper is not to establish criteria for men's involvement in violence prevention that they cannot live up to. It is rather to open up discussion among men (and among women) about how to guard against the potential harms that men can cause when they do not understand the ways in which patriarchy works and their own complicity in reproducing it.

There are wider issues of men's complicity with violence against women that go beyond the violence prevention movement. Men, as policy makers and law makers within the state, as health and welfare professionals, as judges and police, as employers and CEOs of companies, all may make decisions that are not accountable to women and that minimise, overlook or ignore men's violence against women. Although these issues are beyond the brief of this paper, they must be considered when planning violence prevention work with men to ensure that systems and structures of gender inequality are not neglected.

The premise on which this paper rests is that feminist analysis and men's accountability to women's services should be central underpinnings of violence prevention work with men. I acknowledge that many men involved in violence prevention may not necessarily share these premises. However, to be effective, violence prevention organisations need to be alert to the consequences for women and women's services of engaging men in this work.

If men are to be accountable, to which organisations, women or feminists should they be accountable to and what form should that accountability take? The paper will explore why accountability is necessary and engage with political dilemmas associated with it. It will also explore different levels of accountability including personal, interpersonal and organisational forms and outline different models of accountability and strategies for their implementation.

1

Why accountability is necessary

The concern about accountability arises from the potential harm that aspiring allies can cause. Thus it is necessary to revisit some of the dangers of engaging men in violence prevention. It is evident from research on social movements that the involvement of dominant group members can reproduce inequalities within movement organisations, such as in this case, violence prevention movements (Messner et al. 2015). The power and control located in the wider societal context of unequal relationships will often play out within alliances (Margaret 2010). This includes how decisions are made and whose voices are heard. Consequently, when men and women work together in social movements, they must find ways of addressing their differences and the relations of power within which they are embedded (Tamasese 1998). Given that men are socialised into dominant ideas about what it means to be a man and a sense of entitlement that often goes with their privileged position, how do they counter the likely bias that will come to the fore when they work with women against men's violence?

The involvement of men in violence prevention needs to be undertaken very cautiously because many such men continue to express sexism and deny that they continue to be part of the wider problem of gender inequality (Atherton-Zeman 2009). The purpose of accountability processes is to address this sexism and male privilege which men bring with them when they get involved in violence prevention work. Castelino (2012), for example, has documented some of the concerns that women have about the involvement of men in violence intervention and prevention, including, taking resources away from women's services, shifting the focus from women to men, focussing on new forms of masculinity rather than on the structural relations of gender and depoliticising feminist analyses. In the remainder of Part One of this paper, I examine these and other issues of concern.

Setting up a dichotomy between male allies and other men

Men often feel defensive or blamed when violence against women is addressed. Thus one of the tensions in violence prevention work that engages men is to ensure that men in general do not feel blamed for the violence that is perpetrated by some men against women (Piccigallo et al. 2012). Attempts to broaden the problem of men's violence to include the responsibility of all men invites defensive responses from many men. This is seen as a form of male bashing that blames all men for the violence of a few men. Men often make the argument that it is not all men who are responsible for men's violence. Rather, it is just a small group of 'bad' men. These men are seen as having no connection to wider forms of dominant masculinity and male privilege. Thus, in approaching men as potential allies, helpers or bystanders, the aim of engaging men in violence prevention campaigns is often to pre-empt men's potential defensive responses (Piccigallo et al. 2012).

Consequently, many violence prevention campaigns involving men use a dichotomy between 'good men' and other men. Strategies have been developed to enable men to feel that by standing up against violence they are the 'good men' and that they can demonstrate a healthy masculinity. Being engaged as bystanders, champions and advocates, men are able to distance themselves from the wider critique of patriarchy and dominant masculinity (Messner et al. 2015). Consequently, White Ribbon campaigns and other men's anti-violence groups have endeavoured to avoid the defensive responses by men, who may feel put off by the process of focusing on men's responsibility, by emphasising that not all men are violent.

Goldrick-Jones (2002) refers to these 'good men' as 'white knights to the rescue', where men take charge on the premise that they know how to 'fix' men's violence against women. It is important for men's programs to avoid perpetuating the conception of the good man because it fails to recognise the ways in which all men are implicated in male privilege and gender inequality (Linder and Johnson 2015). Such approaches do not encourage men to recognise how their own behaviour and attitudes are part of the wider systems of dominance and oppression. An expressed concern of many feminist critics is that violence prevention programs developed by men may reinforce chivalrous forms of masculinity that imply women need protection by good men (Castelino 2012; Linder and Johnson 2015). Campaigns that focus on 'real men' and chivalrous forms of masculinity reinforce men's dominance and power. When men present themselves as the 'good guys', they exceptionalise themselves from the wider problem of men's violence and gender inequality (Hess 2014). This means that they are likely to be less aware of, and accountable for, their complicity in men's violence. Accountability in this context, means educating men about their own privilege and internalised dominance. This is an issue that will be addressed later in this paper.

Depoliticising anti-violence work

One of the ongoing debates about violence prevention more generally and engaging men in this work specifically, is how explicitly feminist specific campaigns should be. The level of commitment to feminist analyses and the particular form of feminism adopted will shape the ways in which accountability is understood and operationalised. I have noted previously that one of the dangers of men's increased involvement in violence prevention is the de-radicalisation of feminist analyses of men's violence against women (Pease 2008). This may also reflect the de-radicalisation of feminism more widely.

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This de-radicalisation of feminism is evident in Emma Watson's speech launching the HeforShe campaign at the United Nations. She argued that men have not been extensively involved in work toward gender equality because they have not been invited. This speech evoked numerous critiques from feminist journalists, activists and academics. Clementine Ford (2014), for example, criticised her focus on men being imprisoned by gender stereotypes and her argument that men's freedom from these stereotypes was the foundation for women's freedom. Rosie Fletcher (2016), also in critiquing Emma Watson's speech, expresses concern that attempts to engage men in such ways as this soften feminism to make it more palatable to men.

There is an inevitable tension between mainstreaming campaigns against men's violence against women and moving away from social movement politics. This tension is reflected in the differences between the more professionalised public health approach to violence prevention and the activist social movement politics of the women's movement. Engaging men in the context of professionalised programs and paid occupations in the violence against women sector may shift the focus away from more politicised social movement politics (Messner et al. 2015). There is also a concern about male allies making money and developing careers out of this work. Issues have been raised about men becoming private consultants in violence prevention work and using their involvement in these activities to develop highly paid careers (Messner et al. 2015).

It is important to be mindful about how organisations that support violence prevention can use their involvement primarily as a public relations exercise rather than seriously tackling the structural causes of men's violence against women. When sporting clubs, military organisations and male-dominated workplaces develop prevention programs with men, they need to interrogate the ways that gender inequalities are embedded in their structures and cultures, if their practical steps are to contribute to major structural transformation (Messner et al. 2015).

Using traditional masculinity to challenge men's violence against women

In the violence prevention field, the concepts of 'real men' not being violent and 'being man enough' to stand up against men's violence have been used to engage men in anti-violence work. It has thus been a focus in some anti-violence campaigns to use traditional masculinity as a way of getting men involved. (Messner et al. 2015; Pease 2015; Salter 2016). Although the aim is to redefine traditional masculinity, if traditional masculinity is a contributing cause of violence against women, then reinforcing this form of masculinity to engage men to stop violence seems fraught with problems. Goldrick-Jones (2002) asks the question about whether men can be allies to feminism if they retain their commitment to traditional masculinity which, in her view, is part of the reproduction of patriarchy. This is why the reinforcing of traditional masculinity in some anti-violence campaigns is an issue that must be addressed in discussions of accountability.

Within profeminism, there is an important debate about the extent to which men's support of feminism requires a reformulation of masculinity or a rejection of it (Stoltenberg 1989, Connell 1995; Kimmel 2000; Baily 2012; Pease 2014). I have argued elsewhere (Pease 2014) that constructing a new profeminist subjectivity for men will involve destabilising men's identities as men and encouraging them to loosen their connection to masculinity and manhood.

Excluding women

Although there is a place for men organising separately against men's violence and all male groups can be sites of progressive personal and social change, such all-male groups need to be transparent and responsive to feminist concerns. When I first began running workshops with men and invited women as observers, I was criticised by many men in the violence prevention sector who argued that men needed a space without the presence of women to speak authentically about their experience. This view has been more widely noted in the literature (Murphy 2009). Piccigallo et al. (2012), for example, talk about the importance of men being comfortable with each other and being able to talk openly without the presence of women.

Marchese (2008) documents accounts of men's anti-violence groups who exclude women from being involved in their activities. However, as Murphy (2009) asks, why should all-male groups be required for men to have honest conversations? Given what we know about all-male groups producing male peer endorsement of men's violence (DeKeseredy and Schwartz 2013), men only groups seem more likely to reproduce dominant forms of masculinity than challenge them. If men meet in all male groups in addressing violence against women, how can they be accountable to women when the exclusion of women reinforces the notion of male authority? Stoltenberg (cited in Marchese 2008) argues that if men feel uncomfortable speaking about their experience in the presence of women, then this in itself emphasises the importance of why they need to learn how to communicate outside of traditional frames of masculinity and male sociality.

Gaining more praise and marginalising women's voices

Although men have only recently been significantly involved in violence prevention, they gain more credit and receive more praise when they do this work (Pease 2008; Linder and Johnson 2015). This is particularly problematical when women have done most of the work in organising an event and men get most of the credit for being involved. It is apparent that in most of the local White Ribbon events, women do most of the administrative and background work in getting the project organised. When men are present for photos and interviews, women's work may not be sufficiently acknowledged.

As a man who has been doing this work for many years, I have often felt uncomfortable about the accolades that I have received from some women and men that is out of proportion to the contribution I have made. It is also understandable that other women would not be happy about the praise that I and other men have gained from our involvement in this work.

One of the often stated concerns about engaging men is that women will be marginalised and silenced (Marchese 2008). It has been widely noted that when men challenge men's violence they are more likely to be listened to because of their privileged status. Messner et al. (2015) refer to men's unearned praise and the greater likelihood of being listened to as the 'pedestal effect'. This has contradictory effects. On the one hand it means that men's privilege is being used for a progressive outcome of influencing other men, while on the other hand it may further marginalise the voices of women who are less likely to be heard (Murdolo and Quiazon 2016). Will men's voices be heard as more authoritative and will this lead to the further suppression of women's voices? It is important when men receive such unearned praise to make the point that they would not be doing the work if it was not for feminist women who have mentored and taught them almost everything they know (Atherton-Zeman 2009).

Impacting on women's space

It has been demonstrated that the presence of even a small number of men in women's organisations and campaigns has an impact on group dynamics (Schacht and Ewing 2004). Castelino (2012) has explored the issue of how the role of the family violence sector changes when men become engaged in the prevention of violence against women. She is concerned with how men's involvement influences the ways in which violence against women is understood and how it shapes strategies of violence prevention. She argues that men's involvement shifts the focus from addressing structural analyses of violence against women to developing new forms of masculinity. Linder and Johnson (2015) also interviewed feminist women who were working with men in violence prevention programs. They found that many of the feminists they interviewed regarded many of the men as operating through a framework of 'enlightened sexism'. In their view, many men in violence prevention programs perpetuated sexism through both their own behaviour and through their failure to challenge the sexist practices of other men.

It has been widely reported that the presence of men in mixed-gender activism leads women to be very careful about what they say (Baily 2012; Castelino 2012). Women report that they modify their speech and behaviour so that men won't get upset. This reflects the gendered expectation that women should care about men's feelings and avoid upsetting them (McMahon 1999). Phylis Frank (cited in Messner et al. 2015) sees women's praise of men as part of the process of women's socialisation into supporting men and making them feel good. It should also be noted that women are often strongly sanctioned if they do not support and affirm men.

There is evidence that when men get involved in feminist campaigns, they often dominate in meetings. Linder and Johnson (2015) refer to 'micro-aggressions' as the form of men's dominating and abusive behaviours, where they talk over women in meetings, assume a sense of superiority in relation to strategies and campaigns and use their male privilege to further their views. Such concerns expressed by women activists include the following: interrupting women when they are talking, dominating discussions and taking up the majority of time in meetings, presuming to have more expertise and knowledge than they do, receiving more praise than women activists, gaining greater status and money for the work that they do and in some instances, sexually objectifying women colleagues (Macomber 2014). This is not an argument against mixed-sex groups organising against men's violence. However, the concerns raised in this paper need to be addressed if the potential harms of aspiring allies are to be mitigated in such groups.

Further, women are sometimes challenged about why they want women only spaces when men are interested in being involved (Castelino 2012; Goldrick-Jones 2002; Ruby 2001). In the work of engaging men, it is important to support the continuation of women-only campaigns in challenging men's violence.

Lacking historical understanding of violence against women and men's complicity in it

Another concern that women have is that many men who become involved in violence prevention do not do their 'homework' and often do not know anything about the history of the women's movement response to violence against women and have little knowledge about the structural causes of men's violence (Macomber 2014). Consequently, even with good intentions, they may end up reproducing the gender inequalities which cause the violence they are working against.

Thus, it is necessary for dominant groups to educate themselves about their own privilege and power (Temasese et al. 1998; Pease 2010; Macomber 2014). Men need to understand their role in the reproduction of gender inequality and their shared responsibility for the continuation of the structural gender relations and the patriarchal culture which supports men's violence against women (Pease 2015). Such an understanding is essential if men are to become allies to women and to implement principles and practices that ensure their accountability to women's services.

2

The meaning of being an ally and being accountable

The premise of this paper is that it is inappropriate for men to take on leadership roles in violence prevention. Being an ally means having a supporting role in relation to campaigns under women's leadership rather than as leaders or equal partners. This is because of men's dominance and privilege and the structural gender inequalities within which men's violence takes place.

Ayvazian (1995: 1) defines an ally as 'a member of a dominant group in our society who works to dismantle any form of oppression from which she or he receives the benefit'. Similarly, Borshuk (2004) defines ally activism as 'outgroup activism', where those involved are not direct beneficiaries. This is to differentiate allies from beneficiary activists, which is a term coined by Myers (2008) to describe people whose interests are directly impacted by social movements.

Margaret (2010) raises the question whether it is possible to proclaim yourself as an ally, as opposed to be defined as such by those you are in solidarity with. The Women of Color Caucus (cited in Messner et al. 2015) advise men that their ally badge runs out at the end of the day and that they have to give it back and strive to earn it again each day. Thus I argue that it is more appropriate for men to refer to themselves as 'aspiring allies', as this is a state of ongoing political and personal development. However, even with aspiring allies, there are differing motivations and orientations.

Edwards (2006) differentiates between aspiring allies for self interest, aspiring allies for altruism and aspiring allies for social justice. Aspiring allies for self interest see themselves primarily as protectors of women, especially the women they have personal relationships with. Aspiring allies for altruism see themselves primarily as heroes and rescuers who are endeavouring to assuage their guilt for the privilege they have. Whereas, aspiring allies for social justice understand their privilege and complicity in the reproduction of oppression and work towards gender equality. Male allies should strive for the latter form of alliance with women.

In support of this more progressive form of ally activism, Macomber (2006) offers seven tips for allies:

- Remember that your role is to support beneficiary activists, not call the shots.
- Listen to beneficiary activists and learn from them about the key issues the movement is confronting.
- Ally activists should be reflective about the privilege and power that they bring to activist spaces.
- If you are interested in taking on a key activist role in the movement, ask beneficiary activists what they think it should look like and who can best serve the movement.
- Create space to do 'ally accountability work' where beneficiary activists can hold you accountable and tell you about how your privilege 'shows up' in the movement.

- Be open and receptive to feedback and critique and resist the impulse to get defensive.
- Although it is important for beneficiary activists to be able to tell allies how their privilege shows up, it is important that beneficiary activists do not shoulder all of the responsibility for teaching allies about their privilege.

There are parallels between men becoming aspiring allies against men's violence and white people becoming aspiring anti-racist allies (Kessar 2006; Green and Sonn 2006; Sonn and Green 2006). Anti-racist activists also talk about the ways in which white allies may unwittingly perpetuate racism and colonialism. They also emphasise the importance of allies critically interrogating their privilege as a necessary precondition to being allies. Similarly, in relation to gay politics, aspiring straight allies explore how to address their homophobia and heterosexual privilege as part of the process of becoming allies to GBLTI people (Berkowitz 2004; Eichlet 2007; Jip 2007).

Obstacles to men becoming allies

There are important challenges to identity construction and obstacles facing members of privileged groups who become involved in solidarity campaigns (Macomber 2012). Being an ally involves a process of reconstituting one's identity (Ferguson 1998). Whereas for oppressed groups, this involves a positive affirmation of who they are, for those in privileged groups, it means creating what can be experienced as a negative identity. Such a process involves a critical interrogation of the moral superiority embedded in privileged identities.

It is not uncommon for men who speak out against men's violence to be referred to as gender traitors. Rather than being experienced as a criticism, however, this could be embraced by male allies as a positive identity. That is, creating a traitorous identity (Bailey 1998; Ferguson 1998; Pease 2010) is a way in which men can challenge patriarchal manhood. Male gender traitors are those that refuse to reproduce their privilege and who challenge the world views that dominant groups are expected to adhere to.

The contested nature of accountability

One of the premises of accountability in campaigns against oppression is that groups who have been oppressed are in the best position to understand injustice because they are more able to understand the realities of oppression (Temasese et al. 1998). This is why they must be leaders in campaigns to address that oppression to ensure ally actions match the needs and desires of a marginalised population (La Caze 2008; Cohen 2012).

While the concept of accountability is much talked about in the movement against men's violence against women, it is a much misunderstood concept. Mudge (cited in Goldrick-Jones 2002) says that accountability is a complicated and contested process. Lack of clarity about the meaning of accountability, and lack of agreement about the importance of it, generates tensions between men's anti-violence organisations and women's services (Goldrick-Jones 2002; Funk 2008; Macomber 2014).

In the context of men's violence against women, the most important dimension of accountability is that men involved in violence prevention should be accountable to women and should be guided by the leadership of women. This entails seeking feedback from women, hearing what they have to say and being receptive to their comments (Margaret 2010; Macomber 2014). To assist men in this regard, Funk (2008) poses the following questions:

- How do we keep the voices of women survivors in the work we do?
- What does respecting women's leadership really look like? How do men do it?
- What are the models that men have of other men truly respecting women's leadership?
(Funk 2008, p. 166).

One way to frame accountability is to ask the questions: Who benefits from my work and who is potentially harmed by my work? Part of the reason for accountability is to address the interests of women who are impacted by men's violence.

Forms of accountability

Barone (2007) distinguishes between three different kinds of accountability: symbolic accountability, practical accountability and structural accountability. Ideally, all three forms of accountability should be developed.

Symbolic accountability is where men let women know what they are doing and seek women's feedback. Margaret (2010) talks about the importance of allies making their work transparent to those they are in alliance with.

Practical accountability is where men develop relationships with individual feminist women in their lives through ongoing conversations and alliances around particular projects. This involves making agreements with particular women about their aims and intentions and making a commitment to follow through on specific undertakings (Stoltenberg 2013).

At the international level, MenEngage (2014) have developed standards and guidelines on this practical level of accountability. For them, being accountable means:

- Being critically aware of one's own power and privilege.
- Being open to constructive criticism.
- Being responsible for one's actions.
- Following through on what is said and done.

“One way to frame accountability is to ask the questions: Who benefits from my work and who is potentially harmed by my work? Part of the reason for accountability is to address the interests of women who are impacted by men's violence.”

- Taking action to address behaviour or beliefs that go against MenEngage Principles, by individuals and groups both inside and outside the workplace.
- Openly acknowledging any harm caused, and developing and implementing solutions to make amends (page 4).

Structural accountability entails organisational relationships between the men's programs and women's services. One form of structural accountability would be for men's organisations to incorporate a women's advisory group or a women's caucus into the structure of their organisation. This would ensure that they are connected to the intended beneficiaries of their work (Macomber 2014).

MenEngage (2014) stress the importance of accountability as being proactive, whereby men take individual responsibility to behave in ways that are consistent with MenEngage Principles and Code of Conduct. Standards of accountability that relate specifically to relationships with women's services require that MenEngage members:

- Shall seek collaboration, open dialogue and constructive criticism from women's rights organisations and other key stakeholders.
- Shall engage women's rights groups and other key stakeholders to improve programs and initiatives on gender equality.
- Shall promote women's leadership within the organisation, and/or include representatives from women's rights organisations on their boards or directors or similar governing bodies. (page 9).

When Men Against Sexual Assault (MASA) was formed in the 1990s, we developed formal accountability structures with Centres Against Sexual Assault in Melbourne. Before we organised a campaign against men's violence, we consulted with CASAs about their views about such a campaign. When we ran workshops with men about men's violence against women, we invited feminist women to observe our engagement with the men and give feedback and comments at the end of the workshop (Pease 1995).

It is important that profeminist organisations make their commitment to accountability to women's services explicit on their external websites and materials. They should acknowledge the contribution and leadership of women in challenging men's violence. They should also encourage local groups who are developing anti-violence projects to develop dialogue with women's groups in their communities (Bojin 2012).

It is also important for organisations engaging men to develop processes within their workplaces to address male privilege and power (Macomber 2014). Work undertaken elsewhere on undoing privilege and advancing gender equality in public sector organisations (Flood and Pease 2005) is relevant here. Naming and critically interrogating men's privilege in the context of an intersectional analysis provides a valuable framework for work towards gender equality within anti-violence organisations. Such an analysis provides a basis for designing training programs for men. These programs should include content that examines how men's gender interests are socially constructed and psychically embedded, critique the routine accomplishment and reproduction of privilege and identify and encourage gender egalitarian orientations, identities and relations (Flood and Pease 2005: 134-135).

Educating for Accountability

Adopting processes of accountability will require education. The International Rescue Committee (2013), for example, have developed a curriculum for educating men about accountability processes. For them, accountability 'is an active process where men listen to the needs of women and recognise when they act in a harmful manner, even unintentionally' (page 14). They differentiate between personal accountability, where facilitators are required to monitor their attitudes, beliefs and practice, and relational accountability, where facilitators are expected to challenge power differences between men and women.

In terms of practical measures, Macomber (2014: 8) has five recommendations for integrating men as allies in anti-violence work that should form part of any curriculum on accountability: require newcomers to receive training and education before stepping into key activist roles; cap men's speaking fees; link men's organisations to women's organisations and groups; institutionalise a process to address issues of privilege internally; and reconceptualise accountability to include an emphasis on building gender equity.

3

Political dilemmas about accountability

While the importance of men being accountable to women is generally accepted within feminist-informed violence prevention by men, there are a number of political dilemmas that are raised by the issue of accountability.

Engaging with many feminisms

The women's services sector generally, and women's anti-violence campaigns specifically, are informed by a diversity of feminist perspectives. If feminists have different views and approaches on an issue and men ask particular feminists for direction and advice, does that add to the conflict between women? Alternatively, if men choose to stay out of the disagreement between feminists because of their concerns that their support will further divide women, does that mean they have overstated their own influence on the discussion? Staying out of these discussions also means taking a position by default. These questions raise dilemmas for male allies. Mudge (1990) poses some of the dilemmas:

- Which feminisms should men be accountable to?
- What happens when men disagree with directions from feminist women?
- How can the interaction avoid oppressing feminist critics?

When organisers of a Reclaim the Night march in Melbourne invited Men Against Sexual Assault to participate in the sidelines of the march by walking along the footpaths and handing out leaflets to men about why they should support the march, it evoked criticism from some feminist groups. Should we have accepted the invitation from the organisers, when we knew that some participants at the march did not want us to be there? Do organisers 'own' the march and do they have authority over who should be there? We accepted the invitation of the organisers. However, I felt uneasy about our involvement, knowing that some women were opposed to our presence.

Murphy (2013) says that it is not men's responsibility to decide whether feminists are taking the correct course of action or not. However, when profeminist men take any action, they are in effect siding with particular feminist advocates and positions. This is a dilemma that I have frequently faced, when, for example, I've been asked to comment on whether all prostitution was a form of sex trafficking, and also whether governmental discourses about gender had co-opted feminist analysis or not. When I take a position on these issues, I am supporting particular feminist positions over others.

There is a tension between men having views about particular feminist perspectives and having input into what feminism should be prioritising. It is understandable that feminist women will not appreciate men suggesting in some way that they are not doing feminism the right way. The language of 'mansplaining' is used to refer to men's propensity to see themselves as the expert. Having read widely in feminist theory, I know that I have at times fallen prey to this tendency.

Stoltenberg (1990) argues that it is appropriate for profeminist men to choose between different feminist perspectives on issues such as prostitution and pornography, for example. If men believe that women's support of particular policies are oppressive to other women, then it is argued that they have to choose between different feminist views. Stoltenberg argues that men should use their own political and moral compass to decide between different feminisms.

He takes a strong stand against those feminists who support prostitution and pornography. The difficulty, he says, is how men can do this without claiming some form of moral authority or reinforcing misogyny and the marginalisation of women's voices. We also need to be aware that men may be more likely choose strands of feminism, such as liberal feminism, which are less challenging of men than, for example, radical feminism which men may be more confronted by.

Men should not expect women to come up with the right answers to their questions and they should be able to challenge feminist women's views in certain situations (Goldrick-Jones 2002). We should see accountability in terms of men's relationship to the women's movement as a whole, acknowledging its diversity, rather than to individual women (Messner et al. 2015). This means trying to distinguish between listening to the voices of individual women and particular women's groups with endeavouring to understand the collective voice of what feminist women are saying (Cohen 2012). This requires men to make sure they are reading widely, hearing the diversity of views, engaging with the complexities of the debates, understanding the implications and potential harms and benefits of their actions and then making an informed, respectful and strategic choice about how to act and what to say in relation to an issue.

“We should see accountability in terms of men’s relationship to the women’s movement as a whole, acknowledging its diversity, rather than to individual women (Messner et al. 2015). This means trying to distinguish between listening to the voices of individual women and particular women’s groups with endeavouring to understand the collective voice of what feminist women are saying (Cohen 2012).”

Engaging with social divisions between men

It is beyond the scope of this paper to provide detailed guidelines for addressing multiple levels of accountability that result from the social divisions between men and between women. There is a much expressed concern that most male allies are straight white able-bodied middle-class men and that gay, immigrant, Aboriginal, disabled and working-class men are not represented (Goldrick-Jones 2002; Murdolo and Quiazon 2016). How to engage working-class men and men from culturally diverse backgrounds continues to be a challenge to violence against women prevention campaigns. Accountability must address these social divisions between men, as well as between men and women. This raises the issue of white men's accountability to men of colour and economically privileged men's accountability to economically poor men as well as to women from those diverse communities. Funk (2008) discusses the importance of working intersectionally when we practice accountability both in terms of developing relationships with men across class and race differences and also acting as allies to women across class and race, as well as gender. If men are engaged in addressing violence against women in immigrant or Aboriginal communities, it means that they should be accountable to immigrant or Aboriginal feminists, as should men who are engaged in addressing violence against women more generally because their work impacts on these diverse communities as well. Multiple forms of social injustice call for multiple forms of accountability (Murdolo and Quiazon 2016).

Taking moral responsibility for actions

There is a tension between men's accountability to women and individual men's moral responsibility to decide for themselves how to act. Stoltenberg (2013) raises the concern that if accountability is applied too extremely, men have no moral involvement in decisions themselves. Men need to have a moral compass and to develop a sense of what is right and wrong and what is just and unjust. Marx (1997) argues that men need to be accountable to themselves and develop the capacity for reflectiveness about their own behaviour and the behaviour of other men. His concern is that men's accountability to feminists, absolves men of moral responsibility and puts that responsibility on to women. Goldrick-Jones (2002) was critical of the structure of accountability developed by Men Against Sexual Assault that was discussed earlier. She argued that this discouraged men from taking responsibility for their own thinking and behaviour and put responsibility on to women. Denborough (cited in Goldrick-Jones 2002) also challenges the MASA model because he says that it is 'based on hierarchical notions of accountability in which the women are upheld as the experts or monitor the work of the men.'

It is a premise of this paper, however, that women are better 'experts' on gender inequalities and men's violence against women. Feminists are entitled to know what campaigns are being planned and should have the opportunity to comment on them (Goldrick-Jones 2002). Also, men need to do more than rely upon their moral compass because it does not necessarily address their political responsibility to ensure that women's needs are being met. Accountability does not have to mean that men are just passive in response to women's permission. It is also important to ensure that any model of accountability does not impose unreasonable or excessive demands upon women.

Engaging with identity issues for men

Many commentators note that men's role as allies is a developmental process in which men are likely to make mistakes and missteps along the way (Linder and Johnson 2015; Waters 2010; Edwards 2006). However, in acknowledging the learning journey of allies, it is important not to marginalise the experiences of those who continue to be hurt by the mistakes of allies on their learning journeys. Women should not have to wait until men's learning process is over before they can expect to be free of sexism and abuse from these men. What is the end point of the learning process and when can women be free from men's sexism and violence? While male allies will make mistakes, they should not use the notion of a learning process to diminish their accountability or to excuse their mistakes.

Armato (2013) refers to the attitudes and actions by men which appear to be egalitarian but which actually reproduce men's privilege as 'enlightened sexism'. Referring to such men as 'wolves in sheep's clothing', he expresses concern about the prioritising of reshaping men's identities at the expense of challenging gender inequality and other forms of oppression. Men's motives for getting involved in solidarity struggles with women should always be scrutinised. Funk (2008) talks about the importance of clarifying why men are involved in anti-violence work, what it means to them and how doing the work has impacted on them.

Having canvassed some of the political dilemmas, I now turn to practical strategies in promoting accountability.

4

Strategies for men in promoting accountability

The following strategies for promoting accountability are targeted specifically at men who are engaged in violence prevention work in both single sex and mixed sex organisations. As men are at different stages of development when it comes to understanding patriarchy and men's violence against women, the practices involved in enacting these strategies require knowledge, skills and personal reflexivity. They cannot be simply presented as a set of axioms for men to follow. Rather, it is proposed that they should form the basis of a curriculum for men who are new to the movement against men's violence. They should be the starting point for readings, exercises, presentations and discussions.

Learning about your own privilege as a man

A number of writers on accountability talk about the importance of men being reflective and cognisant about their male privilege (Schacht and Ewing 1997; Macomber 2014; Pease 2010). Schacht and Ewing (1997: 169) make the point that while violence against women is a structural issue, it is not only structural and that men need to work on changing their lives as part of the struggle against patriarchy. Any male ally should adopt four basic practices:

- Through the reading of feminist works and actually listening to women, he should try and learn about the depth and unjust nature of women's oppression.
- He should consider asking himself in what ways does he personally and as a man in general (structurally) oppress women.
- He should consider ways to reject traditional notions of masculinity that are oppressive to others.
- He should consider ways to put women's needs as equal or even greater than his own.

The more that men are reflective about their own privileged positioning, and take action to challenge it, the more likely that they can be effective allies (Curry-Stevens 2004). Bojin (2012) argues that men's capacity to interrogate their own privilege is fundamental for developing effective alliances with feminist women. It has been noted by many feminist activists, that true allies were cognisant of their privilege and also had an understanding of the history of women's activism against men's violence (Macomber 2012). Such men were less likely to present themselves as experts and were more willing to take a secondary role in support of women's work.

“The more that men are reflective about their own privileged positioning, and take action to challenge it, the more likely that they can be effective allies (Curry-Stevens 2004). Bojin (2012) argues that men's capacity to interrogate their own privilege is fundamental for developing effective alliances with feminist women.”

Acknowledging what men have learnt from women

It is important when men talk about their work in challenging men's violence that they acknowledge their debt to feminism and to women who have been working in this area for many years (Messner et al. 2015). When I introduce a workshop on engaging men, I always start by saying that I would not be doing this work if it was not for feminist women in my life who have taken the time to challenge me about my privilege as a man. I acknowledge that almost everything that I have learnt about feminist understandings of gender, I have learnt from women. It is important for male allies to recognise that we are a 'Johnny come lately' to men's violence prevention and that we have much to learn from women.

Listening to women

Members of privileged groups are not used to being in dialogues where their privilege and power is the focus of the conversation (Allen 2002). Men need to adopt a position of moral humility and learn to see themselves as women see them. Men need to find ways in which they can learn to hear the experiences of women. This means allowing themselves to feel in their hearts the pain and suffering of others (Pease 2010).

Engaging in dialogue

Groups to promote dialogue between members of privileged groups and those who are marginalised have been promoted by some commentators (Curry-Stevens 2004). Dialogue between men and women seems to be an essential element of effective alliances. However, we need to know more about how to promote the conditions upon which dialogues can best be developed and to understand how inequalities in power and privilege between men and women create barriers to effective communication (Singh 2001). Men need to demonstrate an understanding that their knowledge and perception of the world is socially situated and only partial, if they are going to avoid oppressive practices in their encounters. Men need also to problematise their own dominant position (Pease 2010).

Developing trust

The issue of men's accountability to women is connected with trust (Goldrick Jones 2002). Many women are understandably suspicious and cautious of men who express solidarity with them. Because they have had bad experiences of men in the past, they are not going to offer unconditional support to men. Trust between men and women in violence prevention work has to be achieved; it is not given (Pease 2008). Men have to earn their trust by building up a track record and by walking the walk. Women often complain about the energy and resources they expend in educating men. However, when trusting relationships are established, women are more likely to be committed to working with men (Barone 2007).

Engaging in alliances

Temporary alliances between men and women are an important strategy of developing accountability (Goldrick-Jones 2002). Bystydzienski and Schacht (2001) emphasise the importance of creating shared spaces that can assist participants to engage in alliances without domination. They identify three stages for effective alliances:

1. An acknowledgement of the impact that social identities have on participants.
2. A recognition of how privilege is played out in their relationships.
3. The goodwill to find common ground by honouring perspectives that are different from their own.

In effective coalitions, men are likely to feel threatened some of the time. If they do not, it is unlikely that they are emotionally committed. Alliances between men and women are specific sites where oppressive relations are likely to be enacted. When illuminated and challenged, they become microcosms of the larger struggle against men's dominance (Pease 2010).

Acknowledging when you make mistakes

One key issue is how men respond when they receive critical feedback from women about their practice. Women often report men becoming defensive in response to feedback; whereas, men should learn to receive such feedback as constructive criticism. Linder and Johnson (2015) refer to feedback from women as a gift to men because it provides an opportunity for the capacity for men to learn.

Often when men are challenged by women about their sexism, they say that it was not their intent to cause harm. Their apologies, if they offer them at all, are framed in terms of being sorry if the person chose to take offense. This lets them off the hook and validates their experiences over those they have offended. Stoltenberg (2013) offers advice to men when their actions have aggrieved feminist women.

- Figure out exactly what you did. Hear what you did from the person that you did it to.
- Acknowledge that you know what you did.
- Apologise without qualification and without rationalisation.
- Make amends.

Thus when men do slip up, it is important for them to acknowledge their missteps without defensiveness.

Holding other men accountable to women

A critical step towards accountability is for men to hold other men accountable to women, rather than relying on women to call men out when they are being sexist. Challenging other men's sexism is often difficult for men because it undermines male solidarity upon which men's relationships are often based. It is easier for men to walk the walk with women in relation to gender equality than to do so with other men. It is often men's reluctance to challenge other men that leads women to mistrust male allies (Macomber 2014; Linder and Johnson 2015). When men do challenge other men, they break the bonds that hold men to patriarchal manhood. However, as noted earlier, class and race differences between men complicate this practice. When white middle-class straight men challenge other men, they need to be cognizant of their own positioning within class, race and sexuality hierarchies and well as the positioning of the men they are criticising.

Conclusion

Men's involvement in campaigns against men's power and privilege will always be fraught. Their work as allies in violence prevention will elicit contradictory responses from women (Messner et al. 2015). They will be both scrutinised and criticised on the one hand, and praised and rewarded on the other hand. This seems to be an inevitable contradiction of men working as allies with women. It is understandable that there will always be some level of scrutiny of self-identified allies about their level of commitment to challenging their privileges. It seems likely that any strategy involving men will contain contradictions and tensions between the aim of challenging patriarchal power and at the same time reproducing it. However, the principles and practices of accountability outlined in this paper offer a way forward for men and women who are committed to working for a gender equal and violence free world.

**Accountability:
Whose responsibility is it? A commentary on
'Men as Allies in Preventing Violence
against Women: Principles and Practices
for Promoting Accountability'**

Ann Carrington

Commentary

In order to explore possible principles and practices for promoting accountability, Pease first dissects and examines the many issues and tensions present within the space of men in violence prevention and as allies in the women's movement.

Although the wide range of issues explored is somewhat overwhelming, it is apt in this context, as it helps to capture a realistic picture of the complexities and tensions that exist in this area. Stakeholders need to be cognisant of these complexities as they negotiate this space to ensure the best possible outcomes for women and women's services. As Pease states, 'It seems likely that any strategy involving men will contain contradictions and tensions between the aim of challenging patriarchal power and at the same time reproducing it.' Whilst this point may hold some truth, there is also a need to acknowledge that not all actors in this space have this aim. Irrespective of the aim, Pease argues that it is vital to include processes of accountability '...to address this sexism and male privilege which men bring with them when they get involved in violence prevention work.' The concern, then, is that without actively and explicitly putting in place processes of accountability at the individual, organisational and structural levels, masculine power and privilege can go unchallenged and become problematic. That is, without the necessary checks, ally work and/or men's violence prevention work would contribute to violence against women or, at worst, could become fertile ground for the abuse of power, privilege and positioning which could result in violence against women being perpetrated by 'enlightened' and 'good' men (Armato 2013; Linder and Johnson 2015).

Pease emphasises concerns regarding the replication of sexism, gender inequality and privilege in ally relationships, and highlights concerns from within the literature, that accountability has the potential of shifting responsibility to women, creating an additional burden on women to educate men and to hold them to account. He also brings into the discussion men's responsibility to be guided by their own moral compass and political responsibility, rather than relying entirely on women through the accountability processes. Whilst these issues are of consequence, consideration of power, the practicality of accountability and who is responsible, may contribute further to the discussions. Pease builds a valid argument as to why accountability, in the movement against men's violence against women, should require that men be accountable to women. However, as Cohen (2012) explains, this is in contradiction to the conventional model where those with less power are held to account by those with more power. The question then is: does the theoretical reframing of accountability transfer to reality? In reality, what power does the subordinate or oppressed group have in holding the privileged or oppressor to account?

As a feminist woman, working in the women's sector and academia, I have rarely worked in a position where there was a male co-worker, associate or ally in a subordinate position to me. The environmental context is that men are far more likely in this sector to be in management, even though this is a female majority field (Pease 2011). Therefore, if I, as a feminist woman, am to be responsible for holding a man or ally to account, I am likely to be doing this, not just from the position of the 'marginalised woman' to a 'privileged man', but in the real work context as the subordinate to management. This has real world ramifications on my life as a person, woman, colleague, provider for my family and employee. If I choose to challenge what an ally is doing or saying, what will that mean for me? Do I, in this position, have the power to hold him to account, or by holding him to account, do I risk losing my job or promotion, or professional credibility etc.? Where is the power when it comes to holding men accountable? Do I have any? Can, or should, I use it? Do some women have the power required to do this? Is this power gained through position, personality, age, culture, relationship? Further, given the unequal power difference in general, and often in their position within the immediate context, is feedback always 'real'? Due to power differences, are women really able to make true comments and hold men to full account? Or, as highlighted in Pease's paper, does the socialisation of women mean there is a likelihood that women will appease men, avoid upsetting them and attempt to make them feel better about themselves, rather than challenging them and holding them to account? If this is the case, what processes can be put in place to counteract this?

Drury and Kaiser (2014) explain that when women do raise the issue of sexism, they are perceived as 'complainers'. When men raise an issue as sexist, they are more likely to be heard and the situation is more likely to be acknowledged as sexist by others, including other men (Drury and Kaiser 2014). Further, research illustrates that men are less likely to pick up on, or perceive, something as sexist at an individual and institutional or structural level (Drury and Kaiser 2014). In light of such research, there must be support for accountability to women and women's services by individual men and men's collectives that are working in the violence against women prevention space. If men struggle to identify different forms of sexism and patriarchy themselves, how can an individually reflexive process, as suggested by Armato (2013), be relied upon to interrupt the replication of sexism and patriarchy? It is this aspect that may be addressed with the principles and practices Pease discusses in his paper.

Although there is support for Pease's focus on the importance for women to be central to the process of accountability, to ensure that women's voices are being included and that men's involvement is supporting the change driven by the women's movement, it is also important, as he acknowledges, that men have a part to play in the process of accountability, not just in their willingness to be held to account but in holding each other to account. If men are more likely to be listened to by others, including other men (Drury and Kaiser 2014; Linder and Johnson 2015), and suffer fewer costs (Drury and Kaiser 2014) then do men have an even greater responsibility when it comes to holding other men to account? Yet, we know that men are less likely to hold another man to account by calling him out on his sexist behaviour

(Armato 2013). How then do the men's ally groups work to change this? It is important to recognise that holding men to account does not just mean individual men but organisations and institutions that continue to replicate sexism and male privilege. Allied men's collectives need to start holding the men and organisations involved to account when individual or organisational behaviours and structures replicate sexism, gender inequality, patriarchy and abuse.

Men's involvement in violence prevention, and as allies to women and feminism, is fraught with tensions and the potential for further harm. Therefore, as Pease argues, if men are to be involved there must be a level of accountability to women and a feminist agenda – which feminism(s), as raised by Pease, requires further consideration. Whilst I cannot offer a direct answer to this question, I would suggest that within the current neoliberal context and with the rise of the men's rights movement, there is an increased need to ensure that a gendered analysis informed by any feminist position is better than none. This would assist in ensuring a gendered analysis of violence against women is not lost and that those men involved in this important work are doing their utmost to challenge the replication of sexism, gender inequality and patriarchy by taking responsibility through a willing and active engagement with accountability – being held to account by women, holding themselves to account and holding other men and men's collectives to account.

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