

# Changing Men: Best practice in violence prevention work with men

Michael Flood

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## Introduction: Men's roles in violence prevention

Efforts to end violence against women must address men. This notion is increasingly accepted in violence prevention circles.

The logic of violence prevention work with men is very simple. Men must take responsibility for preventing sexual violence, because the vast majority of assaults are perpetrated by men against women, children, and other men. Although only a minority of men commit sexual assault, all men can influence the culture and environment that allows other men to be violent (Berkowitz 2004, p. 163).

Among males, violence prevention work aims to lessen the likelihood of boys and men using violence. Strategies of violence prevention undermine the beliefs, values and discourses which support violence, challenge the patriarchal power relations which promote and are maintained by violence, and promote alternative constructions of masculinity, gender and selfhood which foster non-violence and gender justice.

The need for this work has been highlighted by recent and highly publicised incidents of sexual assault allegedly perpetrated by groups of young men and by sports players.

Violence prevention includes a wide range of potential strategies, at multiple levels of the social order;

Community and media education campaigns aimed at men, such as;

The NSW campaign “Violence Against Women — It’s Against All the Rules”

The recent and controversial national campaign on sexual and physical violence in relationships, a rewritten version of a campaign about to be launched in December last year.

Workshops and curricula in schools;

A wide variety of community agencies run violence prevention programs in schools, including programs focused on boys and young men. E.g., Shine South Australia...

And among particular groups of men, such as athletes;

In the wake of a series of alleged sexual assaults by players in both rugby league and AFL, violence prevention strategies in these sporting codes are being developed or intensified.

The NRL is funding a large-scale research and education program, in which I am involved. The first stage involves research on the attitudes, values, and experiences of players, and is

underway at present. The second will involve an education program, and I am contributing to the development of this program.

However, violence prevention efforts in the AFL have been much slower to appear.

Community mobilisations and social change campaigns;

UNIFEM's campaign for the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women (on 25 November). This campaign centers on the White Ribbon Campaign, that invites men to wear a white ribbon to show their opposition to violence against women.

And so on.

These strategies can be described as 'primary' prevention, in that they aim to lessen the likelihood of boys and men using violence in the first place. 'Secondary' prevention refers to reducing opportunities for violence by supporting the men who are at risk of perpetrating violence. 'Tertiary' prevention aims to prevent the re-occurrence of violence, and concerns work with males who have already used violence. Tertiary prevention thus centres on perpetrator programs, and it may be more accurate to describe this as violence intervention.

This discussion focuses on primary prevention. To stop sexual assault, we must undermine the cultural and collective supports for physical and sexual assault found among many men. And we must foster norms of consent, sexual respect, and gender equality. Changes at the levels of social structures, institutions and cultural processes are necessary, and only they will constitute a substantial prevention strategy.

I focus on how best to engage boys and men in undermining sexual assault and domestic violence. I concentrate on educational strategies that are face-to-face: education programs and workshops, peer education, training, and so on, although I also comment on other strategies such as social norms campaigns. I try to be as practical as possible: what works and what does not, how should such programs be organised and run, and so on.

## **Evaluations**

### Evaluations too often are absent, poor, or discouraging

In trying to assess violence prevention education with men, I should start with the point that often we do not know whether the intervention has worked or not. Most violence prevention interventions have not been evaluated, and many existing evaluations are inadequate. And where education programs have been evaluated, they demonstrate mixed results.

There are a number of common weaknesses in the evaluations of violence prevention programs, both those among men and in mixed-sex settings. In many evaluations;

Post-intervention assessments are made only immediately after the program or only weeks later, and there is no longer-term follow-up;

There is poor evaluation of men's potential to engage in sexually abusive behaviour;

No outcome measure are used to assess whether the program is effective in reducing actual rates of sexual assault (Yeater and O'Donohue 1999).

Evaluations themselves show mixed results. In some evaluated programs, men's attitudes have been found to 'rebound' to pre-intervention levels soon after the program has concluded (Anderson *et al.* 1998; Frazier *et al.* 1994).

### The good news: Education can make change

At the same time, it is important to note that a range of education programs have made positive changes to men's attitudes and understandings. Various evaluations document at least short-term improvement in men's attitudes and in their empathy towards rape victims (including greater improvement than women) (Pinzone-Glover *et al.* 1998). Male (and female) students and undergraduates who have attended rape education sessions show less adherence to rape myths and express less rape-supportive attitudes than those in control groups (Rosenthal *et al.* 1995; Shultz *et al.* 2000). And some violence prevention programs have been successful at improving attitudes of high school students towards dating aggression (Avery-Leaf *et al.* 1997).

Even these positive results need to be treated with caution. Statistically significant change in dependent measures (such as attitudes) does not guarantee clinically significant changes in behaviour. In short, attitude change does not guarantee behaviour change. Demand characteristics, the influence of social desirability, may produce positive results. And positive outcomes may be due to the use of low-risk samples of men (Yeater and O'Donohue 1999).

### Including change in behaviours, not just attitudes.

Few evaluations of prevention programs have measured and documented actual reductions in violence (Berkowitz 2004, p. 4). However, there is evidence that adolescent dating violence prevention programs can reduce the levels of psychological abuse, sexual violence, and violence perpetrated against the current dating partner among school students (Foshee *et al.* 1998). A recent multimodule program, one of the more sophisticated interventions among adult men, demonstrated the long-term effectiveness of rape education programming, at least for some men. Five months after the program, while some men had 'rebounded' to pre-intervention levels in terms of their attitudes and behaviours related to sexual assault, others continued to show improvement (Heppner *et al.* 1999, pp. 24-25).

### **Best practice: 4 key features of effective prevention programs**

Effective prevention programs have four key features, as Alan Berkowitz (2002; 2004) outlines in a very useful review. I briefly run through these four features, before returning to offer greater detail on particular aspects of each.

Effective prevention programs are;

*Comprehensive:* They address and involve all relevant community members and systems. So in the case of a workshop for athletes for example, coaches also are involved and supportive (Berkowitz 2001, p. 78).

*Intensive:* Effective prevention programs offer learning opportunities that are interactive, involve active participation, are sustained over time, and have multiple points of contact with reinforcing messages (Berkowitz 2004, p. 13).

*Relevant to the audience:* Effective programs are tailored to the characteristics of the participants and acknowledge the special needs and concerns of particular communities. They focus on peer-

related variables, use peers in leadership roles, and emphasize the relationship of sexual assault to other issues (Berkowitz 2001, p. 82).

*Based on positive messages:* Finally, effective programs offer positive messages which build on men's values and predisposition to act in a positive manner (Berkowitz 2001, p. 82). They document and reinforce healthy behaviors and norms, encourage individuals to focus on what they can do, not on what they shouldn't do, and avoid an exclusive emphasis on problem behaviors (Berkowitz 2001, p. 83).

I want now to move to a more detailed examination of some aspects of these features of 'best practice' in violence prevention work with men.

### **Changing men: Making the intervention effective**

The central challenge of violence prevention education among men is to produce change in the attitudes, values, and behaviours associated with violence against women. To do this, interventions must have sufficient intensity, and sufficient personal relevance, to produce change (Heppner *et al.* 1999, p. 17).

A related challenge is to produce change that *lasts*. In evaluations of existing education programs, a common finding is that men's attitudes towards violence have undergone a significant improvement immediately after the program, but that their attitudes then return to pre-intervention levels one or two months afterwards (Heppner *et al.* 1999, pp. 16-17). In other words, there is a 'rebound' effect, in which initial positive changes in men's attitudes and values are not sustained over time.

Again, producing change and producing more lasting change, requires education programs that are both more intensive and more personally relevant for men. I focus first on intensity.

To generate educational 'intensity', effective programs require both length and depth. Interventions need to be short enough to be practical, but long and intensive enough to be effective (Heppner *et al.* 1999, p. 17, quoting others). The evidence is that very short programs, e.g. of one hour only, are ineffective.

There has been growing reflection on the processes of change at stake in violence prevention education. One framework that has become increasingly influential is the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM).<sup>1</sup> The ELM proposes that participants have a variety of ways in which to respond to the educational message, and that desirable responses involve 'central route processing'. This involves attending to the core of the message. Attitudinal and behavioural change are more likely when 'central route processing' is elicited, and this

is based on the participant finding personal relevance in the message, thoughtfully evaluating the message, judging the quality to be good and the level to be appropriate, feeling motivated to listen to the message, engaging in issue-relevant thinking, and subsequently demonstrating more stable attitude change. Central route change is also more resistant to later counterpersuasion attempts and more able to influence actual behavior. (Heppner *et al.* 1999, p. 16).

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<sup>1</sup> See e.g. Heppner *et al.* 1999, p. 16, and Foubert and McEwen 1998, p. 549.

The ELM and other models of attitude change also suggest that programs will be most effective if they address three domains: cognitions, affective or emotional responses, and behaviour (Heppner *et al.* 1999, p. 18). Some programs engage participants only at the cognitive level, e.g. by offering information in a lecture format or by interactive exercises on ‘myths’ and ‘facts’. But programs that explore only what participants know are less effective than programs that also address how they feel and what they do.

One program is a model example of such strategies. Heppner *et al.* (1999) used three educational modules that addressed each of these three domains. They ran three 90-minute sessions with American university students, each a week apart. A *cognitive* module focused on dispelling myths and providing facts. The *affective* module relied on a panel of rape survivors speaking of the aftermath and long-term effects that rape has had on their lives. In addition, two male allies spoke of supporting friends who had been raped, their emotional reactions to this, and so on. All panellists had done a pre-intervention dress rehearsal. These exercises were designed to elicit empathy among the participants (Heppner *et al.* 1999, p. 18).

The third, *behavioural* module, involved two role plays, of a date rape and of male friends supporting a female rape victim. The first role play is an interactive drama. Actors portray a scene of sexual coercion, and the audience is then invited to rewrite the scene by making suggestions as to how the actors could have interacted differently so that sexual coercion did not occur. The actors then recreate the scene, incorporating these suggestions (Heppner *et al.* 1999, p. 21). Such an exercise facilitates behavioural change by modelling the specific behaviours men can adopt to minimise their likelihood of coercing a partner into sex. The second role play extends this behavioural training by encouraging men’s understanding of the needs of rape survivors and men’s skills at responding effectively (Heppner *et al.* 1999, p. 21).

Another valuable characteristic of this kind of multimodule intervention is participants’ repeated exposure to the educational message, which has been shown to help the long-term stability of attitudinal change (Heppner *et al.* 1999, p. 17).

## **Engaging men: Making the intervention relevant**

### Use men as facilitators and peer educators

There is an emergent consensus that sexual assault prevention is most effective when conducted in separate female and male groups. Women’s and men’s programs have different strategies and goals and there are difficulties in combining them, evaluations demonstrate that separate-sex programs are more effective than mixed-sex programs, and female and male participants themselves prefer single-sex workshops (Berkowitz 2001, pp. 80-81).

There are at least six reasons why it is particularly effective to have male educators and facilitators working in all-male groups.

First, men’s attitudes and behaviour are shaped in powerful ways by their male peers. Men’s lives are highly organised by relations between men, by homosocial bonds and homosocial cultures (Kimmel, 1994, pp. 128-129). The importance of male peer groups and male-male influence can be harnessed for positive ends in all-male groups (Berkowitz 2004, p. 7).

Second, all-male groups can provide the space and the safety for men to talk. This is vital as a “common element in successful prevention programs for men is the opportunity to participate in an

experience where men are encouraged to honestly share real feelings and concerns about issues of masculinity and men's violence." (Berkowitz 2004, pp. 7-8)

Third, male educators and participants can act as role models for other men. Men can act as models of a nonviolent masculinity, by practising such qualities and behaviours as listening, empathy, and respect for women and other men or boys. Men can model the taking of personal responsibility for one's sexist or violent behaviour. Male facilitators can discuss how they themselves have examined their own attitudes and opinions in relation to the construction of masculinity. Men's personal and candid discussion of their own experience can be a very useful element of lessons related to gender.

Male educators possess an insider's knowledge of the workings of masculinity and can use this to critical advantage. If they have reflected critically on their own involvements in gender, they can connect with and allow greater interrogation of other men's experience of masculinity and gender relations. Men can break down violence-supportive myths which are focused on men, such as the notion of the 'uncontrollable male sex drive', and other oppressive constructions of male sexuality and identity.

Fourth, male educators tend to be perceived as more credible and more persuasive by male participants (Kilmartin 2001, pp. 51-52). In the context of negative stereotypes of feminists and feminism, as well as cultural constructions of male authority, men may be listened to more and taken more seriously than women speaking about the same issues.

Fifth, working in single-sex groups minimises the harmful, gendered forms of interaction that are common in mixed-sex groups. In mixed-sex workshops, men may look to women for approval or forgiveness or support, women may adopt nurturing or caretaking roles for men, and women and men may clash because of their different relationships to issues of gender, power, and violence.

Finally, having men work with men embodies the recognition that men must take responsibility for helping to end men's violence against women. It avoids the widespread tendency to leave it up to women to address men's violent or sexist behaviour.

All-male groups do involve greater risks of men's collusion with sexist and violence-supportive discourses and behaviours. And male participants may feel that their separation from women is an implicit signal that the program assumes that all men are violent while women are never violent. Various steps can be taken to minimise the likelihood of either problem. And it should go without saying that violence prevention work with men must acknowledge women's work and leadership, and never compete with nor undermine women's efforts (Berkowitz 2004, p. 9).

(But female facilitators and mixed-sex groups also can be effective.)

Having emphasised the benefits of male educators, I should note also that female facilitators can also work very effectively with men, and there are benefits to women and men working together. Having mixed-sex educators involves and demonstrates a model of working in *partnership*. This is a valuable demonstration to participants of egalitarian and respectful working relationships across gender, and it models women's and men's shared interest in non-violence and gender justice.

Mixed-sex groups also are valuable tools for violence prevention, and have been used widely among boys and girls in high schools and colleges in particular (Berkowitz 2004, p. 9). Mixed-sex groups have both pedagogical advantages and disadvantages, but I will not explore these here as my focus is on educational strategies focused on men.

### Use culturally appropriate strategies

Violence prevention strategies must be sensitive to cultural diversities and adopt culturally appropriate languages and strategies. And they must address the ways in which women's and men's experiences of and involvements in sexual violence are organised by class, race and ethnicity, age, and other forms of social division. Race and class relations shape men's perpetration of violence and the family and community contexts in which violence occurs. Race and class relations also shape the institutions that police or respond to violence, the ability and willingness of individuals and communities to report or respond to violence, and the ways in which media and community accounts frame this violence.

In violence prevention work with racially diverse groups of men, culturally relevant interventions are more effective than 'colourblind' ones. In a recent American study, a colourblind intervention was compared with a culturally relevant workshop that used facilitators who shared the ethnic background of participants and included culturally specific information and reflection in its content (Heppner *et al.* 1999). Black men found the latter intervention to be more relevant and engaging, although there was insufficient statistical power to test whether they were more likely to improve than men in the colourblind treatment condition (Heppner *et al.* 1999, p. 24).

Violence prevention efforts must engage with local cultures among men, and sub-cultures for example among groups or gangs of young men, which endorse violence against women.

This is precisely why the first stage of the NRL's violence prevention program involves research among its players: to document those aspects of rugby culture's understandings and behaviours that contribute to sexual violence, and those aspects that support non-violence or can be mobilised in support of non-violence. Violence prevention efforts among rugby league players and other athletes will need to address these men's understandings and engage with their local cultures.

### **Enabling and inspiring men: Building on the positive**

#### Minimise defensiveness

One of the most significant challenges in violence prevention work with men is to minimise men's reactions of defensiveness and hostility. Such reactions are relatively common among men attending rape prevention interventions,<sup>2</sup> and are also evident in men's responses to media campaigns.<sup>3</sup> Men may feel defensive and hostile because they perceive that they are being targetted as perpetrators of rape (Heppner *et al.* 1999, p. 18).

The potential for defensiveness can be lessened by approaching men as partners in solving the problem rather than as perpetrators of the problem (Berkowitz 2004, pp. 5-6). Some programs emphasise that we need leadership from men on the subjects of sexism and men's violence against women (Katz 1994, p. 34). They address men as leaders on their campuses or in their communities,

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<sup>2</sup> For example, in a program involving either a didactic video session or an interactive drama, immediately after the intervention one-third of the men experienced negativity or hostility about the program, reporting for example that "This is male bashing" (Heppner *et al.* 1995).

<sup>3</sup> For example, some men responded to a community education campaign in New South Wales, Australia, by emphasising that men are the invisible victims of violence too, including abuse in their relationships with women, and that men are waiting to hear their own status as victims addressed (Hubert 2003, pp. 50-51).

[inviting them to] use their leadership role to promote a healthy sexual environment.” (Heppner *et al.* 1999, p. 18)

Another way of addressing men that can be effective is to address men as *bystanders* to other men’s violence.

Other measures that can lessen men’s defensiveness include the use of male facilitators, a language of inclusive personal pronouns (“we,” “us”) (Heppner *et al.* 1999, p. 18), and the acknowledgement of men’s own victimisation.<sup>4</sup>

Strategies of blame and attack are ineffective and even damaging in violence prevention work with men (Berkowitz 2004, p. 6). At the same time, this work must challenge the constructions of masculinity and gendered power relations that sustain sexual violence. As Lonsway (1996, p. 250) states, “although educational programs challenging rape culture *do* require confrontation of established ideologies, such interventions *do not necessitate a style of personal confrontation*”.

### Find and build on non-violent behaviours, attitudes, and values

Boys’ and men’s relations to and involvements in dominant constructions of masculinity are diverse and fluid. With this in mind, an important strategy is to find examples of boys’ and men’s resistance to hegemonic and violent masculinities and evidence of their gender-equitable practice, and foster communities of support with which to sustain and spread these (Denborough 1996). Encourage men to find examples of times in their own lives when they have chosen non-violent ways of relating and being, build on these exceptions to dominant masculinity, find support for these in the men’s personal histories, and find support for alternative identities and ways of relating from significant others such as peers, family, and partners.

Such men can also be recruited as educators themselves. For example, in an action-research project in low-income settings in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, young men who questioned prevailing violence-supportive views were trained as peer educators to foster gender-equitable relations in their communities (Barker 2001).

### **The question of pedagogy: How to help men change**

Violence prevention programs among men have relied on a variety of pedagogies, each associated with different frameworks regarding how to help men change and with different understandings of why men commit sexual violence. I offer some brief comments on several key pedagogies.

#### Encourage victim empathy

In addressing the affective domain of men’s relationship to sexual violence, prevention education programs often appeal to or encourage men’s *empathy* with the victims and survivors of rape. This emphasis is based on the belief that lack of empathy for the victims is a necessary condition for men to rape. Programs have men hear survivors speak of the impact and trauma of rape, ask how men would feel if a woman close to them were raped, or invite reflection on the likely impact of being raped themselves (by other men).

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<sup>4</sup> See my discussion of this issue in Flood (2002-2003).

Various studies have shown that education programs intentionally can increase men's sense of empathy for the victims of sexual violence (Foubert 2000), including among 'high risk' males who show a higher self-reported likelihood of committing sexual abuse (Schewe and O'Donohue 1993b; Schewe and O'Donohue 1996).

However, there are some cautions to note. In general, education programs that invite male participants to empathise with a female victim have been unsuccessful in changing men's attitudes, while the use of male survivors has been more effective. Berkowitz (2002, p. 179) speculates that it may be necessary to address men's own questions and concerns first, and that it is prudent to incorporate the voices of both male and female survivors in efforts to encourage victim empathy.

### Teach skills in non-violence and consent

Another strategy is to teach men skills in negotiating consent in sexual relations, other relationship skills such as communication and conflict resolution, and anger management. Such efforts can help to reduce men's violence, in encouraging men to take responsibility for their own actions and intentions in relation to others (Berkowitz 2004, p. 17). However, sexual assault should not be understood in general to be the result of 'miscommunication', as this obscures the gendered power relations and deliberate, planned choices that typically organise sexual violence.<sup>5</sup> Men do not sexually assault because they lack skills, but because they feel they can, doing so offers certain benefits, and their behaviour is socially sanctioned. Skills training can underestimate the power men invest in existing gender relations, the ways in which dominant forms of masculinity may 'feel right' or 'make imaginative sense' to the men who inhabit them (Gilbert and Gilbert 1998, pp. 230-231). Nevertheless, we do need to teach men strategies to minimise their likelihood of coercing someone into sex and more widely to become active citizens for gender justice (Gilbert and Gilbert 1998, p. 232).

### Enable men as bystanders

Some programs teach men how to intervene in violent or sexist behaviour by other men. For example, the Mentors in Violence Prevention Project, run among American athletes and others, "highlights the role that non-abusive men can play in preventing or interrupting sexist or abusive behavior by [their] peers" (Katz 2003, p. 3). It provides the majority of men who are uncomfortable with a minority's violent behaviour with the permission and skills to confront them (Berkowitz 2004, p. 17).

Bystander interventions move beyond individual empathy and attitudes, to make men responsible for helping to create a male peer culture in which the abuse of women will be seen as entirely unacceptable (Katz 2003, p. 2).

### Undermine men's conformity to sexist peer norms: The social norms approach

Men overestimate each others' comfort with sexist, coercive and derogatory comments about and behaviour towards women. Many men overestimate the extent to which other men believe in

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<sup>5</sup> Notions of sexual 'miscommunication' are widely used by men and women trying to explain their own and each others' sexual behaviours and to maintain their heterosexual relationships and identities (Frith and Kitzinger 1997, pp. 521-523). Miscommunication theory is popular because it serves several useful functions for individual women, especially in trying to sustain heterosexual relationships: it avoids blaming men; it gives women an illusory sense of control; and it obscures institutionalised power relations.

societal myths about masculinity and violence, and the extent to which other men are comfortable with sexist behaviour towards women (Fabiano *et al.* 2004, p. 106). Another strategy is therefore to correct this distortion, to shift men's perception of the norm by revealing the extent to which other men also disagree with violence or are uncomfortable with common norms of masculinity, and thus to undermine men's conformity to sexist peer norms (Kilmartin 2001, pp. 63-66).

This has been done on some university campuses by surveying men regarding their comfort or discomfort with other men's sexism and publicising the results. This then effects change in male approval of sexist behaviour (Kilmartin 2001, p. 66). By shifting men's perceptions of other men's attitudes and behaviour, men's own emphasis on sexual consent and their willingness to intervene in violent behaviour increase (Fabiano *et al.* 2004, p. 109).

### **Improving the methodology of violence prevention work**

I want to conclude by calling for an effort to improve the methodology of our violence prevention work. I have three improvements in mind;

Use pre- and post-intervention assessments, and both short- and long-term assessments, to evaluate the effectiveness of our work.

Assess both attitudes and behaviours. And as well as relying on self-report data, considering drawing on additional assessments such as natural observation, information from partners, etc.

Get more sophisticated in terms of both the change we want and the change we see. For example, rather than assuming that there will be one common pattern of change among participants, or that individuals will vary quantitatively in terms of a common growth pattern (Heppner *et al.* 1999, p. 18), look for diversity and contradiction. And investigate why some men rebound and others do not, the extent to which different strategies are required for 'at risk' men, and so on.

### **Conclusion**

Men have a vital role to play in helping to end violence against women. Men must "accept and examine our own potential for violence and take a stand against the violence of other men" (Berkowitz 2004). Violence prevention programs can lessen men's adherence to the attitudes and values associated with sexual violence, increase men's emotional and moral compassion, encourage men to intervene in the behavior of other men, and reduce men's future violence. But if they are to be efforts to do more than 'deliver and hope' (Yeater and O'Donohue 1999, p. 750), they must be well-organised, well evaluated, and well supported.

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