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Chapter 20

OVERCOMING THE GENDER DYAD: ENGAGING MEN AND BOYS IN DOMESTIC VIOLENCE PREVENTION

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ABSTRACT

The entrenched gender dyad of female victim and male perpetrator in domestic violence discourse influences the underlying philosophy and assumptions that guide the design of government policies, programs and community activities and limits long-term, systematic dismantling of socio-cultural conditions that enable violence to exist. The promotion of positive fatherhood is offered as one useful strategy to begin to engage boys and men in domestic violence prevention efforts and to shift broader domestic violence narratives beyond the current gendered conception of vulnerability to domestic violence.

Keywords: Domestic violence, primary prevention, men and boys, fatherhood, gender dyad

Introduction

As I look back on what I've learned about shame, gender, and worthiness, the greatest lesson is this: If we're going to find our way out of shame and back to each other, vulnerability is the path and courage is the light. To set down those lists of what we're supposed to be is brave. To love ourselves and support each other in the process of becoming real is perhaps the greatest single act of daring greatly (Brown, 2012, p. 109).

International declarations calling for the meaningful involvement of men and boys in promoting gender equality and preventing and ending domestic violence have emerged over the past two decades (United Nations, 1994, 1995, 2008; United Nations Division for the

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Advancement of Women, 2004). Research confirms that ending domestic violence requires the engagement of boys and men as allies, advocates, role models, partners, change agents, leaders, bystanders and violence disrupters (Crooks, Goodall, Hughes, Jaffe, & Baker, 2007; DeKeseredy, 1988; DeKeseredy & Kelly, 1995; DeKeseredy, Schwartz, & Alvi, 2000; Flood, 2011; Groth, 2001; Katz, 1995; Kaufman, 2001).

To date, efforts to engage men and boys in domestic violence reduction and prevention ¹² initiatives have been limited in three primary ways: First, country- and state-wide plans led by governments around the world rarely address the current and potential roles of men and boys in prevention efforts. A recent review of national, provincial and state domestic violence and violence against women (VAW) frameworks, strategies and plans completed between 2003 and 2014 (Wells, Pickup, & Esina, 2014)¹³ found that, of the 77 plans, only 31 identified men and boys as part of the solution in violence prevention and merely 16 of those included an explicit strategy and/or action.

Second, a comprehensive international review of current programs, policies and community activities from around the world found that efforts to engage men and boys in violence prevention are few, under-evaluated and diffuse (Wells et al., 2013). These initiatives are often small-scale and not connected to or integrated within broader gender equality or violence prevention strategies at national, provincial or regional levels, thereby limiting their potential to effect systemic change (Flood, 2010, 2011; Minerson et al., 2011; Wells et al., 2013).

Third, most violence prevention plans, strategies and initiatives are grounded on the assumption that females are more vulnerable to domestic violence than men are. It is clear that domestic violence remains a gender asymmetrical phenomenon, with a disproportionate impact on women. Worldwide, the prevalence rate of violence against women ranges from 15% to 71% and on average, 30% of women who have been in a relationship report that they have experienced some form of physical or sexual violence by their partner (World Health Organization (WHO), 2005). Further, we know that "women experience more serious, injurious, and repeated violence than men" (Nixon & Tutty, 2010, p. 67). However, recent research indicates that, at least in North America, girls and women now appear to perpetrate domestic violence as often as or more often than men do (Cutbush et al., 2010; Foshee, 1996; Langhinrichsen-Rohling, Selwyn, & Rohling, 2011; Swahn, Simon, Arias, & Bossarte, 2008).

Authors argue that the entrenched gender dyad of female victim and male perpetrator influences the underlying philosophy and assumptions that guide the design of country/state/provincial plans, policies, programs and community activities and limits long-term, systematic dismantling of socio-cultural conditions that enable violence to exist. The chapter begins with a discussion of the ways in which the feminist discourse has shaped government and community responses to domestic violence, followed by a review of recent evidence challenging the male abuser/female victim dyad and current view about women's heightened vulnerability to abuse. Drawing on research about female-perpetrated domestic

¹² In this context, we are specifically targeting *primary* prevention defined as reducing the number of new instances of domestic violence by intervening before any violence has occurred. Primary prevention "relies on identification of the underlying, or 'upstream', risk and protective factors for [domestic violence], and acts to address those factors" (Harvey, Garcia-Moreno, & Butchart, 2007, p.5).

¹³ Countries included in the study were: Canada, United States, United Kingdom, European Union, Australia and New Zealand. State-wide plans were from Canada, United States and Australia. For full report please go to www.preventdomesticviolence.ca

violence, an alternate view of boys and men as victims and perpetrators is presented. The chapter then presents an analysis of worldwide action plans and initiatives that have attempted to engage boys and men and their key limitations related to the dominant domestic violence discourse and how they are limited by conventional feminist assumptions about domestic violence. The promotion of positive fatherhood is offered as a useful strategy to begin to engage boys and men and shift broader domestic violence narratives beyond the current gendered conception of vulnerability.

DOMINANT FEMINIST DISCOURSE AND ITS IMPACT ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE RESPONSES

Feminist theory provides an essential critique of gender inequality and patriarchy (Gardiner, 2005; hooks, 2000; Judith, 2012). Hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1987) is a concept used to describe men's dominant social position in relation to women and other, "less desirable," forms of masculinity. As a dominant discourse defining what it means to "be a man," hegemonic masculinity incorporates violence among a number of other social behaviours considered to be masculine (Bowker, 1998; Hatty, 2000; Kaufman, 1999; Kimmel, 2000, Seidler, 1996). Thus, masculinities "can be expressed or embodied through violence" (Peralta, Callanan, Steele, & Wiley, 2011, p. 117). Hegemonic masculinity incorporates both aggressive and violent practices, which, in turn, reaffirm gender inequality through the ongoing construction of a hierarchy of masculinities built on the notion of inferior femininity (Peralta, Tuttle, & Steele, 2010). The feminist critique of hegemonic masculinity challenges patriarchal structures and deconstructs gender as a culturally and historically power-laden practice. This destabilization of masculinity has proven to be an essential tool to identifying and challenging oppressive gender-based policies and practices and remains foundational to feminist efforts since the second-wave of feminism (Gardiner, 2005). This approach has significantly shaped and influenced the violence against women/domestic violence prevention discourse that has and continues to inform research, government and community-based responses around the world.

The critique of patriarchy and gender hierarchy has grounded feminist efforts to redress gender imbalance in the 1960s and 1970s, and dominates discourse about the nature, scope and prevalence of domestic violence worldwide. Policies and programs intended to protect victims of abuse or punish and rehabilitate abusers are common responses to the pervasiveness of domestic violence internationally. These efforts are usually based in the gender dyad, consisting of the masculine aggressor and his vulnerable female counterpart (Bowker, 1998; Parrott & Zeichner, 2003; Seidler, 1996). The victim is to be protected, sequestered and supported; the abuser is to be punished, rehabilitated and monitored. The proliferation of batterer intervention programs and domestic violence shelters for women around the world exemplifies this response. Wells et al.' (2014) review of 77 national and state-wide plans reveal that the majority of government investments, legislation, policies and programs has been directed towards a "response" to domestic violence (after the violence has occurred) within the context of heterosexual relationships and within a broader social construct influenced by a gender dyad paradigm.

Though such programmatic and policy interventions are an essential part of the social infrastructure necessary to respond to domestic violence, by failing to critically reflect on the underlying discourse shaping these measures, the opportunity to truly challenge the conditions that promote the permeation of violence in everyday life may be missed. The critique of hegemonic masculinity inherently assumes gender asymmetry, yet this foundation is being challenged by a number of new developments.

THE FEMALE PERPETRATOR

A growing body of research indicates that, at least in North America, girls and women now perpetrate partner violence as often as, or more often than, boys and men (Cutbush et al., 2010; Foshee, 1996; Langhinrichsen-Rohling et al., 2012; Zweig et al., 2013) and bidirectional violence is the most common pattern of violence in abusive heterosexual dating relationships (Johnson, 2011). As one example, a recent review of 50 American studies of various types (large population samples, smaller community samples, university samples, treatment seeking samples, and criminal justice-related samples) found that in heterosexual and gay/lesbian/bisexual couples experiencing domestic violence, the violence was bidirectional about half the time, and unidirectional female-to-male violence was as common as or more common than unidirectional male-to-female counterparts (Langhinrichsen-Rohling et al., 2012).

The most common form of teen dating violence is psychological aggression: Adolescent girls now perpetrate physical violence as often as or more often than boys do, even though girls suffer more serious physical harm than boys as a result (Swahn et al., 2008). A seminal study by Foshee et al. (1996) found that almost twice as many adolescent girls perpetrated dating violence compared to boys (28% versus 15%), although girls were more likely than boys to report using physical violence in self-defence (15% versus 5%). A large American study recently found that girls were more likely than boys to report perpetrating physical violence (30% versus 19%) and psychological violence (40% versus 28%), but boys were significantly more likely to physically injure their dates (Swahn et al., 2008). Although girls are far more likely than boys to be victims of sexual cyber dating abuse, cyber dating abuse overall appears to be perpetrated roughly equally by boys and girls (Cutbush et al., 2010; Zweig et al., 2013). Some research indicates that teen dating violence is often a precursor to violence in adult intimate relationships (Pepler, 2014; Sinha, 2012).

It appears that males continue to perpetrate the most common and severe forms of domestic violence (Black et al., 2011; Dutton & Nicholls, 2005; Holtzworth-Munroe et al., 2000; Johnson, 2008; Johnson, 2011; Sugarman & Frankel, 1996; Statistics Canada, 2011), but research has yet to provide a clear picture of the severity of the violence perpetrated by girls and women. In addition, it is difficult to pin down precise female perpetration rates because they vary depending on the type of study, methodology, definition of violence, sample size, and characteristics of the study population (Cooper & Wells, 2013).

These findings challenge the prevailing paradigm guiding research, government and community responses to domestic violence, which implicitly and explicitly assume girls and women to be the primary victims of violence perpetrated by males (Sinah, 2012; Statistics Canada, 2011; VicHealth, 2007) leading many researchers to question the gender dyad

informed by feminist discourse. Though it would be imprudent to conclude that male violence against women is no longer relevant to the discussion, the research indicates that new approaches to prevention are required. Further, our understanding of vulnerability to violence requires careful reflection and study. As both genders engage in domestic violence, identifying risk factors that are distinct and common can render a more nuanced understanding of domestic violence perpetration and victimization (Capaldi et al., 2012; Renner & Whitney, 2012) which can help to hone and improve prevention efforts. A number of studies conducted over the past two decades suggest that physical acts of domestic violence are often predictable for both girls and boys based on common risk factors and developmental trajectories (Chiodo et al., 2012; Lussier, Farrington, & Moffitt, 2009; Raiford, Wingood, & DiClemente, 2007; Wolfe, Crooks, Chiodo, & Jaffe, 2009). On the other hand, research shows that these risk factors and their mechanisms of influence may be highly nuanced according to gender, thus the ways in which they may be malleable to intervention may be different (Cornelius & Resseguie, 2007; Shorey, Meltzer, & Cornelius, 2010). Regardless of whether prevention approaches should be universal or targeted (Centers for Disease Control, 2008), the research certainly suggests that prevention programs specifically geared to dating relationships are unlikely to be effective if they generally portray boys as perpetrators and girls as victims (Archer, 2000; Capaldi, Kim, & Shortt, 2007; Ehrensaft, 2008; Whitaker et al., 2006).

Unfortunately, considerable research gaps limit our understanding of gender-based developmental trajectories toward violence victimization and perpetration. This is in part a result of the paradigm of female vulnerability, which shapes research approaches resulting in a predominant preoccupation with female victimhood at the expense of probing domestic violence comprehensively. Few studies have followed large samples of girls over a sufficient period of time to "better understand the association between individual, relationship, and contextual factors that contribute to female-perpetrated interpersonal violence across the lifespan" (Williams, Ghandour, & Kub, 2008, p. 245). Challenging the notion of the vulnerable female victim as the norm allows for consideration of alternative solutions at the programmatic, policy and societal levels that reach beyond the gender dyad.

MALES, VICTIMIZATION, AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF MASCULINITY

Boys and men are themselves vulnerable to violent victimization and gender and social constructs, both of which can increase their risk of becoming perpetrators. This reconsideration of vulnerability can significantly strengthen our understanding of domestic violence and shape our responses accordingly.

First, it is well established that both direct maltreatment and indirect maltreatment through exposure to violence in the home are predictors of emotional problems, as well as a range of aggressive and delinquent behaviours, for both male and female children and adolescents (Coohey, Renner, & Sabri, 2013; Evans, Davies, & DiLillo, 2008; Kitzman et al., 2003; Moylan et al., 2010; Wolfe et al, 2003). Many studies have found that boys who have been maltreated are more likely to develop externalizing behaviours, such as aggression, whereas girls are more likely to develop internalizing problems, such as depression (Arata et al., 2007; Wolfe & Scott, 2001), although some studies have concluded that maltreated

children of both genders can develop aggressive and anti-social behaviours and attitudes (Calvete & Orue, 2013; Maas, Herrenkohl, & Sousa, 2008). A meta-study found that any childhood sexual abuse increased male perpetration of sexual violence towards women more than threefold (WHO, 2010), with other studies showing that even experiencing lesser forms of abuse (such as spanking) and hostile family relations increases risk of violent behaviour (Wolfe et al., 2001; Russell, 2008). Experiencing or witnessing abuse and violence can lead to the inability to regulate emotions (Cummings et al., 2009; Harding et al., 2012; Katz, Hessler, & Annest, 2007), and teaches young people that abuse is appropriate, justifiable, and deserved, and that aggressive behaviour can be a useful way of achieving certain goals (Calvete, 2007, 2008; Calvete & Orue, 2013; Henry et al., 2000). Research also shows that these problems can continue into adulthood (Ansara & Hindin, 2011; Herrenkohl et al., 2013; Smith, Ireland, & Thomberry, 2005; Wall & Barth, 2005).

Second, some societal factors can increase the propensity of boys and men to perpetrate domestic violence. These include traditional gender and social norms supportive of violence, societal norms that support male superiority and sexual entitlement, weak legal sanctions against domestic violence, and a high tolerance for crime and other violence (VicHealth, 2007; WHO, 2010). Men are more likely than women to hold attitudes that support or are linked to the perpetration of violence, and social constructions of masculinity play a role in some men's perpetration of sexual assault (Kimmel, 2000; Pease, 2008; Texas Council on Family Violence, 2012; VicHealth, 2007). In many cultures, societal norms uphold the belief that physical strength and sexual dominance are intrinsic male qualities (WHO, 2010). Hypermasculinity predisposes men to engage in behaviours that assert physical dominance and power in interpersonal interactions, particularly those interactions with women (Parrott & Zeichner, 2003). This display of sexual dominance, power and aggression "serves to 'uphold' the macho personality" (Parrott & Zeichner, 2003, p. 70).

CHALLENGES TO ENGAGING BOYS AND MEN IN VIOLENCE PREVENTION

Wells et al.' (2014) review of 77 national and provincial/state domestic violence/violence against women plans published between 2003 and 2014, along with an international scoping review of evidence based policies and practices, suggest a dearth of policies, investments, strategies and programs specifically geared to engaging men and boys as allies, partners, change agents, leaders, bystanders and violence disrupters, or potentially vulnerable to violence. Thirty-one of the government plans identified the engagement of men and boys in violence prevention as an approach to prevent or reduce domestic violence, however, only 16 plans were explicit with strategies, actions and investment. Of those that did take this approach, examples include working with the White Ribbon Campaign on engaging men and boys in building awareness and working with men as allies (Greece, Council of Australia, Tasmania, Portugal), targeting men in education campaigns (PEI, Texas) especially athletes (New Hampshire, New York), providing a men's resource centre (Norway), better supporting fathers (Alberta, Australia), and a national workplace strategy (Australia) to engage men and boys in violence prevention.

Wells et al.' (2013) review of 67 international promising policies and practices that focus on engaging men and boys in domestic violence prevention confirmed that much of the work to engage men and boys in preventing violence is diffuse, small scale, and poorly funded. Promising practices are emerging (Baobaid & Hamed, 2010; Communities and Families Clearinghouse Australia, 2010; Dogruöz & Rogow, 2009; Fraser, 2010; Goodman & Lwin, 2008; Guedes, 2012; Men Against Violence, 2012; I am a Kind Man. 2011; Men Stopping Violence, 2012; Sheehy & Allan, 2005; Supporting Father Involvement Program, 2011; Trevethan, Moore, & Allegri, 2005; United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women, 2004) but most efforts have not been subjected to rigorous evaluation and which approaches are most effective has yet to be determined (Flood, 2010). The majority of initiatives consist of programmatic efforts, rather than systematic responses at regional or national levels. Again, the predominant view of the vulnerable female victim and her male abuser may be limiting the adoption of comprehensive approaches to engaging boys and men in violence prevention. Without a new discourse that moves beyond the gender dyad that includes a strong policy base, institutional support, and long-term funding, programs and initiatives to engage men and boys will continue to remain localized, small in scope, shortterm in duration, and under-evaluated and steeped in the paradigm that only views men as perpetrators (Wells et al., 2013).

Interestingly, the fundamental challenges associated with engaging men and boys in violence prevention arise from the dominant feminist paradigm permeating domestic violence advocacy and response. The critique of fully embracing prevention work with boys and men includes the fear that it may divert resources and attention away from women's campaigns and services; that the feminist orientation to this complex social issue may be excluded in strategy development; and that men could potentially "co-opt" the anti-violence movement and gain a disproportionate amount of media attention, underscoring their position of privilege (Pease, 2008; Texas Council on Family Violence, 2012). Notably, the underlying gender dyad paradigm is evident in these arguments whereby women are the oppressed and vulnerable, requiring protection, while men are violent aggressors who must be curbed from doing harm. It is strongly agreed that being mindful of these challenges is warranted, however, including men as partners, allies, change makers, leaders, bystanders, and violence disrupters, as well as potential victims in prevention work, is a critical step to building long-lasting solutions to domestic violence.

BEGINNING WITH FATHERS

Wells et al.' (2013) recent paper, Engaging Men and Boys in Domestic Violence Prevention: Opportunities and Promising Approaches, identified a number of "entry points", 14

Engaging Men and Boys in Domestic Violence Prevention: Opportunities and Promising Approaches was developed in partnership with White Ribbon Canada and consists of a scoping study of the relevant international literature in the area of violence prevention work with men and boys. In this report, we identify seven entry points as critical areas of focus for violence prevention. These are: 1) Build and promote positive fatherhood; 2) Support men's health and mental wellbeing; 3) Leverage sports and recreation settings to influence norms and behaviours; 4) Engage men in the workplace to build parenting and healthy relationship skills; 5) Support healthy male peer relationships and networks; 6) Engage men as allies in violence prevention; and 7) Support Aboriginal healing. If interested in the report, please go to www.preventdomesticviolence.ca

to engage boys and men in domestic violence prevention that emerged from the review. Fatherhood is proposed as an essential first area of focus from a research, policy and programmatic perspective to move prevention efforts beyond the traditional view of vulnerability.

The engagement of fathers as key participants in family strengthening and support can improve the lives of men, women, and children (Shapiro, Krysik, & Pennar, 2011; Barker & Verani, 2008; Pruett, 2000). By normalizing the role of caring for children, the restrictions of traditional definitions of masculinity are replaced with a broader vision of men's capacity in family life and society (MenCare, 2011). Caring for children and being engaged in the lives of young people can increase men's emotional well-being and capacity to express emotions and experience empathy (Horn, Blankenhorn, & Pearlstein, 1999; Allen & Daly, 2007). This can lower levels of family conflict and violence and increase opportunities for children to grow up in emotionally and physically safe environments (Shapiro et al., 2011; Barker & Verani, 2008).

Until recently, the vast majority of the parenting research and interventions focused on mother-child relationships. Research pertaining to fathers as parents has largely been limited to the ways in which fathers' economic and other contributions foster family stability and support mothers' ability to parent well (Coley & Schindler, 2008; Greene & Moore, 2000; Kalil, Ziol-Guest, & Coley, 2005; Tamis-LeMonda et al., 2004). Research is now confirming and clarifying the vital and distinct role that fathers play in child development (Coley & Schindler, 2008). New studies indicate that, for better and for worse, fathers influence their children independently from mothers and as strongly as mothers (Zanoni et al., 2013). In addition, fathers are increasingly involved in childrearing in two-parent families, particularly in North American contexts, and there has been a clear trend toward shared custody and shared parenting in families in which the parents are separated or divorced (Beaupré, Dryburgh, & Wendt, 2010).

Supporting fathers to become more positively engaged in the lives of their children is a promising strategy to prevent violence in the next generation among both girls and boys. Fathers who are positively engaged take an active role in caring for their child's social, emotional, cognitive and physical health, and they promote their child's well-being and security. Positive father involvement also means taking on nurturing and caretaking roles, and modeling behaviours that promote gender equity and peaceful ways of resolving conflicts. There are two primary components of healthy or positive fathering: being positively involved in the child's life and having an authoritative parenting style (Asmussen & Weizel, 2010). Family conditions that help fathers to parent well include having a respectful, equitable relationship with the child's mother (or co-parent), even if the parents no longer live together. Positive father involvement means interacting with children in loving and consistent ways, and taking an active role in looking after them to ensure that they are safe and their emotional, social, cognitive, and physical needs are addressed (Lamb et al., 1985; Pleck, 2010).

A systematic focus on positive fatherhood can be a significant leverage point in reducing vulnerability to domestic violence for both girls and boys, thereby challenging the notion of exclusive female vulnerability. Comprehensive fatherhood initiatives require a reconsideration of the gender dyad as they address boys as both the potential victims of abuse but also at risk for becoming perpetrators. Such measures can further decrease the risk for girls to become victims and abusers in adulthood. Examples of supporting positive father involvement include governments and organizations offering progressive parental leave

policies for men, replicating evidence-based fatherhood programs, creating father friendly organizations within both the private and social sector, social media campaigns to change norms and behaviours, and educational and networking programs to help fathers enhance their roles in the family. The Fatherhood Institute in the UK submits that shared parenting results in a greater overall satisfaction reported by both parents, an increased likelihood of family stability, and generally favourable developmental and social outcomes for children (2011).

CONCLUSION

This critique of the normative gender dyad permeating domestic violence discourse aims to broaden the work of feminist advocates rather than diminish it. An exclusive focus on women as victims and men as perpetrators of domestic violence serves to exclude boys and men as potential partners in domestic violence prevention efforts. Our understanding of vulnerability to violence and violence prevention must be broadened, all the while paying heed to the global reality of persistent and pervasive gender-based violence (DeKeseredy and Schwartz, 2011) and the disproportionate harm suffered by girls and women who are victims of domestic violence. The intersection of individuals' experiences of domestic violence as it relates to class, race, gender and sexual orientation, age, and ability must be a further critical consideration (Collins Hill, 2012; hooks, 2000; Misra, 2012). Initiatives developed to prevent and address violence need to acknowledge the socio-cultural and historical context of men and women's experiences in their communities (Casey et al., 2013), particularly in light of the impacts of racism, homophobia, and other forms of oppression (Mitchell, 2013; Ruxton & van der Gaag, 2013).

In addition, domestic violence cannot be solely conceptualized as a family or interpersonal problem; the structural inequities that reproduce this violence are intimately interconnected and both underpin and reinforce other forms of violence. Strategically tackling domestic violence from this perspective requires a multi-level systemic approach tailored for population groups across the lifecycle, with a simultaneous focus at varying social levels. While paying heed to gender effects, such approaches must include boys and men in domestic violence prevention efforts to create a society where domestic violence is no longer viewed as inevitable.

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