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Educating Men About Violence Against Women

Jeff Hearn

Over the last thirty years, feminist theory and practice have made major advances in bringing the problem of men's violence against women into public debate. This work has, not surprisingly, made its main priority the giving of support to women, the hearing of women's voices, the improvement of women's lives, and the development of ways of reducing men's violence. Interestingly, this period has also been one in which men and masculinities have been problematized. Much remains to be done, however, in spelling out the implications of feminist and critical studies on men in regard to analyzing the problem of men's violence against women, persuading men to abolish or at least reduce their violence against women, and educating men about violence against women. Educating and changing men against violence to women is necessary in reducing that violence, alongside and accountable to political, policy, and practical initiatives for women. In this essay I review some major arenas in which men, and boys, may be and have been educated about violence against women. Because of the limitations of space, I will not be directly addressing the education of boys and young men in families.

Self-Education and the Education of the Self: The Personal Is Political

The male self has a double significance in educating men about violence against women: men can educate themselves (self-education), and they can be educated by others. The most obvious place to begin educating men about violence against women is men's relationships with women. Indeed many women may be engaged in a shorter- or longer-term process of trying to educate men on how not to be violent, even though it is quite probable that this will not be defined as such by either party. This education may be having the man acknowledge and listen to the woman's experience, stop the violence (if relevant), and perhaps end the relationship and move away from her. This

sequence of events often entails changing living arrangements and relationships with others, one of the most fundamental and difficult areas for men to face, and one that, in a sense, underpins all the others addressed here.

Men in Groups: Educating Men for More or Less Violence

Much of men's information about how to be a man comes from being with other men in groups. Some studies of men who have been violent toward women emphasize the importance of men's support for one another in perpetuating this violence. For example, Walter DeKeseredy (1990) stressed the way "male peer support" reproduces men's violence by providing attachments and resources in the form of social integration, information, and esteem support. He also cites a number of studies that have found a strong relationship between the frequency of abusers' contacts with friends and female victimization. My own research has found that it is not so much the quantity but the quality of those social contacts that is important. The rare social antiviolence support from friends is likely to have an effect very different from the more common complicity. Furthermore, because many men prefer to keep their public and private lives separate, they regard their relationships with women as their private business. Consequently, they are usually unwilling to challenge other men's violence against women (Hearn 1998a).

This separation of the public and private spheres and changing men and educating men about men's violence against women have been addressed by profeminist, antisexist men (Hearn 1987, pp. 174–76). Although antisexist men's groups are an obvious place to educate men about violence, and such opposition to men's violence was present in antisexist men's politics in the 1970s and 1980s, education has not often been the central defining principle of action. "A minimum self-definition of the antisexist men's movement" produced at a national conference in Britain in 1980 (Morrison 1980) began with the following statement: "This conference of men places itself unequivocally in support of the women's and gay movement in the struggle against sexism." But the only specific mention of violence was "We would like to find ways of supporting women's movement campaigns and demands, when invited, and in developing the particular contribution we can make as men—for example, in confronting rape and male violence." Since then, some men in antisexist groups have gone on to political and practical interventions against men's violence toward women. Men's support for men, however, even in men's groups, needs to be

viewed with great caution, as men are apt to shift from more progressive, even profeminist, stances toward those that are ambiguous, even antifeminist.

Men's Programs: Specific Education Against Violence

During the 1980s, a further development in the education of men was the growth of group programs for men who were violent toward women. In North America, these included shelter adjunct programs, mental health programs, and self-help programs (Gondolf 1985) and were initiated by antisexist men and feminist women, as well as the criminal justice system. In the United Kingdom, most of the programs begun in the late 1980s and early 1990s were voluntary or only partly funded by outside sources. Now, though, the interest in court-mandated programs is increasing, with the offender's program attendance part of the court's sentence following his conviction.

The philosophy, theoretical orientation, and practical methods of these programs include psychoanalytic, cognitive-behavioral, systemic, and profeminist approaches (Dankwort 1992/93). The focus on education is clearest in the profeminist approaches, in which part of the task is to convince men of the inaccuracy and oppressiveness of their beliefs and actions, or what has been termed "profeminist resocialization" (Gondolf 1993). A clear example of the profeminist approach is the Duluth "Power and Control" model (Pence and Paymar 1990), in which all aspects of men's power and control over women—physical, sexual, economic, emotional, and so on—are confronted and, if possible, changed. The task of programs is to educate, challenge, and change the full range of men's behavior, and not only physical violence.

Some programs have a fixed length, say twenty-five weeks, whereas others, particularly voluntary or self-help programs, are more open-ended. Most of the programs have the men describe and analyze their actual violence, abuse, and controlling behavior and then help them move away from that power and control and toward more equal relationships. Specific techniques include cost-benefit analysis (of the gains and consequences of violent and abusive behavior), safety plans (strategies for avoiding violence and abuse), and control logs (diary records of attempts to control partners) (Gondolf 1993). Particular problems have been identified with those programs and groups that focus on anger control as the central element in their intervention (Gondolf and Russell 1986).

An evaluation of the effectiveness of two men's programs in Scotland working with a combination of cognitive-behavioral methods

and a profeminist "power and control" framework found relatively impressive results (Dobash et al. 1996). Importantly, this evaluation used women partners' assessment of men's behavior following intervention. Three months after the imposition of the criminal justice sanction (that is, a program or other punishment, for example, a fine), 20 percent of the men in the programs had committed another violent act, but 62 percent of the men given another punishment had done so. After a year, these figures were 33 and 75 percent, respectively. Even clearer differentiations appear in regard to the frequency of violence. After three months, none of the women whose partner was in the program reported five or more incidents of violence, whereas 16 percent of the women whose partner had been given another punishment did so. After a year, these figures were 7 and 37 percent. In the United States, Tolman and Bennett (1990) found that after six months, 60 percent of men who had completed programs had not been physically violent toward women.

Evaluating the different approaches of men's programs is more difficult, because the wide variation in philosophy and methods makes impossible a general rating of program interventions. Some men enter programs to rescue a relationship with a particular woman, with stopping or reducing their violence, perhaps only temporarily, the means to that end. A substantial number of men appear to reduce or stop their physical violence while in the group, but a few learn or increase their knowledge of the most harmful ways, physical or nonphysical, to hurt women. This points to the importance of incorporating feminist/profeminist perspectives into the programs' philosophy and practice (Dankwort 1992/93, Holmes and Lundy 1990) and of carefully selecting the programs' participants.

For my own studies of men who had been violent toward women they knew, men from three programs with quite different philosophies were interviewed. Most of the men made positive remarks about the program, with only one of the nineteen men dismissing this particular program as a "complete waste of time" (Hearn 1998a). But such responses are not in themselves evidence of success. As one of the women leaders of a program noted, "What I find with men in the group is that physical violence [to the woman] stops probably within the first week. They overcompensate then by increasing the verbal, emotional and psychological [violence], because they've nowhere to offload the tension you see. [Changing] [t]hat takes a long time." Moreover, the program groups themselves often involve complex dynamics in which men recognize their similarity to and difference from others' stories and behaviors and others' intentions to change or

not in the future (Hearn 1998a). The support of peers in men's programs is one way that some men change their behavior, through a process of mutual reeducation (Gondolf 1984, Saunders 1989). But Gondolf also argued that "those batterers in deep denial and resistance may be more likely to respond to the didactic confrontation of the feminist approach" (1989, p. xi).

Agency Policy Development: Educating Men Inside and Outside Agencies

The education of men also needs to be part of general policy development in government agencies and private-sector organizations, both the education of men who work in those agencies and organizations and that of men in the community by those agencies and organizations. Many men who are violent toward women have no or negligible contact with such agencies, and some men are unlikely to have much sustained contact with agencies unless they commit murder. Even attempted murder does not guarantee involvement with state agencies. Nonetheless, much of men's contact with agencies is result of their violence against women, but unfortunately this is usually not directly focused on stopping the violence. Although the problem may be mentioned in passing, other problems may be treated instead, or the violence may be dealt with periodically but not necessarily in a way that is likely to reduce or eliminate it.

Following research with Jalna Hanmer on women's and men's experiences of men's violence to known women (Hanmer 1996; Hearn 1995, 1996, 1998b), a series of policy and implementation seminars were organized to report to agency personnel the results of the research and to help develop policy (Hanmer et al. 1995). Part of this process was educating the men working in the agencies as managers, policymakers, and practitioners. The issues spanning particular agency responses to the problem of men's violence toward women are the following:

1. Educating men about what violence is. Most of the men we studied defined violence in limited ways. Violence is not only physical violence, nor is it only physical violence that is visibly damaging or leads to police intervention. Rather, it includes pushing, shoving, blocking, pinning, holding, and throwing—all forms of violence often excluded by men. It also encompasses sexual violence and abuse; violence toward and abuse of children and young people; violence toward older people; emotional, verbal, and psychological violence; the threat of violence; and the control of a woman's money, time, friends, and social

life. That is, it is what the woman experiences as violence—a sense of a situation's being out of control.

2. Making the problem the responsibility of the statutory sector. The statutory sector has to have the responsibility of dealing with the problem of men's violence to women whom they know, just as they do for child protection.

3. Producing clearly written general policy statements regarding men's violence toward known women.

4. Supplementing public campaigns against men's violence toward women by advertising and other media aids.

5. Changing the conditions that produce and sustain men's violence.

6. Connecting violence with other problems, such as racism, sexism, ageism, disablism, and heterosexism, in the development of agency and interagency responses.

7. Developing appropriate and detailed policies and practices.

8. Monitoring, maintaining, and improving policies and practices.

9. Working with men more specifically against violence. Agencies working with men who have been or who are likely to be violent toward women need to focus directly on the violence and work to stop it.

10. Focusing on issues of power, control, and responsibility when working with men.

11. Working with other agencies. Agencies that work with women who have experienced violence from men may help them decide on appropriate measures for men.

12. In agency and interagency work, making explicit that men's power over and violence toward women are unacceptable.

13. Addressing the need to change men working in agencies. The men who work in agencies must be able to work against men's violence to women. This means considering the position and power of men who work in agencies and their ability to do this kind of work, as well as reducing or stopping their own violence toward women. It is not possible, on the one hand, to work with men against *their* violence and, on the other, to behave in violent and abusive ways as men. Developing ways of managing that are nonoppressive, nonviolent, and nonabusive is a high priority (Hearn 1996, p. 113).

14. Dealing with ambiguous issues of men's support for men. Changing men who have been violent to women raises complex questions about men's support for other men.

15. Reaching out to men not in contact with agencies. For those many men not working with agencies in relation to their violence to women, outreach work is needed, bringing us full circle to educational and campaign work with men and boys (Hearn 1996).

Schools and Educational Institutions: Education in Educational Contexts

Schools and other educational institutions are obvious places to begin educating boys about violence against girls and women. As Jeffrey Edleson and Richard Tolman observed, "One of the most logical avenues to influencing future behavior is through contact with children and adolescents in the educational system" (1992, p. 109). This entails attempts both to create a nonviolent educational environment and to offer specific education about and against violence.

There have been increasing concerns with the operation of gender and sexual dynamics in schools, and how these may include violence, abuse, and harassment. To reduce violence by men, it is necessary to change the ways that boys are brought up and educated in schools and elsewhere (Askew and Ross 1988, Mahoney 1985, Whyld, Pickersgill, and Jackson 1990). Practical exercises for raising awareness of and challenging sexism are helpful, usually by drawing on boys' own experiences (Salisbury and Jackson 1996). Although not all need to focus directly on violence, such exercises should be designed to produce general changes in boys', and thus men's, behaviors that contribute to reducing violence. Similar approaches have been used in other institutional contexts; for example, David Potts (1996) described possible methods of "focusing on masculinity in a prison group."

The problem of bullying in schools has attracted a good deal of attention in recent years (Tattum and Lane 1993), with clear connections found between bullying and sexual harassment. Thus, antibullying polices and practices can be introduced into an educational environment in which men's violence against women is not tolerated. In some schools, particularly in the United States, there has been considerable interest in peer mediation as a means of resolving conflicts (Schrumpf 1994). Mediation, however, must be used with some caution as it can obscure social divisions, such as between gender or race, in the guise of equality (Quill et al. 1993). Two other important issues in creating a nonviolent educational environment are the abolition of corporal punishment and policy and practical responses to violence against the educational staff (Education Service Advisory Committee 1990).

Attempts to introduce education about men's violence against women into the curriculum range from the introduction of material on men's violence across an entire state to individual talks by representatives of women's shelters and criminal justice agencies. This may be part of education on peace, conflict resolution, and personal and social development or teaching on violence, gender equality, or equal opportunities. Edleson and Tolman (1992, pp. 109–10) reported on

several such initiatives. For example, the curriculum (see Levy 1984) developed for thirteen- to eighteen-year-olds jointly with the Southern California Coalition on Battered Women and the Junior League of Los Angeles covered four main areas: defining abuse; understanding myths and facts of domestic violence; comprehending the social and psychological contributors to abuse; and developing skills to provide alternatives to abuse, such as stress management, conflict resolution, and assertion skills. These were carried out through various brainstorming, discussion, role-playing, and experiential activities. There was no fixed number of sessions in the curriculum; rather, educators tailored the activities to the particular educational needs. "An evaluation comparing students in classes where the curriculum was delivered with those in classes where it was not delivered reveals that knowledge about woman abuse and community resources increased significantly. Student attitudes about male and female roles in intimate relationships did not, however, change significantly" (Edleson and Tolman 1992, p. 110).

Special attention needs to be given in sex education to links between sexuality and violence, because of both the generally sexualized nature of men's violence against women (MacKinnon 1983) and the increasing recognition that much sexual abuse of children and young people is committed by male youths and young adults. In addition, the schools are where those who have abused or are abusing and have been or are being abused may become apparent. Indeed all these possibilities in schools are equally relevant for the training and retraining of teachers and other educational personnel (Jones 1991).

Campaigns and Public Politics: Broad Education Against Violence

Men can be educated about violence against women through campaigns and public politics. Campaigns are usually, by definition, partly educational, and can be promoted by governmental and occasionally private-sector organizations and by voluntary effort. They may grow from men's antisexist, profeminist activities; they may accompany men's programs; or they may be sponsored by government agencies.

In Canada, for example, the White Ribbon Campaign organized in 1991 urged men to wear or display a white ribbon on the anniversary of the 1989 Montreal massacre. "Their idea was to create a symbol which any man could easily display and thereby begin to foster a climate in which violence against women would become increasingly unacceptable" (Luxton 1993, p. 362). There remains a need for large-scale state-funded advertising and postal campaigns (of the car safety-

belt type) that say simply and directly "Don't do it, don't think it." Such campaigns can be effective when governments and other powerful lobbies want them to be. Government agencies could begin by making part of their public policy their opposition to men's violence against women.

Beyond that, men's violence to women is itself linked to men's violence to each other, to the self (Kaufman 1987), and to children (Hearn 1990), and militarism and global violence (Strange 1983). Such connections are increasingly recognized on a global scale, not least through Council of Europe, EU, UNESCO, UN, and other international declarations, such as the UN Platform of Action from the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995.

Thinking and Acting in Spirals

All the initiatives discussed here are connected in what may be thought of as spirals. The education of the self connects with the education of men in relationships and in groups, which in turn connects with the education that may take place in organizations, such as men's programs, government agencies, or educational institutions; and this connects with the development of education through campaigns and public politics. Broader social change itself requires and suggests change of the self, the male self. Just as spirals of thought and action can become vicious circles of more and more violence, so too can they become virtuous circles against violence.

Finally, there is one further form of education that in some ways binds all these arenas together–namely, research, writing, and representation. These activities, including hopefully this article, are a means of educating men against violence to women. My own motivation for researching this problem has been to try to move from a generalized opposition to men's violence to women toward practical policy initiatives against such violence. This has involved finding out about how men describe, understand, and "explain" that violence, examining how to reduce and stop it, and thence how to develop policies and practices against violence. All other forms of media can be used to encourage or discourage violence, can educate for more or less violence. The representation of violence, particularly in written and visual media, is a fundamental feature of education for or against violence; and thus these debates are just as important in fictional writing, journalism, photography, film, video, television, computer representations, advertising, and other media as they are in academic research.

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