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Engaging Men and Boys in Gender Justice Through Pro-Feminist Podcasts: Potential Benefits, Challenges, and Risks

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Engaging Men and Boys in Gender Justice Through Pro-Feminist Podcasts: Potential Benefits, Challenges, and Risks

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Abstract

This article explores pro-feminist podcasting as an emergent approach to engaging men and boys in gender justice. In recent years, an increasing number of podcasts have surfaced which implicitly or explicitly espouse pro-feminist praxis. However, scholarship in this area remains underexamined. This article seeks to move the literature forward by 1) situating pro-feminist podcasting within the wider multi-disciplinary literatures on critical podcasting pedagogies; 2) sharing examples from the current landscape of English-language pro-feminist podcasts; and 3) discussing the potential benefits, challenges, and risks of this approach. In doing so, this article considers how pro-feminist podcasts have the potential to expand men's engagement efforts to wider audiences, provide new accessible entry points, and help facilitate ways to bring together and mobilise groups of pro-feminist men. However, there are several challenges and tensions involved in pro-feminist podcasting - as is the case with other forms of engaging men and pro-feminist allyship - which demonstrate that this work should be undertaken with care, ongoing reflexivity, and accountability. Overall, this article seeks to start a conversation about the potential of podcasting in the field of engaging men and boys and to draw attention to the need for further work and research in this area.

Keywords: pro-feminism, podcasts, engaging men and boys, men and masculinities, gender equality

Involucrarse a Hombres y Niños en la Justicia de Género a través de Podcasts Profeministas: Posibles Beneficios, Desafíos y Riesgo

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Resumen

Este artículo explora los podcasts profeministas como un enfoque emergente para involucrarse a hombres y niños en la justicia de género. En los últimos años, ha surgido un número cada vez mayor de podcasts que adoptan implícita o explícitamente la praxis profeminista. Sin embargo, la erudición en esta área sigue siendo poco examinada. Este artículo busca hacer avanzar la literatura al 1) situar el podcasting profeminista dentro de las literaturas multidisciplinares más amplias sobre las pedagogías críticas del podcasting; 2) compartir ejemplos del panorama actual de podcasts profeministas en inglés; y 3) discutir los posibles beneficios, desafíos y riesgos de este enfoque. Al hacerlo, este artículo considera cómo los podcasts profeministas tienen el potencial de expandir los esfuerzos de participación de los hombres a audiencias más amplias, proporcionar nuevos puntos de entrada accesibles y ayudar a facilitar formas de reunir y movilizar grupos de hombres profeministas. Sin embargo, existen varios desafíos y tensiones involucrados en el podcasting profeminista, como es el caso de otras formas de involucrarse a los hombres y la alianza profeminista, que demuestran que este trabajo debe realizarse con cuidado, reflexividad constante y responsabilidad. En general, este artículo busca iniciar una conversación sobre el potencial de los podcasts en el campo de involucrarse a hombres y niños y llamar la atención sobre la necesidad de más trabajo e investigación en esta área.

Palabras clave: profeminismo, podcasts, involucrarse a hombres y niños, hombres y masculinidades, igualdad de género

This article explores the potential of pro-feminist podcasts as a form of engaging men and boys in gender justice, otherwise referred to simply as ‘engaging men’. The growing field of engaging men includes diverse forms of activism, scholarship, and practice working to engage, educate, organize, and mobilize men and boys on issues including violence prevention, sexual and reproductive health and rights, fatherhood and care work, and health and wellbeing (Funk, 2018; Van Der Gaag, 2014). Not all engaging men work is explicitly pro-feminist. However, for this article we focus on efforts that align with what Flood (2019) outlines as the three core principles of engaging men. The work must be: 1) feminist: intended to transform gender inequalities; 2) committed to enhancing boys’ and men’s lives; and 3) intersectional: addressing diversities and inequalities among men. Research shows that some efforts at engaging men can support positive changes in men towards gender equality, for example, by shifting violence-supportive attitudes and behaviours (Foley et al. 2015; Jewkes et al., 2015). However, men’s direct and structural violence remains a severe and systemic problem around the world (WHO, 2021), and the empirical evidence on efforts to engage men is mixed overall (Flood, 2019). As a result, scholars and practitioners continue to advocate for more creative, impactful, and accountable approaches to working with men (Casey et al., 2013; Macomber, 2015; Pease, 2017; Westmarland et al., 2021). This article explores how podcasting, and in particular, pro-feminist approaches, might support such efforts.

Podcasts are an on-demand digital audio communication medium that has steadily increased in popularity around the world over the past decade.¹ Recent surveys indicate podcast listenership is growing around the world (YouGov, 2023) with upwards of 40% of the population listening to a podcast in the previous month in countries like the US (Pew Research Center, 2021). Research in the US also shows trends toward more active users with weekly podcast listenership nearly doubling in the past five years (Edison Research & Triton Digital, 2021). As the number of podcast shows, episodes, and listeners has grown, educators and activists have increasingly engaged with this digital medium. First, educators and researchers have explored podcast listening and creation as a means of learning and teaching in diverse education

settings (Drew, 2017; O'Connor et al., 2020; Pegrum et al., 2015), including as an innovative research methodology itself (Eringfeld, 2021). Second, activists working on issues of social justice have used this intimate audio medium to advance their causes (McHugh, 2017). At the nexus of these two areas lies the emergence of scholarship examining critical podcasting pedagogies and praxes. Of particular interest here is the ways in which scholars and practitioners have explored the 'feminist potential of podcasting' (Richardson & Green, 2018), and podcasts as a 'tool of resistance' (Tiffe & Hoffmann, 2017) within the ongoing, contested, and increasingly technologically situated 'new waves' of global feminist movements (Hoydis, 2020).

Building on these ideas, there appear to be an increasing number of podcasts available on English language podcasting platforms informed by pro-feminist approaches to engaging men (Flood, 2020). We ground this article in Mackay's (2015) definition of feminism as a social movement for women's liberation from men's dominance. We use the term pro-feminist to indicate efforts by and/or for boys and men to support feminism (see Messner et al., 2015, and Jansson & Kullberg, 2020, for a deeper examination of men's pro-feminism). We distinguish pro-feminist podcasts from both feminist podcasts which address different or broader issues beyond engaging men, and podcasts simply about men and masculinities but which lack a feminist analysis and approach. However, it is important to make clear that boys and men can, should, and do listen to feminist podcasts too. This article focuses on the specifics of pro-feminist podcasts in order to examine their potential as a complementary approach to engaging men - not as a replacement for a feminist foundation.

Yet, while we have noticed both more potential pro-feminist podcasts in our podcast feeds and more scholarship on podcasting emerging, academic literature in this specific area remains minimal. Further, surveys of podcasts users in the US (Edison Research & Triton Digital, 2021) indicate the medium is disproportionately used by men and by young people aged 12-34. This demographic overlaps with key gender and age groups for engaging men work and presents an opportunity to 'meet men where they are' (Flood, 2019). As the field of engaging men also continues to develop and expand, we believe that addressing this gap could illuminate generative insights and questions for

scholars and practitioners. To move the literature forward in this regard, the goals of this article are to: 1) situate pro-feminist podcasting within the multi-disciplinary literature on critical podcasting pedagogies; 2) share some examples from the current landscape of English-language pro-feminist podcasts; and 3) discuss potential benefits, challenges, and risks of this approach as a form of pro-feminist education and engagement.

Before moving forward, we feel it is important to share our own backgrounds and connections to the topic as authors, not least to acknowledge the limitations of our work here. Our interest in pro-feminist podcasting stems from our dual backgrounds as pro-feminist researchers and educators, and as radio journalists and podcasters ourselves. William is a peace and men's violence prevention educator and researcher and a former radio journalist and podcast host for a National Public Radio affiliate in the United States. Stephen is a sociology researcher focusing on men, masculinities and violence, and is involved in gender equality work and activism, including co-hosting a pro-feminist podcast called *Now and Men* since July 2021. This paper is therefore inevitably influenced by our own experiences; however, it is not solely about these - we have also sought to consider lessons from the literature and engaging men field more broadly.

Lastly, we do not seek to definitively define pro-feminist podcasting, to identify what 'good' examples sound like, or to claim to map all its current diverse manifestations. Rather, this article is an introduction to the digital media practice and a questioning of its potential to support feminist work with boys and men. This is also specifically constrained in scope by our focus on English language podcasting. It is important to note this limitation to our own work, and how the same limitation operates across the field of engaging men - disproportionately drawing attention and resources towards scholarship and praxis in Global North, Anglophone countries like the USA and UK (Boonzaier et al., 2021). Rather than define and declare what pro-feminist podcasting is or should be, we hope to use this article to start a conversation about the potential of podcasting in the field of engaging men and to draw attention to the need for further work and research in this area in diverse global contexts.

Podcasting and Critical Pedagogies

There is a growing body of literature on the use of podcasts in formal and informal learning contexts. Looking at podcasts in higher education, McGarr (2009) divides their use into three categories along a spectrum. First, podcasts can be substitutional. They offer students an audio copy of lectures or other course materials that may then be accessed on demand. Second, podcasts can be supplementary. They provide students with new learning materials. And third, podcasts can be creative. In this case, students can interact with and create their own podcasts as a way of applying and demonstrating their knowledge. Thus, podcasting pedagogies can include both teacher and student-created content and involve technology-enhanced mediums of instruction as well as new experiential pathways to learning.

Evidence on the effectiveness of podcasting pedagogies in improving learning engagement, accessibility, and retention is mixed (Abdous et al., 2012; Gachago et al., 2016). The operative word in podcasting education literature appears to be *potential*. Podcasting has the potential to enhance deep student-centred learning, but it can also be used to promote passive and teacher-centred learning (Pegrum et al., 2015). Scholars like Drew (2017) argue the debate over whether the benefits outweigh the challenges of podcasting in education remains unresolved in the empirical literature. As McGarr (2009) cautioned, the use of podcasting in education is most influenced not by its technological innovations, but by the creative ways it is situated within wider pedagogies. Accordingly, Drew (2017) calls for a move away from rigid ‘good practice’ templates and towards more responsive and contextualised podcast designs for education. To that end, we now turn our attention to how podcasting has been used with critical pedagogies before focusing on the specific potential benefits and challenges of pro-feminist podcasting.

Several scholars have examined the use of podcasting in critical pedagogical contexts as a new way to share knowledge with students, and an opportunity for students to create and disseminate their own critical perspectives. Bejtullahu et al. (2018) discuss how creative podcasting in peace and conflict studies opens up a collaborative learning process, a “mise-en-

scéence” of “creative choices and affects” to pedagogically enrich learning (p.1). Similarly optimistic on podcasting’s critical potential, Lewis et al. (2021) outline how what they call sociological podcasting “has the capacity to offer a small but effective intervention in support of radical, creative and informative knowledge production” by acting as a form of public sociology moving beyond the confines of the written word in ways that are more accessible, political, and uplifting (p. 95). Putting some of these ideas into classroom practice, Ferrer et al. (2020) conducted a study assessing the viability and impact of creative podcasting as a transformative learning technique to promote social justice practice for social work students. Findings show students “began to develop their professional and generalist social work identity, engaged in critical reflective practice, and made links between structural and experiential issues related to social policy and social justice” (p. 850).

Anti-racist scholarship has also explored podcasting outside of traditional classrooms - looking at the ways podcasts can increase access to critical information whilst operating as a “metaphorical curriculum for blackness” and as a counter-space where marginalized identities build community and resistance (Fox et al., 2020, p. 299). For example, Vrikki and Malik’s (2019) research with Black and Asian UK podcasters found podcasts offer emergent spaces for those at the margins “for voicing the self and community” (p. 285). In feminist scholarship on this topic, podcasting has been similarly written about as offering marginalized voices a tool for resistance (Tiffe & Hoffman, 2017) and for building intimate community and connection (Hoydis, 2020). Richardson and Green (2018) looked at a case study of podcasts as a digital learning opportunity that pushes feminist knowledge beyond the margins of the written word in university teaching and scholarship contexts. In doing so, they argue that particularly for women, “the sound of our voices opens sites of resistance, communication, collaboration, and critique” (p. 289).

However, the scholars cited here also make clear that critical podcasting is not a feminist utopia (Tiffe & Hoffman, 2017) and podcasts are very much “part of a history of media-making linked to historical and ongoing systems of oppression.” (Vrikki & Malkik, 2019, p. 286). For example, Richardson and Green (2018) caution that the digital context of podcasting brings the practice into proximity with the abundance of violent patriarchal virtual

communities targeting harassment towards women and gender minorities online. Further, there are questions about who is excluded from this digital medium, which is predominantly recorded in the English language, often lacking written transcripts for those in the Deaf community, and which assumes audiences have reliable and sustained online access (Richardson & Green, 2018; Lewis et al., 2021). While scholars like Lewis et al. (2021) remain unambiguously hopeful in podcasting's potential as a catalyst and convener for social change, they also caution that it should be a complement, not a substitute or shortcut, for this. They write that podcasting's "work of contesting local and global inequalities cannot be positioned as something which replaces, or is as radical as, activism or direct action against those in power." (Lewis et al., 2021, p. 97).

Our review of podcasting literature reveals multiple ways this emergent digital media has been used to promote learning in traditional and non-traditional learning contexts, and that the current empirical scholarship in this area shows mixed evidence overall. This review has also shown how critical scholars in fields ranging from Peace and Conflict Studies, to Sociology, to Gender and Critical Race Studies have explored podcasting as an intimate and creative way to effectively and affectively engage learners, amplify voices, and build communities of resistance for marginalised groups. However, it is also clear that such work comes with challenges and risks. This article now seeks to explore the potential of podcasting in the complementary field of pro-feminism.

Pro-Feminist Podcast Landscape

In this section we introduce the pro-feminist podcasting landscape within the wider context of podcasts about men and masculinities. In May 2022, we reviewed three of the most popular English language podcast platforms, Apple Podcasts, Spotify, and Google Podcasts, using relevant keyword searches (e.g., men, masculinity, masculinities, manhood, men and feminism, pro-feminism). Additionally, we reviewed a curated list of podcasts about men and masculinities on the pro-feminist website, XYonline (Flood, 2020). However, this is not a systematic review representative of all current podcasts in this area. The purpose of this review is to show some of the diverse array

of podcasts about men and masculinities, with specific focus on examples which might be considered pro-feminist.

Searches on major platforms for podcasts about men and masculinities produced large volumes of results – many of which explicitly or implicitly did not appear to align with or focus on pro-feminist ideas and approaches relevant to engaging men. Some of the more general podcasts focused on men and masculinities in more individualised, depoliticised or psychologised ways, and mirrored the categories Lingard and Douglas (1999) used to describe men’s responses to feminism: as anti-feminist, men’s rights activism, masculinity therapy/mythopoetic, and pro-feminist. While a deeper examination of all anti- and non-feminist podcasts on men and masculinities is beyond the scope of our work here, it is important to note their proliferation in the digital media space. Further research is needed to examine these approaches within the context of rising gendered violence online and the increasingly digitized backlash to feminism (Ging, 2019).

Our focus in this article is on podcasts from our searches which directly or indirectly engaged with pro-feminist ideas. While there is no exact formula or template for what constitutes pro-feminism within a podcast, we sought out examples which explicitly included feminist or pro-feminist language in their descriptions or that included episodes which explored ideas such as promoting gender equality with men, critical examinations of men’s violence and privileges, the connections between masculinities and violence, intersectional understandings of masculinities, the impact of patriarchy and structural violence, and various forms of alternative masculinities such as ‘healthy’ or ‘non-violent’ masculinities. Our searches reveal what appears to be a growing number of podcasts covering these areas. Flood’s (2020) XYonline list alone includes over 30 examples of podcasts which engage these subjects to varying degrees.

Within the pro-feminist podcasts we found and listened to there are two main categories. First, there were podcast series which specialised solely on pro-feminist explorations of men and masculinity. Some of these focused on a specific context, group, or target audience. For example, *What’s A Man* addresses masculinities and feminism in the Indian context and discusses “power and love in different aspects of men’s lives in homes, schools, and offices”. *Let’s Talk Bruh* examines new visions of Black masculinities in the

US, with conversations about issues including mental health, Black male privilege, vulnerability, Black women's experiences of patriarchy, friendship, sex, and more. The Canada-based *Breaking the Boy Code* specifically examines the inner lives of boys, with each episode based around a boy describing a single experience, "interwoven with the perspectives of experts and leaders in progressive masculinity".²

Others focus broadly on issues around engaging men. One of the most well-known examples of this is *The Man Enough Podcast*, which is hosted by US pro-feminist actor and director Justin Baldoni, author and journalist Liz Plank, and musician and producer Jamey Heath. It releases new episodes once per week, often involving conversations with celebrity guests "about what we need to do to change our minds and actions to create a more connected, just world", and even has corporate sponsorship. Another example is *Remaking Manhood: The Healthy Masculinity Podcast*, again based in the US, which states that in "every episode you'll hear honest conversations designed to show you what breaking out of the man box can look like and feel like". Both podcasts are built upon books authored by their respective hosts: 'Man Enough' by Justin Baldoni, and 'Remaking Manhood' by Mark Greene. *Now and Men*, the monthly UK-based podcast co-hosted by one of the authors of this article, explores "how feminist issues are relevant to men" by interviewing experts including scholars, practitioners, and activists. Similar to the two aforementioned podcasts, it discusses a range of topics including men's violence against women, fatherhood, men's health, militarism, environmentalism and work with men and boys.

None of these podcasts necessarily *emphasise* that they are pro-feminist, but this is nonetheless relatively clear to discern given their extensive discussion of issues such as gender equality, male privilege, men's violence, and changing masculinities. By focusing predominantly on feminist issues and perspectives, podcasts such as these can offer a deeper and more expansive exploration of these topics for audiences who are invested in learning more. It is also notable that all of these examples were initiated in 2021, apart from *Let's Talk Bruh* and *Breaking the Boy Code*, which have been running since 2018.

The second category of pro-feminist podcasts we found consists of single episodes engaging with this subject matter as part of more general interest

series. Podcasts ranging from *TED Radio Hour*, *Fresh Air*, *Hidden Brain*, *Football Weekly*, and *Big Ideas* have all produced episodes or multi-part limited series that explore men and masculinities in ways that align (perhaps more implicitly) with pro-feminist approaches. Some shows in this category are distributed by large media companies including The Guardian, National Public Radio (NPR), and the Australia Broadcast Corporation. As one example, *TED Radio Hour* produced a podcast episode entitled “Gender, Power, and Fairness”, which discussed the #MeToo movement, everyday sexism, and engaging men in gender violence prevention. This single episode with pro-feminist content was not only distributed as a podcast by its production companies, TED and NPR, to their large podcast audiences, but it was also played on the over 600 radio stations in the USA and internationally through the show’s distribution network (NPR, 2019). Single or multi-part pro-feminist-oriented podcast episodes embedded within larger general audience shows have less time to explore a wide array of issues like the specialised shows in the former category. However, this approach has the potential to reach much larger audiences and expand the pro-feminist conversation to those who might not seek it out directly.

Our limited review of podcasts about men and masculinities has shown a broad audio landscape, a considerable amount of which does not align with pro-feminist approaches to engaging men. However, there do appear to be several podcasts that explicitly and implicitly align with pro-feminist ideas; some built around entire shows and others a single episode within more general interest podcasts. With this broad overview in mind, we now turn to consider the potential benefits, challenges, and risks of podcasting as a way of engaging men.

Possible Benefits, Challenges, and Risks of Pro-Feminist Podcasting

Benefits

Podcasting presents multiple opportunities for engaging men. First of all, in terms of expanding that engagement. Gender equality work with men and boys is often under-resourced and only able to reach relatively small numbers compared to the scale of the problems it seeks to address. Podcasts can communicate with much wider populations, so have the potential to be used

to engage with broader groups of men and boys about issues of feminism, violence and masculinity who might not have opportunities to learn about them elsewhere. They can provide a valuable entry point to discussions about gender equality from which men and boys can explore further. This might be the case for individuals encountering a show independently on their podcast application, through social media or word of mouth, or it could apply to groups of men and boys encouraged to listen by someone in their lives such as a teacher, youth worker, coach, colleague, or friend.

That said, as alluded to earlier, on its own listening to podcasts may offer a relatively superficial, passive form of engagement, rather than the kind of ongoing, reciprocal dialogue and reflection which is likely to bring about meaningful change (Pegrum et al., 2014). However, their conversational format can provide a proxy for this at least, and their intimate dynamics, in which listeners are encouraged to develop an attachment to the hosts, may make them more relatable and impactful than other media formats (Hoydis, 2020). In addition, podcasts can provide a tool to augment and deepen education men and boys may already be receiving about gender equality. For instance, within work with men and boys, they can be shared with participants as a way of furthering understandings outside of organised activities. This can be valuable given that podcasts allow space for in-depth exploration of different issues, especially if only limited time is available for face-to-face engagement work. Participants could be encouraged to listen to specific episodes before or after workshops, for instance – or to create their own as an exercise. They can also be utilised similarly as a pedagogical tool within educational programmes about men and masculinities in universities, schools or colleges, as noted earlier, in substitutional, supplementary, or creative ways (McGarr, 2009).

Podcasts can also be beneficial on a more informal basis, for individual men seeking to advance their learning, or in community contexts, such as anti-sexist men's groups, where they can provide the basis for collective discussion and exploration. They have the potential to facilitate new spaces for engagement too, especially online and on social media platforms. Podcasts allow for relatively high levels of audience participation with hosts and other audience members and offer opportunities to foster virtual communities built around the issues the podcast focuses on. They can thus provide an organic or

facilitated way to bring together and mobilise groups of pro-feminist men and build networks in the field. Podcasts therefore have exciting potential as a mode of pro-feminist activism, offering a valuable tool for raising awareness of specific social issues and supporting feminist political actions – perhaps especially if traditional media is failing to give adequate attention to them (Tiffe & Hoffman, 2017). These insights are key because as hooks (2003) argues, the mass media all too often amplifies anti-feminist backlash and acts as an agent of patriarchal socialisation.

We contend that pro-feminist podcasts have the potential to contribute to transgressive cultural counterweights that highlight alternative – more egalitarian – forms of masculinities that challenge these dominant cultural norms. Such alternative portrayals of masculinities are vital to engaging men in feminism (hooks, 2004). Taliep et al.'s (2017) meta-synthesis of 12 engaging men programs and 23 studies concludes, 'the promotion of positive forms of masculinity as an interpersonal violence prevention strategy is a much-needed, relatively untapped approach' (p. 2). While podcasts are by no means the only or most powerful means of advancing more plural, intersectional, and feminist depictions of masculinities, the recent growth of this digital medium and the potential benefits outlined above warrant further attention from engaging men practitioners and scholars alike.

Challenges

There are also a number of challenges posed by pro-feminist podcasting. Perhaps the biggest of all is how to actually get men and boys to listen, akin to the obstacle faced by work with men and boys of getting them 'in the room' (Casey et al., 2017). This is a problem faced by any podcast, given the wealth of media content now available online which people only have a limited amount of time to listen to. However, it is perhaps particularly acute for pro-feminist podcasts – especially those seeking to reach a wider audience new to the issues – given that men can often be reluctant and resistant to openly engaging in potentially challenging and uncomfortable conversations about gender (Pleasants, 2011). This is one reason why individual episodes within wider non-related series can be particularly valuable entry points for those who might not otherwise seek out a podcast on this topic.

It also makes it important for podcasts to decide on the audience they are realistically seeking and able to appeal to, to increase the chances that they will successfully engage listeners. Targeting the podcast at men and boys in general may have relatively little impact, given the huge range of interests and experiences among them. Podcasts specifically aimed at men already involved in pro-feminism can be valuable for instance, in building a sense of community and deepening their understandings as already discussed. That said, targeting a podcast at such a specific group also comes with limitations, given that it involves relatively small numbers of men, and may assume a level of prior knowledge and experience which could alienate listeners newer to the field. Furthermore, such a focus would potentially only ‘preach to the converted’. Indeed, this may be a limitation of pro-feminist podcasts more broadly, that most people choosing to listen to them are likely to already be supportive of gender equality. Given that podcasts need to be sought out, they can contribute to deeper political polarisation in society, in which people only listen to voices and views which they already agree with. So, there are balances to be struck in appealing to different audiences – and particular challenges around gaining the attention of men and boys unfamiliar with feminist ideas. In addition, it is important to recognise that many women are involved in work and research around men and masculinities too, so it should not be assumed that podcasts on these issues will only be of interest to men and boys.

Another challenge is finding the resources to run a pro-feminist podcast sustainably in the long-term. One major benefit to podcasts is that they can be developed and run by a small number of people on a ‘DIY’ basis, with relatively little technological know-how. They also require comparatively few resources – indeed, they are an important example of how technology and the internet have enabled a degree of democratisation of media production (Vrikki & Malik, 2019). Yet they are not resource-free – especially if run in a relatively professionalised way. Many aspects of podcasting do require some degree of investment, such as audio and IT equipment, recording software, hosting, and marketing. There are free options for many of these components but they are often more limited. This points to an immediate potential inequality in podcast production; those individuals, organisations and areas of

work with more resources will find it easier to create and sustain high-quality podcasts.

Another crucial resource is time; podcasts can be time-consuming to set up and run. It can thus be a challenge to find opportunities to record and release new episodes on a regular and consistent basis. This will be a particular issue for small podcast teams, and for people involved in gender equality work who may already have multiple other commitments. There is a risk that much effort can be placed in setting up a podcast, but that it dissipates over time as its producers struggle to sustain it in the longer-term. One way of dealing with this is being realistic in what can be achieved, and releasing new episodes less often for example, but there is a balance to be struck here with retaining and building a fanbase through regular outputs of new content.

A further challenge is ensuring that pro-feminist podcasts are of a good and relatively professional quality. There is a technical element to this, such as ensuring that audio output is of a high standard. This can make a considerable difference in whether people choose to keep listening, and may be challenging for individuals without training or experience in sound engineering. Significant effort is also required to ensure that the content is of a good quality; for example, that it is engaging, interesting and informative, and goes into sufficient depth to be educative without being off-puttingly lengthy. Podcasts are limitless in their potential length, but it is also important to be as concise as possible, especially when seeking to appeal to new listeners. Similarly, there is a balance to be found (depending on the target audience) between ensuring that content is accessible for a wider listenership, without overly simplifying the issues being discussed. All these challenges require serious thought and preparation to ensure they are successfully addressed, perhaps especially for pro-feminist podcasting where contentious and sensitive issues which require careful treatment will be regularly discussed. Even how the podcast is branded and marketed is important to consider, as this can play an important role in attracting an audience.

Risks

It is also important to acknowledge that there are risks attached to pro-feminist podcasting, akin to those faced by the engaging men field more broadly. These are based around the fundamental question of the extent to which work by and with men and boys, and about men and masculinities, can be defined as pro-feminist – and the contradictions imbued in such work, since it revolves around men deconstructing their own power and privilege (Burrell, 2018).

When it comes to podcasting, it is not enough to simply label a show ‘pro-feminist’ – pro-feminist values should be embedded within the different elements of the podcast. For instance, its content could focus on and bring attention to feminist issues, and seek to share feminist analyses and insights with its audience. However, this goes beyond content, too – the ways in which a podcast is run also connects to pro-feminism. For instance, who appears on the show, how conversations are conducted, how the audience is interacted with, and how it is promoted. Indeed, a podcast might deliberately *not* be labelled as pro-feminist – out of concerns that this might unnecessarily deter some listeners if seeking to engage a wider audience of men, for instance – but still put pro-feminism into practice with its content and approach. However, there is also a danger that podcasts about men and masculinities could present themselves in progressive ways, whilst in practice (intentionally or not) furthering anti-feminist agendas, for example in terms of the themes they focus on or the guests they invite (e.g., if these lean more in men’s rights, purely therapeutic, or mythopoetic directions), demonstrating benefits to a clearly distinguished, explicit pro-feminist approach.

There is also a risk that pro-feminist podcasts may fail to ‘practice what they preach’, and that gender inequalities re-surface as they can within other aspects of work with men (Macomber, 2015; Pease, 2017). For instance, podcasting about masculinities can lead to a re-centring of men, and in the process risk marginalising women’s voices and leadership, or presenting men as the primary ‘victims’ of patriarchy (McCarr, 2007). It could contribute to what van Huis and Leek (2020) describe as a ‘men-streaming’ of gender equality, in which attempts to involve men in the conversation can lead to women and their oppression being pushed out of it. Given that hosts play a significant role in podcasts, with particular attention placed on them, there is a risk that this could further the ‘rock-star’ status (Westmarland et al., 2015)

and ‘pedestal effect’ (Messner et al., 2015) pro-feminist men can receive, in which they are disproportionately lauded whilst women continue the hard work of day-to-day feminist activism with little acclaim. Unlike forms of critical podcasting focused on elevating marginalised voices, a potential pitfall of pro-feminist podcasts is that, by being based around allyship, they may involve giving a privileged group a(nother) platform from which to speak, and reinforcing rather than challenging that privilege. If a podcast gradually becomes more popular over time, the individuals involved in it change, or it attempts to reach a larger audience, then its investments in feminism could also become diluted.

This highlights the need for men taking up pro-feminist podcasting to critically reflect on their motivations for doing so - and how they can practice genuine allyship in the process. Vital in this regard, as with other aspects of engaging men, is accountability – to women and to feminism (Burrell & Flood, 2019). This could involve a range of practices in relation to podcasting. It could mean meaningfully including women in the hosting and running of the podcast itself, in addition to having them as regular guests. It could involve actively seeking out honest feedback from feminist women who have listened to the podcast. It could include consulting and collaborating with feminist groups and activists in the development of the show. At the same time, it is important to avoid simply placing more labour on women’s shoulders, so such feedback should not be an expectation, and be properly recompensed wherever possible (Pease, 2017). Ongoing critical self-reflection, and seeking out feedback from other pro-feminist men, are therefore also valuable in this regard (Westmarland et al., 2021).

It is similarly important to take account of how to practice intersectionality with pro-feminist podcasting. This includes ensuring that a wide and representative range of voices and experiences are reflected in podcast content and who is invited to appear on the show. Podcasting surely has even fewer excuses than traditional media for a lack of diversity in guests, given the relatively limitless boundaries of who can participate in features like remote interviews. Pro-feminist podcasts have a particular responsibility to seek out and give platforms to people and experiences which are marginalised more broadly in society. But there are deeper questions about the power relations of podcasting, too. Given the aforementioned issues around resources, it is

important to consider who is able to set up podcasts in the first place, and whose voices and shows are being supported, funded, and given attention. There are risks, for instance, of reproducing neo-colonial power dynamics within pro-feminist podcasting, given the ascendancy of the English language in online media, and the dominance of Global North institutions in arenas such as academia and civil society (Casey et al., 2013; Lewis et al., 2021). A longstanding problem facing masculinities scholarship has been the dominance of the field by a small group of white men in the Global North (Bridges, 2021), so it is vital to ensure that this is not perpetuated within pro-feminist podcasting.

Conclusion

There are clearly a number of possible tensions, contradictions and struggles involved in pro-feminist podcasting – as is the case with other forms of engaging men and pro-feminist allyship – which demonstrate that this is not something to be entered into lightly, and should be undertaken with care, ongoing reflexivity, and accountability. It can involve a continuous dilemma of how to critically highlight issues of masculinity, and provide feminist-informed examples of men defying masculine norms, without further centring men's positions, voices and experiences in the spotlight.

This does not mean that pro-feminist podcasting should not be pursued – quite the contrary. It has the potential to make a valuable contribution, building on wider feminist podcasting efforts, to engaging with more men about gender equality and ending violence. In fostering critical reflection about masculinity issues, it can have a positive impact on the lives of men and boys and the people around them, and expand their understanding of gendered power relations. It is important not to exaggerate the transformative effects that podcasts can have; they may typically serve as a useful supplement to work with men and boys and critical pedagogy on men and masculinities, rather than being an engine of that work. But they represent an important tool in the inventory of pro-feminist practitioners, advocates and scholars to communicate their analyses and insights, with one another and with wider groups of men and boys. Indeed, it is arguably urgent that more pro-feminists do engage with this increasingly popular and influential medium, whether it's as listeners, guests, creators of new podcasts, or integrating pro-feminist

content into existing podcast series on varied subject matter. This is especially important given the growing deluge of masculinist, anti-feminist, misogynistic material across the internet, including in the podcast sphere, and the relative lack of content critically questioning this, especially aimed at men and boys. It is arguably the case that anti-feminist groups have more effectively used online media to garner public support among men than pro-feminists have to date (Westmarland et al., 2021), so this is an ever more important domain in which to engage with men about the roles they can play in equality, peace, and mutual care.

Notes

¹ While some definitions of podcasts include video and other mediums, our use of the term here is associated with the more commonly used audio podcasts.

² Quotes used to describe several of the podcasts in this section were taken directly from their descriptions on the Apple Podcasts platform.

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