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Which Feminism? Dilemmas in Profeminist Men's Praxis to End Violence Against Women

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Abstract
Much of the work to engage men in preventing violence against women across the globe is profeminist—it is informed by feminist perspectives and done by or in collaboration with women and women's organisations. Men involved in this work typically are expected to support feminism and to be accountable to women and feminism. But which feminism should profeminist men support? There has been relatively little discussion of this question in the 'engaging men' field. Yet, organisations and individuals involved in undertaking this work, whether it is delivered by or with men, adopt a range of different approaches and the significant diversity of thought within feminist activism is also reflected to some extent within the engaging men field. This can make accountability more challenging, because it means asking: to whom specifically should profeminist men be accountable? The relationship between feminism and the theories and strategies adopted by organisations and activists in this field is often left implicit or vague, and there can be a lack of clarity or transparency about the nature of the feminist social change that such groups seek to help bring about. The paper therefore contributes to the articulation of how profeminist men should understand their relationship to feminism, and considers how they can make choices about which feminism to adopt. It argues that, by discussing more explicitly the different interpretations of feminism shaping the engaging men field, this work will be better equipped to tackle men's violence against women through more open, rigorous and profoundly profeminist praxis.

Keywords Engaging men and boys · Violence prevention · Feminism and profeminism · Men's violence against women · Gender inequalities

Introduction

If efforts to engage men and boys in preventing men's violence against women are feminist, then *which* feminism does this represent? This article explores how to assess the extent to which efforts in the 'engaging men' field are feminist, and the kinds of feminism they embody. The fact of diverse and indeed incompatible feminist theories raises important conceptual and political challenges for profeminist men's praxis in anti-violence work. The article identifies four important factors which can help to answer the question of which feminism should be adopted within such efforts, and considers ways in which profeminist male advocates can effectively and constructively negotiate debates within feminism.

Much of the work to engage men in preventing violence against women across the globe is (pro) feminist—it is informed by feminist perspectives and carried out by or in collaboration with women and women's organisations. Men involved in this work typically are expected to support feminism and to be accountable to feminist women. Yet, there has been relatively little discussion of the question of *which* feminism profeminist men should support within the engaging men field. Such work is often perceived to be relatively homogenous, yet organisations and advocates involved in engaging men adopt a range of different theoretical and strategic approaches, and the significant diversity of thought within feminist activism is also reflected to some extent within this field (Storer et al. 2016).

This can make the key practice of accountability more challenging, because it means asking: to whom should profeminist men be accountable? The relationship between feminism and the theories and strategies adopted by violence prevention organisations and advocates is often left implicit or vague. There

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can be a lack of clarity or transparency about the nature of the feminist social change that such groups seek to help bring about. This article therefore contributes to the articulation of how profeminist men should understand their relationship to feminism, and considers the feminisms that they should adopt. By discussing more explicitly the different interpretations of feminism shaping the engaging men field, we will be better equipped to tackle men's violence against women through more robust, transparent and profoundly profeminist praxis.

The article provides an assessment of the field, based upon the authors' empirical experiences and observations of work with men and boys to prevent violence against women in Britain, Australia and internationally. It is not based on a systematic empirical analysis of the field as a whole internationally or in a specific locale, so in this sense represents a conceptual assessment. The article begins with an appraisal of how feminist such efforts can be seen as being, before considering which kinds of feminisms are manifested within it. It then asks on what basis profeminist men involved in the prevention of violence against women can make a choice between which feminist theories they should seek to follow. Finally, it explores some of the issues and dilemmas of praxis that are associated with making such a choice. Rather than seeking to provide a direct answer to the "Which feminism?" question then, it aims to provide tools which can help profeminist men to arrive at answers to that question themselves—and to show why it is an important question to ask in the first place.

In describing work to engage men and boys in the prevention or reduction of men's violence against women, we use such shorthand terms as the engaging men field and 'work with men'. Whilst such terms also can be applied to efforts to involve men in gender-related change focused on *other* domains, including sexual and reproductive health, fathering and education, they are not included in our discussion here. The engaging men field here includes male activists, men-focused organisations and other organisations which work with men as part of their violence prevention activities. Note therefore that efforts by and with men to prevent violence against women exist on a continuum, from those in which men themselves are the agents of change (e.g. as activists and educators) to those in which men are the objects or targets of change (as participants in education, the audiences of lobbying efforts and so on). At different times in the article we discuss issues which specifically affect either organisations or individual advocates (who may or may not be involved as members of organisations) working in the field, or which sometimes affect both.

How Feminist Is the Field?

First, we will consider the extent to which the engaging men field can actually be seen as feminist, and what kinds of feminism it represents. On a simple assessment, certainly it seems that efforts underway around the world to engage men in the prevention of men's violence against women typically are feminist. Such efforts are intended to achieve feminist aims, are grounded in feminist perspectives and are practiced by or in collaboration with feminist activists and organisations.

First, this work with men embodies a goal which is quintessentially feminist: to end men's violence against women, perhaps the bluntest expression of patriarchy or systemic gender inequality. For example, feminist and women's rights organisations increasingly have worked to involve men in violence prevention efforts because of a recognition that violence perpetration will only lessen with positive changes in men's attitudes and practices, their peer relations and the social and structural relations in which they participate (Flood 2015). Second, feminist perspectives are the anchor for much of this work. Much of the work engaging men in violence prevention is based on well-established feminist understandings: gender inequalities are at the root of violence against women, domestic and sexual violence are legitimated and normalised by sexist social and cultural norms, perpetrators of violence must be held accountable for their actions and so on (Jewkes et al. 2015a). Feminist notions of how to *conduct* this work also are common: men involved in violence prevention advocacy should address their own sexist behaviour, patterns of interaction and decision-making should be gender-equitable and work with men should be accountable to women (Messner et al. 2015). Amongst men involved in efforts to prevent violence against women and girls, there is widespread recognition of the challenges of negotiating male privilege (Casey et al. 2013). Third, much of the work is carried out by, or with, women's rights organisations, as global data suggests (Kimball et al. 2013).

Men-focused violence prevention efforts come in part out of a longer history of profeminist men's activism. Men have mobilised collectively at various points in support of women's struggles for gender equality, including at least as far back as the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in efforts to achieve women's suffrage (Messner et al. 2015). More recently, anti-sexist or profeminist men's groups emerged in the 1970s in countries such as the USA, Australia, the United Kingdom, and elsewhere in the wake of the second wave of feminism (Ashe 2007; Flood 2005). The contemporary engaging men field includes collective mobilisations amongst men, most notably the international White Ribbon Campaign (Ashe 2007). Again, this work typically is inspired by feminism.

Whilst the field of work engaging men in preventing violence against women can therefore be seen as feminist in some simple sense, what does a more systematic analysis suggest? There are several different ways in which we can appraise the different positions and approaches that organisations and advocates take.

One method is to assess the *extent* to which particular efforts or approaches are feminist. The most widely used example of this is Gupta's (2000) influential typology of how different health interventions interact with gender. Gupta offered a continuum, from least desirable to most desirable approaches: gender-unequal (perpetuate gender inequalities), gender-blind (ignore gender norms and conditions), gender-sensitive (acknowledge but do not address gender inequalities), gender-specific (acknowledge gender norms and consider women's and men's specific needs), gender-transformative (create more gender-equitable relationships), and gender-empowering (empower women or free women and men from the impact of destructive gender and sexual norms). This typology now has been taken up in guidance for and assessments of the engaging men field. For example, in an influential 2010 guide for engaging men Gupta's categories were adapted into a four-category programming continuum: gender-exploitative, gender-neutral, gender-sensitive, and gender-transformative (UNFPA and Promundo 2010).

Whilst Gupta does not describe a gender-transformative approach as feminist (and the term does not appear in her 2000 plenary address), that is what it is: it seeks to end gender inequalities and create more gender-equitable relations (Gupta 2000). To gauge how feminist the engaging men field is, therefore, one approach is to hold it up against a gender-transformative standard. This is precisely what a number of subsequent examinations do. A World Health Organisation review examines health interventions aimed at men against a gender-transformative standard (Barker et al. 2007). Dworkin and colleagues assess gender-transformative interventions with heterosexually active men as they impact four sets of outcomes: HIV/STI outcomes, violence perpetration, sexual risk behaviour, and norms and attitudes related to gender equity (Dworkin et al. 2013). Fleming and colleagues appraise health promotion efforts aimed at men against a gender-transformative standard (Fleming et al. 2014). Casey et al. (2016) assess to what extent a gender-transformative approach (defined by an explicit focus at least in part on a critical examination of gender-related norms and expectations—particularly those related to masculinity—and on increasing gender-equitable attitudes and behaviours) characterises the engaging men field, across the three domains of initial outreach and recruitment, interventions and social action.

In fact, 'gender-transformative' is rapidly emerging as an ideal for work with men, as this approach to engaging men in change is said to be more effective than other approaches. The 2007 WHO review emphasised that gender-transformative programmes were more effective than gender-neutral programmes at improving a variety of health outcomes, and this was also supported in a more recent review (Dworkin et al. 2013).

Whilst the gender-transformative ideal is influential, it remains a relatively weak model at this stage. It is underdeveloped in terms of what it requires of the field, and its usage is somewhat vague, varying from influencing gender norms to building more gender-equitable interpersonal relationships (Dworkin et al. 2013). Some other assessments of men's anti-violence work have used much more demanding and elaborate criteria for what counts as desirable support for feminism, of which two are described here. In an assessment of a men's anti-violence network in Indonesia, Hasyim (2014) compares it to feminist criteria for its (a) ideology, (b) organisational structure and practices and (c) positive impact on the prevention of violence against women. Feminist ideology, for example, is demonstrated by the presence of the beliefs that patriarchy plays an important role in shaping the notion and practices of gender, that the root cause of violence against women is the unequal power relations between men and women produced by patriarchy and that men must be held responsible for their use of violence. Feminist organisational structures and practices are demonstrated by collegial rather than hierarchical organisation, the presence of accountability mechanisms to women's networks and the use of strategies addressing both the personal and structural dimensions of violence against women. Whilst there will certainly be debate over the specific elements said to be defining or constitutive of feminism in Hasyim's framework, it nevertheless is notable for setting a clear and high bar for what counts as feminist work.

Another assessment framework is more focused on the capacity of organisations working with men to engage them effectively, but includes some assessment of the extent to which this work is feminist. Profeminist activist Rus Funk has developed assessment tools including a measure of "Organizational Readiness to Engage Men in Violence Prevention", which examines the extent to which an organisation is prepared to engage men effectively, based on its organisational structures and practices, professional development, programming and community engagement work (Funk 2017). The measure includes the expectation of a feminist analysis of gendered violence. Another measure of organisational readiness, the "Engaging Men Capacity Assessment for Member Partners" (EM-CAMP) developed by the Delaware Men's Education Network (2016), includes assessment of the degree to which the work in question adheres to key principles of effective efforts in prevention and engaging men, but does not specify any explicitly feminist criteria.

What Kind of Feminism?

So far we have considered the question "*How* feminist is the engaging men field?" A different kind of question, however, is, "*What kind* of feminism does the engaging men field adopt?" The approaches described thus far seem to treat

feminism as a continuum, such that something can be 'more' or 'less' feminist. However, feminism is diverse, and one could more properly speak in the plural, of *feminisms*. Indeed, there are multiple, incommensurate feminisms, with radically different and incompatible ideologies and practices. Given this, one also could assess organisations or interventions in the engaging men field in terms of *which* feminism they embody.

There is significant debate about how to define kinds of feminism, with disagreement over how to divide feminisms into types, which to include, how broadly or narrowly to define them, and the labels with which to name them (Beasley 1999). Overlapping with this, there is debate over conceptions of 'waves' of feminism (Evans and Chamberlain 2015). Nevertheless, there are some common formulations of distinctive feminisms.

Three feminisms which characterised the early second wave of feminism in particular are liberal, radical and socialist/Marxist feminism (Lorber 2012). Liberal feminism, often mistakenly seen as synonymous with feminism per se, focuses on women's right to participate in the public worlds of work, the marketplace and politics (Beasley 1999; Harding 1998; Lorber 2012). Radical feminism focuses on women's oppression as women in a social order dominated by men, seen in terms of patriarchy or the systemic organisation of male supremacy and female subordination, including through sexuality and bodies (Harding 1998; Mackay 2015; Robinson 2003). Marxist feminism sees unequal class relations, the defining feature of capitalism, as also being at the root of gender inequalities, whilst socialist feminism emphasises that patriarchy and capitalism interact as two systems of social organisation and power (Beasley 1999; Harding 1998; Johnson 1997). Other types often identified in contemporary accounts of feminism's diversity include postmodern and intersectional feminisms. Postmodern or poststructuralist feminism emphasises the role of language in the construction of the social order, difference and the instability of categories and the contingent character of identities, thus offering differing accounts of truth, identity and power (Beasley 1999; Lorber 2012). Intersectional feminism stresses the interconnections of gender with other forms of social difference and inequality, particularly of race/ethnicity (Beasley 1999; Crenshaw 1991).

This brief account hardly does justice to the diversity and complexity of contemporary strands of feminism. There are several dangers in such typologies: they may impose too neat an order and exaggerate the internal homogeneity of each type, they can suggest an overly fragmented view of feminist theories and more recent feminist perspectives do not fit such labels (Beasley 1999; McCarry 2007). Nonetheless, it is valuable to recognise the distinctive theoretical approaches and political programmes of these different feminisms.

There are clear radical feminist roots to the dominant perspectives and strategies of the men's anti-violence field, reflecting its origins in radical feminist advocacy and scholarship (Brod 1998; Robinson 2003). It is radical feminism that has tended to focus most of all on men's violence against women as a cause and consequence of patriarchal social relations. The majority of theory regarding men's violence against women has therefore been developed by radical feminists, and radical feminists pioneered advocacy and education aimed at the prevention and reduction of men's violence (Mackay 2015; Robinson 2003). Given this, choosing to focus specifically on the prevention of men's violence against women may articulate an alignment with a radical feminist analysis. Working in an area in which some of the most harrowing consequences of patriarchy and men's practices within it are dealt with on a day-to-day basis may also make it more likely for activists and educators to adopt a more critical feminist perspective. This may mean that efforts to engage men in ending violence against women have a stronger conceptual orientation to radical feminism than those focused on engaging men in other areas, such as sexual and reproductive health or parenting, although feminist orientations are visible here too.

A focus on men's violence against women still does not guarantee, however, that efforts to engage men in its prevention will have a homogenous feminist perspective. Diversity and disagreement amongst feminisms extends to feminist understandings of men's violence against women. Diverse strands or schools of feminist advocacy and scholarship differ in the weight they give to the issue of men's violence, their explanatory or theoretical frameworks regarding this violence and the strategies they advocate or pursue in response. Indeed, there are heated debates within feminism over particular practices or domains seen by some to be implicated in men's violence against women, such as pornography, prostitution or sex work, trafficking and sadomasochism. Such debates became so heated in the 1980s that they were termed the 'feminist sex wars' (Vance 1984), and these debates persist today. Indeed, differences amongst profeminist men with regard to such divisions have caused some organisations and groups to split and disintegrate in the past, as has been the case in feminist activism more broadly (Messner et al. 2015).

Given the diversity and disagreement amongst feminisms, have profeminist men sided with some and against others? In one sense, any position on gender issues represents a 'taking of sides', whether conscious or not. It is inevitable that profeminist men involved in preventing violence against women will take positions in relation to different debates within feminism, because agreeing with some feminist arguments sometimes unavoidably means disagreeing with others (Pease 2017). However, men's anti-violence groups and organisations only rarely have explicitly taken sides in feminist debates. One notable exception to this occurred in 1992. At the First National Ending Men's Violence Network Conference in Chicago, USA, participants argued that activists against men's

violence should hold themselves accountable only to those feminists who themselves are accountable to the victims of prostitution and pornography. This declaration of loyalties and political allegiances was challenged by others, with academic and activist Harry Brod critical particularly of the authors' negative characterisations of the feminists with whom they disagree. He wrote in an open letter, "The profeminist men's movement has no business contributing to the factionalisation and divisiveness in the women's movement". We return to the politics of profeminist men's side-taking later in this article.

Whilst most organisations undertaking work with men and boys to prevent violence against women are relatively open about being influenced by and seeking to support feminism in general, *which* feminism they are attempting to adopt and apply is often left more implicit and vague. That being said, it can still be relatively easy to identify their broader standpoints if they have an explicit position in relation to specific issues. However, many organisations appear to steer clear of clear commitments to specific feminist approaches over others.

One issue which can evoke visible divergence amongst men involved as agents of change in the prevention of violence against women is how they perceive and define themselves in relation to their work. More specifically, different men take different positions as to whether it is appropriate to describe themselves as being a feminist, with some instead preferring terms such as profeminist or feminist ally. This illustrates that even the way that men understand and construct our own identities in work to prevent men's violence against women carries with it important and contested signifiers about their wider interpretations of feminist thinking (Crowe 2013; Brod 1998). For example, using the term 'profeminist' may imply support for more radical iterations of feminism, based on the radical feminist notion that the goal of feminism is women's liberation from patriarchy (as opposed to simply bringing about gender equality), and that whilst men can support feminism, they cannot therefore themselves be feminists (Mackay 2015). However, there are no definitive rules in this regard, and the usage of the term 'profeminist' for example does not mean that a man is necessarily pursuing radical feminist agendas in different aspects of his life and practice.

There are perhaps justifiable reasons why an organisation might want to be relatively equivocal about its position in relation to the differences within feminism. Some who work to prevent violence against women may aim to adopt an approach which can have as broad an appeal as possible, and which avoids the risk of potentially alienating some people by explicitly committing to one specific form of feminism, or focusing excessively upon internal debates (Casey et al. 2013). They may also be fearful of receiving criticism from those who hold opposing views, or of causing divisions within their own organisation. The perception amongst some organisations in the engaging men field may therefore be that it is unnecessary or counter-productive to overtly align themselves with specific variants of feminism as part of their work.

It may also be the case that the vagueness or lack of clarity of organisations regarding debates and contentious issues within feminism is not a deliberate decision. It could instead be based around a lack of confidence in their knowledge of different feminist perspectives, or a failure to engage beyond a superficial level with feminist theories to enable them to clearly differentiate and choose a specific set of ideas to follow in an informed way. For individual advocates who are relatively new to the field this may be understandable, but for organisations, the seriousness of their profeminist approach could be brought into question if they have not at least reflected on these differences, even if they do not explicitly advocate for one position or another. Undertaking prevention work always involves the implementation of theories of some kind, knowingly or not, so it is likely to lead to more effective practice if these theories are consciously decided upon and pursued (Carmody et al. 2009; Casey and Lindhorst 2009; Flood 2005; Nation et al. 2003).

The field of engaging men in the prevention of men's violence against women is therefore not homogenous with regard to approaches to feminism, and there are other distinctions and complexities which can be found within it too. For example, the organisations that carry out work in this area are often multi-layered entities, with those involved in them undertaking a range of different roles. When individuals are engaging in this work, they may therefore be doing so in a variety of different ways, both inside and outside of formal organisations (Pease 2008). For example, many organisations working with men and boys may have board members, a small number of paid full time and part time staff and a much larger group of volunteers, such as 'ambassadors', who are all carrying out some form of practice relating to the prevention of men's violence against women. It would therefore be unreasonable to expect the same depth of reflection on and awareness of feminist theory and strategy at all of these different levels in an organisation. A veteran profeminist activist will have been able to spend much more time engaging with feminist thought than an individual who has just begun volunteering for an organisation, for example.

For these reasons, it is important to avoid over-generalising about those who are involved in working with men to prevent violence against women. It would be unrealistic to expect all those in the field to be equally well versed in the different strands of feminist theory, especially in the early stages of their involvement, and it would be counterproductive to shun those who are relatively new to such work on this basis. Experience should therefore be taken into account when considering the commitments of individual activists to specific profeminist principles, given the knowledge and awareness which must be developed to unlearn deeply embedded patriarchal ideologies. A key factor in assessing the work of male advocates in

putting feminism into practice may therefore be the *effort* they make to engage reflexively with feminist ideas and analysis in a substantive way. This may be more significant than the length of time profeminist men have spent doing so, or the specific conclusions they come to about which schools of feminist thought they are most closely aligned with.

Having discussed the extent to which the engaging men field is feminist, or can be assessed as such, together with what kinds of feminism that actually means, we now turn to a more abstract question: on what *basis* should a particular feminist theory be chosen?

Choosing Between Feminist Theories

If men support feminism, which feminism should they support? This question has had some currency in profeminist men's activism and, overlapping with this, in scholarship on men and masculinities. Profeminist men, on the email list Profem for example, have debated the issue, as well as men's claims to the term 'feminist' and men's roles in (pro)feminist advocacy. Scholarship on men and masculinities too has explored the political, epistemological and ontological issues at stake in men's relations to feminism (for example, see Digby 1998; Hearn 2013; Pease 2013). On the other hand, there has been little obvious attention in the engaging men field itself to the question of which feminism.

So why does it matter which feminisms are adopted in the name of efforts to engage men in preventing violence against women? What is at stake when we ask this question, and why is the specific theoretical perspectives, and practical strategies, that are taken up important? We explore four possible answers to why this matters: (1) work with men should be guided by theory, (2) work with men should be guided by the best theories, (3) work with men should be guided by shared theories and (4) work with men should be guided by the theories of the women and organisations to whom it is accountable.

Guided by Theory

Efforts to engage men and boys in preventing men's violence against women, like any effort to create social change, are more likely to be effective if they are guided by theory: by an appropriate diagnosis of the problem and an account of how they will address this. Violence prevention must therefore incorporate both an appropriate theoretical framework for understanding violence, and a theory of change (Carmody et al. 2009; Flood et al. 2009). There is a growing awareness in the violence prevention field that the articulation of these two overlapping elements is necessary to good practice (Jewkes et al. 2015a; Storer et al. 2016). Without them, there is little sense of what change is being attempted or how these efforts will lead to the transformations that are desired. Despite this, both elements often are absent or underdeveloped in existing programmes.

For example, a systematic, evidence-based review of sexual assault prevention programmes, based on an evaluation of publications of 59 studies from between 1990 and 2003, found that most programmes do not have strong or well-developed theoretical frameworks (Morrison et al. 2004). Meanwhile, a review of 11 programs targeting middle- or high-school-aged students and addressing the prevention of partner violence reported that few studies discussed the theoretical orientation of the intervention program in depth (Whitaker et al. 2006). Feminist and feminist-informed approaches provide the most common theories and concepts amongst violence prevention programmes. A reliance on feminist approaches is both understandable and appropriate, given that it is feminist activism that placed violence against women on community and policy agendas and feminist scholarship that provides the most comprehensive and credible account of the causes and consequences of domestic and sexual violence. At the same time, many interventions' theoretical underpinnings are relatively simple and underdeveloped.

In asking why Which feminism? matters then, the first point is that work with men should be guided by theory. However, this does not mean that any theory will do so long as it is adopted energetically. Some theories are better than others. Some theories are inaccurate, and their adoption will lead to neutral or even negative outcomes. Indeed, some feminist theories are better than others.

Guided by the Best Theories

What makes a better theory? There is wide-ranging debate amongst scholars over how to assess the quality of theoretical claims, frameworks and the research that they are built upon. For example, whilst criteria such as reliability, validity and objectivity are widely used in quantitative research, their applicability to qualitative research is hotly contested (Flick 2008). Alternative criteria have been offered which may also have relevance to theorising, such as Lincoln and Guba's (1985) influential account of the 'trustworthiness' of a research study, based on its (1) **credibility** (confidence in the 'truth' of the findings), (2) **transferability** (the findings are applicable in other contexts), (3) **dependability** (the findings are consistent and could be repeated) and (4) **confirmability** (the extent to which the findings are shaped by the data and not researcher bias, motivation or interest). Note that these are similar to common criteria for quantitative research, with the four matched, respectively, by internal validity, external validity, reliability and objectivity. Other scholars raise cautions about the use of standards or criteria altogether, whether because they are not suited to qualitative

research, they focus on technical fixes which may not themselves confer rigour or they are challenged by the pluralism of qualitative methods and frameworks (Hammersley 2007; Barbour 2001).

Whilst these debates may seem obscure in relation to violence prevention practice, they have real ethical and political implications. Bad theory generates bad outcomes. If efforts to engage men are informed by understandings which are inaccurate or incoherent or out of date, they are less likely to be effective and more likely to do harm. In practice, for the engaging men field the decision about which theories to adopt is usually one taken from *outside* research or scholarship, as most advocates and organisations involved in this work are outside the university context. They therefore find themselves in the same position for example as governments, having to assess the quality of the theories and research available to them (Spencer et al. 2003).

Pragmatically, there are questions which those working with men can pose in deciding upon which theoretical accounts to draw from. These questions are not merely about theories' abstract properties, their claims to knowledge and truth, but also about theories' utility. This reflects the fact that engaging men is a project of social change, and it shares with other activist projects more political considerations regarding how theories and research are applied or used and the practical ends to which they can be put (Hammersley 2007; Brookfield 2005). It may therefore seek to ask questions such as

1. Does this theory help us understand the world or some part of it?
2. Is this theory useful in explaining how the world might be changed for the better? (Does this theory assist us to do good work? Does it contribute to building a society organised according to the values we espouse?)
3. Does this theory offer hope for change (rather than simply pessimism)? (Brookfield 2005).

The first question emphasises the matter of the truthfulness or accuracy of a theory. For work with men then, we could ask whether the theory accurately represents men, masculinities, gender and violence. Does it speak to the realities of gender? Better theories will enable explanation, for example, of why some men use violence whilst other men do not, why some men desist from violence whilst other men continue to perpetrate, why rates of violence against women are much higher in some contexts than others and so on. In the absence of the opportunity to gather data and test theoretical claims themselves, advocates may ask whether a theory is supported in contemporary scholarship, and if it is supported by evidence. Put more simply, is this what contemporary scholarship says is true? In short, then, work with men should be guided by better theories.

Guided by Shared Theories

If one basis of choosing one's feminist theory is explanatory accuracy and political utility, another is the extent to which it is *shared*. The rationale for this goes as follows. Work with men may be more likely to make change if it is guided by shared theories. If diverse organisations and networks seeking to engage men in preventing violence against women have common understandings of the problem and the solution, they are more likely to push in the same directions, and their shared agenda and strategies will increase the momentum and critical mass of their work. In contrast, differing understandings may weaken existing efforts or even breed internal conflict and factionalism. This reasoning leads to the conclusion that work with men should be guided by shared theories. Profeminist men and organisations should cast their lot with whichever explanations are dominant in the field. Indeed, in practice, this may be what occurs. Individuals' and organisations' adoption of particular theories is likely to be shaped as much by prosaic factors as by careful assessment of their merit, such as advocates' own political and personal predispositions, the influence of peers and mentors, the conceptual approaches of the organisations and movements with which they associate and wider social and cultural conditions.

The obvious problem here is that influential feminist theories, shared or not, may be poor theories. They may be empirically inaccurate, conceptually impoverished or devoid of strategic utility. If it is bad theory, then being adopted by more advocates and organisations may simply make things worse. There is strength in numbers, but not if the numbers are wrong. We therefore reject the third possible answer to the Which feminism? question, that 'work with men should be guided by shared theories'.

Guided by Those to Whom It Is Accountable

A fourth possible answer to the question Which feminism? is that work with men should be guided by the theoretical frameworks of the feminist women and organisations to whom it is accountable. The ideal of 'accountability' is widespread in the engaging men field (Flood 2015; Pease 2008). It is a central tenet of much work involving men and boys to prevent violence against women that it is accountable to feminism (Messner et al. 2015), although at times its conceptualisation is vague and its practice is uneven (Macomber 2015). The notion of accountability comes out of the politics of oppression and the politics of knowledge. It is based on two, overlapping foundational ideas. First, struggles against oppression should be led by those who are oppressed. Second, when it comes to systems of oppression or inequality, those who are oppressed or disadvantaged have a much better understanding

of that system than those who are privileged or advantaged, as privilege and injustice often are invisible to members of the dominant group (Cohen 2012; Harding 1998; Kahane 1998).

Whilst the principle of accountability does invite advocates and organisations to look towards feminism for its theory, the issue of *which* feminism remains. Because of the debates and disagreements within feminism, it is impossible to agree with *all* feminists at all times, so what does it mean for being accountable, if one in fact *disagrees* with what some feminists are arguing (Pease 2017)? This tension often goes unacknowledged and undiscussed within the engaging men field, perhaps because it is so difficult to resolve, and illustrates some of the contradictions involved in profeminism and 'ally work' (Pease 2008).

In the name of accountability, an organisation working with men to prevent violence against women may decide simply to adopt whatever feminist frameworks are dominant amongst the women and women's organisations in local proximity to them. Working with and supporting local feminist organisations is an important element of profeminist activism, and this approach may seem easier, by virtue of avoiding the challenge of assessing competing feminist theories. However, it has three flaws. First, it fails to put those frameworks to the test in terms of accuracy, relevance or rigour. Second, there may be a range of different types of feminist activism present in the local area and debates and disagreements between those, meaning that political choices will still have to be made.

The reflex adoption of whatever form of feminist theory and activism is locally dominant also positions profeminist men as passive, and this is the third problem here. It is difficult to see how this approach fosters 'ownership' of or a meaningful commitment to feminist ideas. Men's support for feminism should mean actively engaging with feminist theories and making them their 'own', rather than uncritically taking on whatever they encounter first (Brod 1998; Harding 1998). Certainly, listening to women is fundamental in this kind of work, because it recognises "women's epistemic privilege in the form of first-hand experiences of gender oppression" (Göransson 2014). This does not, however, mean leaving it to women to undertake the intellectual labour involved in being profeminist on men's behalf, nor leaving it to women to 'train' men in feminist theory, so that they do not have to do the hard work involved in reflecting on and applying it to their own lives and practices (Castelino 2014). In other words, men who support feminism must be autonomous moral agents, taking the onus for their own personal and social politics, rather than turning all such responsibility over to women (Brod 1998). We return to more effective strategies for accountability further below.

In response to the question Which feminism? then, it is not good enough to answer, "Whichever feminisms are held by the women and organisations to whom I am/we are accountable". Whilst accountability is a vital political principle, it does not remove the challenge of critically assessing and adopting specific feminist theories.

Dilemmas of Praxis

It is important to recognise that there are also a number of dilemmas and issues of practice which are posed for profeminist men and the engaging men field when choosing between different feminist theories. We will discuss some of these further now.

Gaps Between Profeminism and Feminism

First of all, we need to consider the very purpose of profeminist men's work: is it simply to mirror or echo feminism more broadly? If so, then the specific feminist approach in question, and the strength of its project of social change, is relatively unimportant, so long as that original goal of replication has been achieved. Yet, this in itself again asks relatively little of men who are serious about applying profeminist praxis. On the other hand, if profeminism develops independently from feminism to such a degree that the links in theory and practice between the two become largely disconnected, then arguably it could no longer be considered profeminist. The solution to this dilemma for profeminist men may lie in finding a balance in practice, between listening to and supporting feminist theories, and reflecting upon and applying what are believed to be the most powerful of those for their own context.

There may already be a gap between the feminisms of the engaging men field and those which characterise feminist advocacy more broadly. For example, work with men still seems to lag behind other feminist social change projects in terms of its recognition of the intersections of gender with other forms of social difference and inequality and its acknowledgement of sexual diversity (Flood 2015; Peretz 2017). Of course, feminist advocacy itself is diverse and under continual threat, and there are feminist reasons for the engaging men field to resist troubling trends in gender justice practice and policy, whether they are hollowed out, neoliberal and individualised versions of feminism (Rottenberg 2014) or depoliticised anti-violence strategies (Hall 2015).

If there are gaps or tensions between the engaging men field and women's movements, they may mirror those documented between masculinities scholarship and feminist scholarship. There is now something of a disconnect between contemporary feminist scholarship, a great deal of which is significantly influenced by postmodern, poststructuralist theorising and scholarship on men and masculinities, which continues to be strongly influenced by more modernist, structuralist modes of thinking (Beasley 2012, 2013, 2015). However, the latter is also true to some extent regarding

feminist scholarship specifically on men's violence against women, so critical studies on men and masculinities in particular may have remained more closely aligned with feminist work in this area, than with feminist theorising more broadly. Compared to much contemporary feminist theorising, critical studies on men and masculinities typically place greater emphasis on power as structural oppression, give greater emphasis to categories of identity and, arguably, have a greater orientation towards practice, activism and making social change. The extent to which contemporary research on men and masculinities can be said to be accountable to, and influenced by, feminist scholarship more generally is therefore debatable. Indeed, there has also long been scepticism from some feminist theorists about the extent to which men and masculinity scholarship measures up to its claims to be aligned with feminism (for example, see Ashe 2007; Castelino 2014; McCarry 2007; Robinson 2003). Meanwhile, O'Neill (2015) has suggested that contemporary scholarship on men and masculinities is moving further away from its 'critical' roots and relationship with feminism. This also brings into question the extent to which there is a relationship between efforts to engage men and boys in the prevention of violence against women, and contemporary scholarship on men and masculinities.

An Accountability Based on Critical Reflexivity

On accountability, we argued above that whilst profeminist work with men must be accountable to women and feminism, this does not remove the responsibility also to assess the feminisms to which it is accountable. Because of the sometimes significant divergences in feminist theorising and activism, in practice accountability may therefore often mean being accountable to specific feminist women and specific iterations of feminism (Pease 2017). This does not mean that profeminist men should not be open to being held to account by other feminist women too. However, *only* being accountable to a notion of 'feminism' as a broad singular entity, rather than to specific individuals, groups and strands of feminist thought and activism, may in fact mean relatively little in practice, and may indicate a vague and ineffectual approach to accountability.

At the same time, being accountable also means interrogating *why* it is that one does sympathise with some specific forms of feminism over others. It is important to listen to and reflect upon the diversity of feminist viewpoints and women's experiences, even (and perhaps especially) if they challenge one's existing beliefs (Pease 2017). Otherwise, it may be the case that profeminist men simply adopt whichever feminist theories fit most easily with their existing view of the world and challenge their current ideas and behaviours the least. Being sympathetic to a particular school of thought within feminism does not therefore mean that profeminist men should engage *only* with those ideas, since one cannot meaningfully adopt a position without considering the range of other arguments available.

This demonstrates that the accountability of men's anti-violence work can be most effective if it is built on critical reflexivity, especially with regard to its relationship with feminism. Furthermore, it is important to maintain an awareness of the directions and arguments of the broader women's movement (whilst avoiding what is 'shared' becoming the sole factor in deciding which theories to adopt). As we have shown, if there is a significant gap between those and the frameworks that engaging men work follows, then that too would bring into question the efficacy of its practices of accountability. This approach may also help organisations and activists to deal with occasions where they are faced with conflicting arguments from different feminists, or if they are unsure about feedback or comments received from individual feminist women (Pease 2017).

If organisations working with men to prevent violence against women are honest, explicit and specific about their profeminist commitments, this can encourage a deeper and more focused level of engagement with feminist perspectives and activism. This in turn will aid the development of clearer, more systematic and coherent theoretical and strategic underpinnings for such efforts. It would also help organisations to be more transparent, and thus facilitate being held to account by feminist women more easily, if their aims are identified and explained from the outset. This does not mean it is necessary to make every aspect of an organisation's frameworks explicit to everyone at all times, and certain debates, issues and complexities will be more appropriate for different audiences in different contexts. However, being prepared to thoughtfully engage with and critically reflect on feminist debates and divergences in the first place could have a number of useful impacts in developing the rigour of work with men boys.

Men Taking Sides

This raises the question of how profeminist men and the engaging men field more generally should interact with debates and disagreements within feminism, and whether or not they can make a useful contribution to them. Many would take the view that it would be highly inappropriate for profeminist men to wade into contentious debates and implicitly or explicitly assert to some feminists that they are 'wrong' about a particular issue; that it is not men's place to make claims about which direction the women's movement should take (Pease 2008). At the same time, a serious engagement with feminist theories arguably *requires* men to actively reflect and take on their own positions in relation to different feminist issues, rather than passively accepting whichever feminist arguments they encounter about them (Brod 1998; Harding 1998).

It would be an abnegation of responsibility, moreover, for profeminist men to ignore contentious debates within feminism, especially since these issues are often directly related to men and men's practices. Indeed, evading such discussions in itself involves taking a particular position (Pease 2017), and arguably reflects a privileged position, by being able to 'pick and choose' which feminist issues to care about. It may be particularly difficult for an organisation focusing on the prevention of men's violence against women to disregard deliberations around prostitution/sex work and pornography for example, given that many feminists would argue that these are themselves examples of violence, abuse and exploitation, or at least encourage and glorify these things (Jensen 2017; Mackay 2015). What is more, it may be easier for men to comment on such issues than it is for women, given the sexist and misogynistic abuse that women often receive for speaking out about any topic related to feminism, and perhaps especially when those issues are more 'controversial' (Messner et al. 2015).

Where feminist debates do concern issues in which men's practices are directly involved, such as prostitution/sex work (as sex buyers) or violence (as perpetrators), profeminist men's voices may be particularly valuable. It is therefore possible that men's experiences may, on occasion, actually be able to provide alternative and productive perspectives and insights within highly polarised debates (Harding 1998). However, any such intervention from men must be handled very carefully, in a way that does not diminish the prioritisation of women's voices and experiences, and which is based around supporting the feminist movement rather than colonising discussions within it (Kahane 1998).

Weighing up and arriving at their own position on a certain issue, and potentially disagreeing with some feminists, does not mean that profeminist men should spend their time dictating to feminist women that their position is wrong. It is one thing to advocate for a particular position amongst profeminist men, quite another to make claims about which direction the women's movement should take—because, if men see themselves as *allies* to feminism, then it is not their movement to make such claims to. This also brings us back to the point made by Brod that profeminist men have to be careful not to contribute to or antagonise divisions within feminism, which can in turn help to preserve patriarchal social relations. Profeminist men could thus help to maintain patriarchal inequalities if they contribute to such conflicts, or, on the other hand, if they see themselves as 'saviours' of feminism who possess the solutions to contentions within the women's movement.

Aligning Feminist Theory and Practice

It is also important to consider whether there may be a relationship between the type of feminist theoretical framework that an organisation adopts, and the extent to which it succeeds in putting profeminism into practice. For example, it could be argued that subscribing to a form of radical feminist analysis is likely to equate to a 'stronger' degree of profeminist praxis, as by its very nature radical feminism demands deeper levels of individual and social change in relation to gender than other forms of feminism (Brod 1998). If we are asking more far-reaching, critical and challenging questions about ourselves and the structures and systems of the world in which we live, it is likely that the strategies and methods we adopt in attempting to put that theory into practice will be more profoundly and transformatively feminist in nature.

However, it is not inevitable that this will be the case. We cannot necessarily take aspects of an organisation or individual advocate's practice for granted because of the theory they are adopting. Adopting radical feminist ideas does not automatically detach men from male privilege and entitlement. Attempting to recognise and dismantle these things remains an everyday task for *all* profeminist men, in which mistakes and lurches back into sexism can easily be made. On the one hand, subscribing to radical feminist ideas may make men more attuned to identifying such dynamics. However, it could also lead to problematic behaviours of its own, such as a 'holier than thou' or competitive approach to being more 'radical' than other men—or spending more time criticising 'liberal' feminist women than on the day-to-day work of engaging with other men and boys. It may also counter-intuitively lead to a failure to reflect adequately on one's own behaviour, based on the mistaken assumption that, having adopted a radical feminist analysis, it is impossible to simultaneously enact sexism in practice.

This again demonstrates why consistent critical reflexivity and accountability to feminist women about the work that profeminist men do is so crucial. It also highlights why it is beneficial to listen to a range of women's voices and feminist arguments, not only those which one agrees with most for whatever reason. Working to prevent violence against women as a man surely means *constantly* being challenged—men never reach a point of being 'beyond' this, no matter how well versed in feminist theory, or experienced in profeminist praxis, they may be. Furthermore, sometimes men can be challenged by unexpected voices and in unexpected contexts, not only in those that they perceive to be the most radical.

These issues also illustrate the importance of taking into account both theory and practice in engaging men work, and working to create a harmonious alignment between the two, in order to effectively enact profeminist praxis (Jewkes et al. 2015b; Storer et al. 2016). An organisation working with men can develop a highly radical and systematic theoretical framework, but that can be relatively meaningless if the strategies and methods it uses to put that framework into practice are not equally carefully developed. The type of feminist theory an organisation adopts may thus be of less importance

than the extent which it is effective in actually putting feminism into practice. On the other hand, an organisation might undertake a wide range of innovative activities in engaging men, but if these are not built upon a coherent theory of feminist social change, then it will be difficult to assess what the actual aims of that work are, and whether or not it can actually be considered to be effective. Work with men and boys to prevent violence against women therefore requires carefully developed and mutually supportive theory *and* practice if it is to have a significant impact in achieving its goals.

Conclusion

There are a number of differences which can be observed within work to engage men and boys in the prevention of men's violence against women. These are particularly apparent in the different types of (typically feminist) theories and frameworks that provide the foundations for these efforts, and in the degree to which feminism is put into practice in the range of strategies and methods that organisations adopt in their work. However, differences do appear elsewhere too, such as in the structure and composition of organisations involved in this field, and the different ways in which they implement accountability to feminism. To date, there has been relatively little reflection on these divergences within engaging men work, and we do not seek to highlight them in order to encourage conflict or division which could serve to constrain a still relatively small field of activism.

However, we would argue that it is important that these organisations, and profeminist men seeking to support efforts to prevent men's violence against women more generally, reflect upon rather than ignore the divergences and debates within feminist thinking, and contemplate their own position in relation to them. There can sometimes be ambiguity surrounding the theoretical underpinnings of the engaging men field, where the specificities and emphases of feminist commitments of individuals and groups can be left implicit. This may cultivate a lack of transparency, which limits the capacity for those organisations and individuals to be held to account as they attempt to put feminism into practice. Furthermore, a dearth of openness and decisiveness in relation to the ideological approach being adopted can contribute to a lack of cohesion and coherence between the change that is aspired to, the rationale for that change and the strategy for accomplishing it, which can lead to disjointed and ineffective efforts.

Yet, there are undoubtedly also challenges involved both in being more reflective and more explicit about the forms of feminist theory that provide the foundations for work with men and boys, and the strategies that are developed to implement them. Not least because this requires an in-depth, ongoing engagement with different strands of feminist thought, which demands resources of time and effort. However, it could be argued that for those who are serious about supporting feminist social change, these levels of engagement are essential. In addition, some of the debates within feminism are also highly contentious and polarised, and so it is important to respond to them sensitively. It is inappropriate for men, as the dominant group within the patriarchal social order, to intrude on these and proclaim the direction which they think the movement for women's liberation should take, as if men could solve the dilemmas and contradictions that feminists have grappled with for decades.

That does not mean these issues and debates should be avoided in the process of trying to engage men in preventing violence against women, not least because ignoring them in the context of such work is almost impossible. It would also represent an abdication of responsibility if the field is serious about taking up feminist analyses. As is frequently the case in work to engage men in the prevention of men's violence against women, it is therefore important to craft a careful balance in response to the Which feminism? question. Profeminist men should engage seriously with the diversity of feminist thought and advocacy, but avoid replicating patriarchal power dynamics, such as invading or antagonising debates within feminism, in the process.

This article has considered how we can assess the feminism of work to engage men and boys in preventing violence against women, in terms of *how* feminist the field is, and what *kinds* of feminism can be identified within it. It has also explored how profeminist men involved in the prevention of violence against women can go about choosing which feminist theory they should adopt in their work, as well as some of the dilemmas in practice that can arise when making such decisions. This leaves us with the question of whether or not there is a particular type of feminism which *should* be adopted in work with men and boys to end violence against women. Taking into account the issues raised in this article, individual advocates and organisations involved in the prevention of violence against women must come to their own conclusions about which kind of feminism they feel is most relevant and helpful to apply to the contexts in which they are operating. In some ways, the answer to this question may be less important than the extent to which this work succeeds in actually putting profeminism into practice—because the frameworks that are adopted are relatively meaningless if they do not become effective praxis.

Fundamentally, organisations and individual advocates should push themselves to be as feminist as they can be in work with men and boys, because deep-rooted feminist social change is what is required in order to bring about an end to men's violence against women. This will undoubtedly mean different things to different people, depending on their subjective interpretations of feminism. However, we would argue that there are some rudimentary principles which should underpin work with men and boys to prevent men's violence

against women, if it can genuinely be considered profeminist. The following are by no means intended by be comprehensive, but they illustrate what some of the minimum standards could be in profeminist approaches to the elimination of men's violence against women:

1. That we strive to enact transformations towards gender justice in our personal lives, in the lives of other men and boys and in society as a whole.
2. That we make ourselves open to being held to account about our practices and our work by feminist women, and put steps in place which ensure we are accountable as individuals and organisations to specific feminist women and feminist organisations.
3. That at the same time as being accountable to women, we do not place the onus on them to 'teach us' about gender inequality. We take on the responsibility to learn, and to change ourselves and other men in order to live in more gender-equitable ways.
4. That we make efforts to listen and learn from the diversity of women's experiences and engage critically and reflexively with a range of feminist theories and ideas. This means being clear about the kind of feminist approach we are adopting, particularly regarding what kind of change we want to achieve and why that change is important.
5. That the strategies and methods we adopt marry with the aims of our theory of feminist change, and that we consult with feminist women wherever possible during the process of implementing work with men and boys.
6. That we critically reflect on and evaluate the extent to which the work being carried out is effective in actually bringing about the change that it aims to achieve.
7. That through both our theory and practice, we make the connections between and address different forms of men's violence against women and patriarchal social relations—and consider the ways in which we are also personally implicated in, and privileged by, these social structures.
8. That we take into account the full continuum of men's violence against women in our prevention work, and consider the relationships between this and other normalised institutions and patterns of practice within patriarchy (including those which are seen as being contentious within feminism, such as the sex industry).
9. That we recognise the importance of women's voices and women-only spaces being prioritised and playing a leading role within struggles to end men's violence against women and gender inequality. Whilst seeking to support this work, this also means working to counteract the potential for men to dominate or 'take over' such efforts.

These principles themselves perhaps lean more towards a radical feminist analysis. However, we would argue that this is to some extent inevitable, given the saliency of radical forms of feminism in particular to efforts to understand and address violence against women and girls. If it can build upon such principles with the reflexive development of cohesive profeminist praxis, the engaging men field has the potential to contribute to significant transformations in men and masculinities and gender relations more broadly, and to bringing men's violence against women to an end.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

This paper is not based on research with human subjects and therefore did require Institutional Review Board approval.

Conflict of Interest The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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