Preventing domestic violence in young men – masculinity, intimacy and alcohol's 'man laws'.

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Introduction

This paper examines the ways in which alcohol advertising intersects with masculinities and the relationship between these representations of masculinities and those associated with domestic violence.

Preventing Domestic Violence is stopping it before it starts.

One of the biggest challenges that the sector involved with gender-based violence faces is prevention: stopping men's domestic violence towards women before it starts. This is the area that we know least about, that is most difficult to evaluate and that requires some lateral thinking and that is in its infancy internationally. This work involves figuring out how to intervene with populations in order to bring about change, rather than the smaller group or individual work that is carried out at the early intervention stage (with those at risk of domestic violence), or at the late intervention stage (with those already experiencing domestic violence).

When we are dealing with violence against women we are talking about big numbers and it is unlikely that we will ever have a front-line workforce that can intervene effectively with each of these incidents. According to the "areyouokay" website, police recorded 86,545 family violence incidents and offences in New Zealand in 2008, and were called out to 200 family violence situations a day – one every seven minutes. 84% of those arrested for family violence were men; 16% were women. One in three women in New Zealand who had ever had a heterosexual partner has been found to have experienced either physical or sexual violence (Fanslow & Robinson, 2004). Women's Refuge alone received about 50,000 crisis calls in 2007-2008 year. The cost of family violence in today's dollars, adjusted from a Suzanne Snively's 1994 study (Snively 1994), is up to $8 billion. This is a problem that must now be affecting almost all New Zealanders through their contact with friends or family members if not directly. The problem disproportionately affects Māori women (Fanslow & Robinson, 2004).

Can attention to alcohol be used to prevent violence?

One of the areas that the World Health Organisation has identified as central to stopping violence in communities is to reduce alcohol consumption. Alcohol consumption alone is not considered to cause men's domestic violence against women but alcohol can play a significant role in the dynamics, for example by

- contributing to more severe aggression (Fals-Stewart, 2003), and greater likelihood of injury (Thompson & Kingree, 2006)
- reducing the effectiveness of stopping violence programmes, and
- serving as a marker of masculinity when men feel their masculinity is under threat (Galvani, 2006; Peralta et al., 2010). Women's injuries have been found to be more severe when the man has an alcohol dependency but the relationship between domestic violence and alcohol is complex (Thompson & Kingree, 2006).
- Intoxication is not always present, with anecdotal accounts from women who say that the violence was worse when their alcohol dependent partner was <u>not</u> intoxicated (Adams, 2010).
- Peralta et al. (2010) argued that when men's domestic violence is used against women alcohol appears to work by bolstering a "fragile masculinity".

This finding suggests an important relationship between masculinity, alcohol and men's violence towards women.

What masculinities should be promoted and what are problematic?

Attention to masculinity has been identified as a means to prevent domestic violence: not all versions of masculinity are problematic for men's relationships with women. There are many forms of masculinity that are respectful of women and that promote equal, humane and caring relationships with women. For example, not all cultures have considered the domination of

women as the mark of a man's masculinity. Traditionally Māori culture did not differentiate between women and men by gender – there were no gendered pronouns (MOJ, 1999). Leadership was through who was most competent to lead and women were treasured and protected as the bearer of children (MOJ, 1999). When colonisation happened in New Zealand much of the privileges that Māori women received naturally were systematically removed – their divorce rights, their right to land ownership, their right to equal participation in politics, and therefore their right to participate in decision making. Māori were expected to take on the gender values of the British settlers (MOJ 1999).

In comparison to Māori, Western cultures have a long history of men's dominance and control of women. This history goes back to Greek mythology, and the Poet Hesiod who described Pandora opening the forbidden Pandora's box that released evil into mankind. In these traditional western cultures women were treated as children, confined to rooms in the house and forbidden to go out without permission and chaperones (Holland, 2006). In the middle ages many women were burned as witches – tens of thousands of women lost their lives in Europe through the Christian church's promotion of these women as evil (Holland, 2006).

Today remnants of male domination and control remain in New Zealand culture but they are sometimes difficult to detect because they are hidden in institutionalised language and practices. Previous research with young New Zealand men found those at most risk of domestic violence were young men who associated themselves with the binge drinking culture who spoke of keeping women on a leash, and of proving that they were 'The Man' to their mates by dominating and controlling their girlfriends (Towns, 2009). Young women who have experienced controlling behaviour from boyfriends say these attitudes and values are promoted by media representations of women in advertising – the use of young women's bodies to sell things that give permission to young men to treat them as disposable objects - and by other men and older men in young men's lives, who criticise them for not being dominant or controlling enough (Towns & Scott, 2008).

A WHO study that looked at the prevalence and risk factors for domestic violence in several countries around the world found that the women were most at risk where there were traditional values that involved men's control and domination of women (WHO 2005). Coercive control has been identified as a feature of men's domestic violence towards women (Pence & Paymar, 1993; Stark, 2007). The language that men used to justify and excuse their domestic violence was found in New Zealand research to involve the language of dominance and entitlement (Adams, Towns & Gavey, 1995). Those New Zealand men who used more severe levels of violence were found to hold more macho ideas about being a man (Leibrich, Paulin and Ransom, 1995). This information will not be new to those of you who run programmes for men and who listen to their justifications for violence towards women. These programmes involved unravelling the gendered language of dominance and entitlement.

How is masculinity promoted in alcohol advertisements?

The gendered nature of alcohol advertising has, in the past, been identified as a public health issue that requires population-base interventions. Messages about what it means to be a man and the objectification and denigration of women associated with the dominant construction of masculinity saturate alcohol advertising and have been subject to extensive critique (Campbell, Law & Honeyfield, 1999; Messner & Monrez de Oca, 2005; Smith, 2005; Strate, 1992). Strate (1992) for example, said that these advertisements provide a 'manual on masculinity' and the masculinity that is promoted is not one that is good for women or men who do not fit this formula. The utilization of a problematic masculinity by alcohol advertisers is worrying for the prevention of domestic violence as many young men see drinking alcohol as a rite of passage into manhood.

There has been a noticeable shift in the ways men and women are shown in alcohol advertisements across time. In the 1950s and 1960s, the postwar years, ads began to promote lifestyle branding and a common image in these advertisements was the "the young or middle-aged, white, heterosexual couple" happily sharing a cold beer. In these advertisements there was an acceptance of clear gender roles with the man earning and the wife, the housewife,

providing the contented home environment (Messner & Montez de Oca, 2005, p. 1880). These images did not last and it is possible that they met with resistance from consumers who associated beer drinking with men.

By the 1970s women as wives or partners had largely disappeared from beer ads except as accessories in men's drinking places (Messner & Montez de Oca, 2005, p.1880). These advertisements occurred when the major social movements of feminism and civil and gay rights were in full swing and the shift in beer advertisements were considered to be a reaction to these movements. Researchers argued that these disruptions created anxieties amongst men that the practices associated with traditional white masculinity with its strong ties to authority and alcohol consumption would be overturned (Messner & Montez de Oca, 2005; Smith, 2005; Walker et al., 2009).

The result was the production of an imagined lifestyle, where men's leisure was primary and free of the disturbances of women, and beer - and plenty of it - was earned at the end of a hard day's work. Men were outdoors, cool and detached, and women, if present at all were admiring on-lookers or barmaids and largely irrelevant. There were large numbers of chest, buttocks and crotch shots of them that were dehumanizing of women (Hall & crum, 1994). These sexualized images of women in beer advertisements appear to have increased over time.

In recent decades another image of men has been produced in beer advertisements. This is 'the bloke' or the 'loser' man or average guy. This image appears to be an eroded version of the hyper-masculine man of the 1970s and 1980s: he privileges beer, mates, sport, heterosexuality, disdain of intimacy with women, and rejects non-traditional masculinity. (Wenner & Jackson, 2009). In these ads being a man involves distancing yourself from femininity (Smith, 2005, p.9). The loser must overcome some adversity in order to get access to beer and is always on the verge of being humiliated by his own stupidity. But this humiliation is offset by the safety of the male group (Messner & Montez de Oca, 2005, p. 1887) and doing stupid things is represented as humorous, adding to male status. Life with the boys is fun, full of silliness and exciting.

These ads have been described as working because they recognize that not many men can reach the standards of the hyper-masculine ideal that is portrayed for 'real men':

> "Instead there is a tacit wink to the viewer that this is assuredly not about the strapping hunk who effortlessly scores women, but about the everyday guy who sits around the house watching TV, gawks at women in strip clubs, and hangs out in the local bar with his buddies." (Smith 2005, citing Connell, 2001, p.16).

Women are presented as 'hotties' or 'bitches' (Messner & Montez de Oca, 2005). Hotties are the sexually desired fantasy objects and bitches are the bitch girlfriends. "Gender opposition" and "selfish consumption" are strong themes (Carlisle Duncan & Aycock, 2009, p. 248.)

What are the features of relationships that protect women from domestic violence?

The WHO (2010) has identified gender transformative programmes targeted at young men, and those that promote the intolerance of violence as effective in the prevention of gender-based violence. These programmes are about shifting young men's understandings away from traditional ideas about male dominance and control of women towards fairness and equity for women and men – promoting human rights in order that both men and women received fair, just and ethical cultural and social actions as of right. These programs work towards equality in relationships by getting young men to determine what is morally right, human, and just in relation to women and men.

Intimacy or close relationships have also been identified as those that prevent alcohol related harm. Adams (2010) identified the aspects of intimate relationships that are useful for prevention: closeness, commitment, compassion and accord (as opposed to discord).

Alcohol advertisements and what it is to be a man.

Prevention programmes that address men's domestic violence towards women through attention to practices of control or domination towards women will be undermined if there are other social and cultural influences that promote men's domination and control. Alcohol advertising may well be one such influence given the importance of alcohol to young men when they are moving away from parental control and attempting to establish themselves as independent men.

I suggest that those working on the prevention of domestic violence need to take a critical look at alcohol advertisements as a social and cultural influence on what it means to be a man and the associated implications for domestic violence. What are the advertisements saying about what makes a real man? How does alcohol advertising employ gender/masculinity to sell beer? Is the representation of what it is to be a man problematic for the prevention of domestic violence? How are women represented in these advertisements? Is there an argument to be made for addressing or banning alcohol advertising in order to reduce alcohol related harm and harm associated with domestic violence?

What is needed is critical reflection about what these alcohol advertisements are portraying as manly. Violence prevention workers and alcohol harm prevention workers need to:

1. Identify the identity and lifestyles that are portrayed for men in this/these ads.
2. Determine what these advertisements tell young men about how to be a man.
3. Determine if there any parallels between this way of being a man and the dominance, entitlement and control that are problems for men's violence towards women.
4. Determine what local communities can do to promote safe gender practices in advertising.

Conclusions

I suggest that if we want to promote safe gender practices we need to find where unsafe practices are promoted. Beer advertisements may be a site for unsafe portrays of masculinity to young men. Communities can interrupt cultural representations that collude with young men treating women badly by mobilising against harmful representations in alcohol advertisements.

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