

# What has masculinity to do with intimate partner violence?

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‘We don’t work with masculinity here, we work with individuals’. This was pointed out by a facilitator working in a perpetrator programme in Sweden during Gottzén’s fieldwork in 2010. The facilitator wondered if a focus on masculinity really could contribute to interventions on intimate partner violence. The programme was one of the first in the country working with partner-violent men and combined a feminist perspective with therapeutic and cognitive behavioural interventions. Despite his own feminist standpoint, and despite the fact that the majority of the perpetrators they worked with were men, the programme had in recent years started to refer to their clients in gender-neutral terms. They were called ‘perpetrators’, ‘users of violence’ or ‘clients’, but never ‘violent men’ and definitely not ‘woman batterers’. The semantic change expressed a desire to make the programme more LGBTQ inclusive, but it also indicated a wish to offer abusive heterosexual cis women treatment. As a consequence, not only did this obfuscate the fact that their perpetrators were still mostly heterosexual men, to some extent it also undermined the feminist perspective that the treatment model was based on and which was the facilitator’s personal political standpoint.

The facilitator’s comment highlights several of the controversies featured in both research and interventions on men’s violence against women in intimate relationships. This book attempts to respond to his query about what masculinity has to do with violence and, more specifically, what contemporary, critical masculinity studies has to offer research and work on intimate partner violence. This chapter introduces the volume by first providing a brief overview of the role of feminism in research and work in the field, as well as introducing masculinity studies and how it has related to the study of violence in intimate relations. We then go on to present a general framework for the volume and the individual contributions.

### **Feminism and intimate partner violence work**

The interest in researching about, and working with partner-violent men emanates from the important efforts that feminists – particularly radical

feminists – developed from the late 1960s onwards. These ‘second wave’ feminists highlighted the role that physical and sexual violence has in maintaining patriarchy; that is, the unequal power relations between men as a group and women as a group. One of the earliest theorists, Kate Millet (1970), argued that the ‘expectations the culture cherishes about his gender identity encourage the young male to develop aggressive impulses’ (p. 31) so that violence and sexual conquest become male traits. Certainly, patriarchy does not always need to be maintained through direct violence, and violence is often seen as ‘the product of individual deviance’, but it would not be upheld, Millet posits, ‘unless it had the rule of force to rely upon, both in emergencies and as an ever-present instrument of intimidation’ (p. 43). While white, Western radical feminists argued that all women shared a common experience of being subordinated to patriarchal power, socialist and black feminists pointed out that our experiences of violence differ depending on, for example, race, class and sexuality. Black men could consequently not only simply be seen as perpetrators of sexual violence, but also as victims of racism and state violence. The Combahee River Collective (1977/1997) therefore argued that, ‘we struggle with Black men against racism, while we also struggle with Black men about sexism’ (p. 65). Similarly, postcolonial theorists pointed out that Western anti-violence activism has racist and colonial inclinations where ‘white men are saving brown women from brown men’ (Spivak, 1988/1993, p. 93). These critiques pointed to the need for a more nuanced and integrated understanding of violence, one in which people’s complex relationships to different dimensions of power and social inequalities are considered (Crenshaw, 1991).

The women’s movement’s pretension to combat men’s violence against women, especially in intimate relationships, also led to the establishment of women’s shelters worldwide. These were mainly based on voluntary work and on the idea of women supporting other women. Other forms of anti-violence and anti-rape activism also developed, which attempted policy and legislative change. Soon activists realised that stricter legislation was not sufficient to end violence, but that men and boys also must learn to behave differently towards women and girls. While it has not been uncontroversial, treatment efforts with partner-violent men have increased since the first programmes started in the late 1970s (see Hester & Newman in this volume).

Historically, such indicative interventions have been based on social work, psychology and public health frameworks, combined with feminist perspectives (e.g. Pence & Paymar, 1993). Yet, treatment with partner-violent men has mostly not kept up with contemporary shifts in feminist theorising and rarely incorporates a nuanced understanding of masculinity (Hall, 2019), but largely takes a one-dimensional perspective on gender and power (Boonzaier & van Niekerk, 2018; see also van Niekerk, in this volume). There are, however, some exceptions to this, as contributions to this

volume illustrate (see Beiras; and Päivinen, Siltala & Holma). Today there is also widespread criticism of feminist approaches to perpetrator treatment, which are accused of being too 'ideological' and 'biased', while mainstream psychological interventions are argued to be 'scientific' and 'evidence-based' (e.g. Dixon, Archer, & Graham-Kevan, 2012; cf. DeKeseredy, 2011). A central concern has been that since women can also be perpetrators of violence, treatment needs to be gender-inclusive.

In contrast to many indicative violence interventions, universal violence prevention initiatives often have more outspoken gender transformative and intersectional approaches aiming at decoupling masculinity from violence, control and dominance and attempt to activate men and boys as advocates for change (Flood, 2018; Peretz, 2020; see also Flood in this volume). The work with men and intimate partner violence has become increasingly professionalised. While the early generation of activism was largely voluntary, anti-violence work is now a possible career path, at least in the global North (Messner, Greenberg & Peretz, 2015).

In tandem with the development of violence prevention efforts, intimate partner violence research has grown and been established as an interdisciplinary field. Conceptual discussions have been important. Intimate partner violence often refers to physical, sexual or emotional abuse and controlling behaviour perpetrated towards an intimate partner, regardless of gender (WHO, 2012). The term is somewhat problematic as it obscures the gendered nature of violence and that abuse in 'intimate' relations therefore needs to be contextualised as an expression of inequality and gender power. Feminist researchers and activists therefore rather use concepts such as 'violence against women' or 'men's violence against known women' and, when the context of the relationship is important, 'intimate partner violence against women' (see Hearn, this volume, for further conceptual discussion). With that said, the term is still useful as it highlights a specific form of violence while opening up the possibilities for considering different categories of victims, including LGBTQ persons and heterosexual men.

Another conceptual question is what constitutes an 'intimate partner'. Who we see as a partner depends largely on the cultural setting, but also on class, ethnicity, sexuality and age. For instance, intimate partner violence is commonly seen as perpetrated between adults living in a relatively stable heterosexual relationship with children, a 'typical' nuclear family. In order to highlight the specific characteristics of young people's intimate relationships, many researchers use the term 'dating violence'. This concept is, however, troublesome since not all societies have the same dating traditions as those that have been historically prevalent in US youth culture. In addition, it is argued that sexual practices among American college youth have changed radically in recent years and a 'hookup culture' has emerged where casual sexual relationships with fellow students are normalised (Wade, 2017). Hookup is perhaps not a completely novel phenomenon

but seems to have become more widespread among both youths and adults of different sexualities, partly influenced by dating apps such as Tinder and Grindr (Haywood, 2018). This somewhat new sexual landscape both blurs the boundaries of what an ‘intimate partner’ is and creates other risks than, for example, violence in long-term relationships (Hirsch & Khan, 2020).

If early research on intimate partner violence was heavily influenced by feminist perspectives, the field has diversified considerably during the last 30 years. This could be seen as a success story where a central feminist issue has been taken up and embraced by mainstream researchers and policy makers. The fact that the UN Secretary-General António Guterres (2020) addressed intimate partner violence as part of the gendered consequences of the COVID19 crisis very early in the course of the pandemic, illustrates how feminist perspectives have become more or less mainstream. However, one could also argue that feminist perspectives have become less influential in the field, which is partly due to the increased global influence of the public health and epidemiological framing of gender-based violence (Bowman et al., 2015) and that contemporary feminist research now includes a wide range of topics and areas of concern beyond violence against women. This has resulted in comparatively little feminist theorising on partner abuse and, in particular, a dearth of studies focusing on men and masculinities in this context.

## **Masculinity studies and violence**

Masculinity studies, sometimes also called critical studies of men and masculinities, emerged in the 1980s as a response to academic feminism. Much of this scholarship has been developed within the humanities (Gottzén, Mellström & Shefer, 2020), but the research that focuses on violence has primarily been sociological or criminological and inspired by socialist feminism (see Berggren, Gottzén & Bornäs, this volume). This tradition has explored power relations between men and women but particularly emphasised relations among men. It also largely follows a conceptual distinction between sex and gender, where the former is understood as biological and relatively stable while the latter is seen as culturally, socially and historically contingent. From such a perspective, masculinity is not an inner, stable identity or a sex role that characterises all men in the same way, but rather a ‘configuration of gender practice’ (Connell, 1995, p. 77). Consequently, there are multiple forms of masculinity that relate to each other within a hierarchy. Historically, gay men have in many societies been subordinated and ‘the repository of whatever is symbolically expelled from hegemonic masculinity’ (p. 78). As a consequence, gay men have often been exposed to physical and sexual violence from heterosexual men, as well as state violence through imprisonment and pathologisation. More recently, masculinity scholars have started to explore violence in gay relationships and pointed

out the need to understand it in a societal and gendered context (see Javaid, this volume).

Violence, in a gender context, may constitute a resource to ‘accomplish’ masculinity and gain power and status in relation to women and other men (Messerschmidt, 1993). Other masculinity researchers, especially those inspired by poststructuralism, have problematised this and highlighted the ambivalent relations men have to both violence and masculinity (e.g. Jefferson, 1994). Violence is not always a way of gaining a higher status as a man, since different forms of violence are understood in distinct ways. Some violence – especially against women – may at times be questioned and instead be used to create hierarchies among men where perpetrators are portrayed as unmanly, deviant or even monsters (Gottzén, 2017; Hearn & Whitehead, 2006; Pascoe & Hollander, 2016). Although masculinity scholars recurrently point out that masculinity is accomplished, they tend to tie it to what men do. Queer theorists have therefore made a case for separating masculinity from male bodies and seeing it rather as practices and discourses that people can embody in different ways and to varying degrees (Halberstam, 1998). This has opened up a field of research on trans men and masculinities, and some have started to explore trans men’s experiences of violence (Abelson, 2019; see also Rogers, this volume).

Even though prominent masculinity scholars – such as Raewyn Connell, Jeff Hearn, Michael Kimmel, Michael Messner and James Messerschmidt – have discussed masculinity and intimate partner violence to some extent, comparatively few masculinity researchers explore violence within the context of intimate relationships specifically (cf. Boonzaier & van Niekerk, 2020). In fact, not even violence in general seems to be a particularly popular issue within masculinity studies. The most common keywords for papers published in the leading journal *Men and Masculinities* between 1998 and 2017 include sexuality, family, culture and sports – but not violence. Moreover, there has not been any special issue devoted to the topic since the inauguration of the journal (Cserni & Essig, 2019). This feature, however, may reflect a particular geo-political dimension as work focused on ‘southern’ men and masculinities tends to foreground issues of violence, frequently in ways that continue the problematic stereotyping of marginalised men more generally (cf. Boonzaier & van Niekerk, 2020; and see Boonzaier, Huysamen & van Niekerk in this volume).

Another way of exploring the relationship between masculinity studies and intimate partner violence research is by examining how the latter relates to masculinity theory. In a review article, Edward Morris and Kathleen Ratajczak (2019) analyse studies that have used a masculinity perspective published in one of the major violence journals, *Violence Against Women*. While the term is used in many papers, it is rarely defined and most do not apply masculinity theories. Those who explicitly analyse masculinity rather make use of generic feminist theories, such as doing gender (West & Zimmerman,

1987) and performativity theory (Butler, 1990). The most common frameworks are patriarchy theory and Ellen Pence and Michael Paymar's (1993) theory of power and control. More specific masculinity theories used include male peer support theory (DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 2013) and hegemonic masculinity theory (Connell, 1995). Morris and Ratajczak (2019) argue that even though Connell's framework has not frequently been used explicitly, it has nevertheless had 'a strong impact on studies of violence against women' (p. 1988). The generalisability of the review may be questioned given that it only includes papers published in one journal and primarily research developed in the Anglophone world while much masculinity scholarship on violence against women developed in the global South and non-English speaking countries is missing. However, it nevertheless indicates that there is much scope for increased dialogue between work on intimate partner violence and masculinity studies.

### **Towards a feminist perspective on men, masculinity and intimate partner violence**

It is not only masculinity studies that has shown a relatively cool interest in intimate partner violence, the same seems to apply to social and cultural theory in general. As Hearn (2013) points out, social theory has been quite interested in analysing social and institutionalised violence, but there is a 'relative marginalization of domestic violence' (p. 155). When renowned theorists explore violence, they tend to focus on state violence, war, symbolic violence and violence in public settings (e.g. Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Žižek, 2008). This, we argue, is based on, and reproduces a hierarchy between private and public spaces that has characterised Western culture and scholarship. Public violence – that is, men's violence against other men – is visible, spectacular and exciting, while private abuse is hidden, mundane and apparently less interesting.

Unfortunately, the same could be said also about feminist theorising. As noted, sexual violence took centre stage in second-wave feminism. Feminist sexuality research was so closely related to issues of violence that in the mid-1980s the leading queer and masculinity scholar Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1985) argued that it was time to liberate sexuality research from radical feminists since they tended to equate heterosexuality with violence. Today, there is obviously much feminist violence research, but few leading feminist theorists pay particular attention to intimate partner violence (but see Alcoff, 2018; Gqola, 2015), and violence can hardly be said to be pivotal in feminist theorising in the way it was in the 1970s. While there is an ongoing feminist theorising of intimate partner violence, it has largely been ignored in mainstream feminist theory and the issue is mainly discussed in designated violence journals, which contributes to the field's isolation from the mainstream (cf. Bjørnholt, 2021). A recent exception is the influential

feminist theorist Judith Butler (2020), who in *The Force of Nonviolence* points out that theories of violence also need to deal with the intimate sphere.

[A]ny account of violence that cannot explain the strike, the blow, the act of sexual violence (including rape), or that fails to understand the way violence can work in the intimate dyad or the face-to-face encounter, fails descriptively, and analytically, to clarify what violence is—that is, what we are talking about when we debate over violence and nonviolence.

(p. 2)

Although Butler emphasises the importance of theorising and discussing intimate partner violence, she almost exclusively devotes the book to state and political violence, how refugees who died on the Mediterranean become ‘ungrievable’ and the police violence that black men and women in the US experience. These atrocities are obviously important to reflect on, but given the violence that women – of all classes, races and ages – are subjected to, a feminist theorising of partner abuse is needed more than ever. At the end of the book, Butler (2020) nevertheless discusses violence against women, particularly femicide, and provides examples of feminist activism against this form of violence that links cis and trans women’s experiences, such as the Argentine movement ‘Ni una menos’ against ‘machista violence’, which has spread to other parts of Latin America. This could be compared to the way trans activism often has been argued to oppose the interests of the women’s movement in the global North, as trans women have not been seen as ‘proper’ women and trans men as traitors that reap the benefits of patriarchy (Hines, 2019). While not all feminists are critical of trans people, they have not been central in feminist theory and anti-violence activism, despite high rates of victimisation of trans people (see Namaste, 2009).

Butler further argues that femicide must be seen as ‘sexual terror’. This is reminiscent of the arguments that Rachel Pain (2014) has presented about domestic violence as being a form of ‘everyday terrorism’, since it creates fear and circumscribes the victim’s mobility in similar ways as public terrorist attacks. Here, Butler highlights a crucial contribution of a feminist, intersectional perspective on intimate partner violence. She sees violence as the use of force and control, but unlike official definitions – and in line with radical feminism (e.g. Kelly, 1988) – she also draws attention to society’s response (and non-response), as well as the continued sexual subjugation of women generally. Femicide is then seen as part of a social structure where women are, or become, ungrievable.

If *femicidio* is understood as producing sexual terror, then these feminist and trans struggles are not only bound together (as they should be) but linked to struggles of queer people, of all those fighting homophobia,

and of people of color who are disproportionately the target of violence or abandonment.

(Butler, 2020, p. 190)

Butler's argument points to a number of issues that are important when exploring men, masculinity and intimate partner violence, and that guide the contributions of this volume. To start with, the gendered division between private and public violence is problematic; partner abuse needs to be conceptualised as part of more global and 'structural' forms of violence. Violence works on different scales. This is particularly evident in the current antifeminist and men's rights activism in many countries. These movements organise against feminists that oppose violence against women and that work for policies that protect abused women (see Blais, this volume). One strategy is to use intimate partner violence against men to argue that feminism has gone too far and that a 'feminist state' trivialises men as victims of violence (see Bjørnholt & Rosten, this volume). But men's rights activists and a younger generation within the 'manosphere' also use direct violence and harassment to intimidate women and feminist activists (Condis, 2018).

Second, there is no contradiction in highlighting the violence perpetrated against different groups in society in various ways, while also focusing on issues of gender and power. It is possible to draw attention to violence against LGBTQ people and heterosexual men, while also highlighting that cis men are over-represented as offenders. The dilemma that the prevention programme discussed above faced between working from either a gender-neutral or gender power perspective is erroneous, since gender and sexuality – as social structures – affect individuals regardless of gender identity or sexuality. However, *how* individuals are affected is another issue. We therefore need to theorise about men, masculinity and intimate partner violence while keeping the intersectional entanglements of identities and social inequalities in mind, otherwise we run the risk of reproducing classed-based and racist hierarchies (see Gottzén & Berggren in this volume). Theory, research and interventions geared towards men's violence that do not deconstruct subjectivity and systems of oppression may, at worst, reproduce new social inequalities.

Third, intimate partner violence needs to be linked to the rest of our lives and, consequently, to other forms of activism. Gender-stereotypical identities and higher acceptance, and use of violence in general, increase the risk of being abusive in intimate relationships (Herrero et al., 2017; Jewkes et al., 2011; Yamawaki, Ostenson & Brown, 2009), and gender transformative violence prevention has proven to be more effective than interventions that do not problematise gender (Barker et al., 2010). This suggests that it is not enough just to help men to cease their abuse, or teach men and boys to never use physical or sexual violence in the first place. Men need to change in other parts of life as well and masculinity itself needs to be questioned. Physical

and sexual abuse are only facets of a more encompassing ‘violent hierarchy’ (Derrida, 2004, p. 39) of gender binary that seems to structure masculine ontology and contribute to gender oppression. But while the long-term aim is the deconstruction of such binaries, specific interventions may be more limited and rather use them strategically to highlight inequalities (Jewkes et al., 2015).

## **The contribution of the volume**

This book foregrounds scholarship on men and masculinities in the context of intimate partner violence. By doing so, the objective is to revitalise feminist theorising and research on partner abuse, and, more specifically, to bring together the fields of masculinity studies and feminist studies of intimate partner violence. Men’s diverse positions in relation to partner abuse call for nuanced and intersectional approaches where specific groups of men are highlighted but where they – and masculinity in general – are deconstructed and problematised. In this book, we do this by bringing together contributions on men and/or masculinities of different sexual orientations and gender identities from the global North and South. It also gathers research on experiences and responses to violence, as well as research on interventions at different levels of prevention.

While many of the other chapters theorise men, masculinity and intimate partner violence, the book starts with contributions that more specifically speak to the project of developing theory towards rigorous critical analysis of men, masculinities and intimate partner violence. In his chapter, Jeff Hearn reflects on his own pioneering and lifelong work on the topic. He provides a personal theoretical, political and reflexive account of various engagements with men, masculinities and ‘violences’, bringing together critical studies on men and masculinities, violence studies and organisational studies – and the difficulties it involves. In keeping with the frame of the book, this chapter keeps the thread on ‘intimate partner violence’ and ‘masculinities’ although these are concepts that Hearn criticises. Preferring his own concept, ‘men’s violences to known women’ he emphasises a gendered, plural understanding of intimate partner violences, and argues for a strong openness to how such violence interconnects with and blurs into many other forms and contexts, such as militarism, war and online violence. In the next chapter, Kalle Berggren, Lucas Gottzén and Hanna Bornäs trace historical and contemporary feminist perspectives on violence, moving from radical feminism to socialist feminism and intersectional approaches emergent from black feminist thought. They also discuss three areas that have made important inroads into working with masculinities and partner abuse: ‘accounts research’, psychosocial criminology and social network approaches. These approaches are reviewed to illustrate the opportunities they provide to bolster the important dialogue between masculinity studies and feminist perspectives on

intimate partner violence. While Berggren and colleagues primarily discuss literature from the global North, Floretta Boonzaier, Monique Huysamen and Taryn van Niekerk foreground the argument that theory and activism must be broadened to also include the experiences of those in the majority world. Drawing from their feminist work on men, masculinities and gender-based violence in South Africa, they make a case for reading the complexities of men's lives, histories and contexts and also argue that this work has reached across geopolitical contexts. The theoretical tools they centre include intersectionality and feminist decolonial theory, arguing that the former allows for the full appreciation of the complexity of men's lives and how they are shaped by different structural oppressions, while the latter tackles the racist and sexist nature of coloniality and the ways it shapes the lives of partner-violent men.

Anti-violence activism has been successful in bringing about legislative change regarding violence against women in many countries, and feminism and gender equality are accepted and at times even embraced by men in some societies. However, there is also an antifeminist backlash and Western culture could be characterised as being 'postfeminist', where gender equality is argued to be achieved and there are therefore no structural obstacles for women (McRobbie, 2009). In such a cultural landscape, men's relation to masculinity and intimate partner violence is not straightforward. In their contribution, Gottzén and Berggren consider the meanings of men's embracing of gender equality in the Swedish context and what this means for men's violence against women partners. Drawing on narratives of young men that have used physical or sexual violence in intimate relations, they argue that we need to move from a perspective of masculinity based on typologies and binaries, and instead advocate a poststructuralist and post-humanist approach. They see masculine ontology as always contradictory and contingent and consisting of a multitude of materialities, practices, discourses, ideals, affect, human and non-human bodies. As a consequence, partner-violent men may incorporate both traditional and 'inclusive' values and practices but also, importantly, violence may come to be considered the property of 'other' men. In her chapter, Melissa Blais studies antifeminist discourses in Canada and how they affect feminist organisations working with female victims and analyses the tactics of 'masculinist' activists in undermining the expertise of feminist participants. Blais identifies the rhetoric on 'parental alienation' and the 'false memories syndrome' in disputes over custody and visitation arrangements for children, as well as the assumption of 'gender symmetry of violence between partners' as important rhetorical tools for antifeminist contestation.

The following three chapters explore men as victims of intimate partner violence. Two of them explore gay and trans men's experiences of abuse and how their vulnerability is exacerbated by their marginal positions. Ali Javaid theorises the intersection between masculinities, romantic love and violence

in gay relationships. Using sexual violence as his core focus, he analyses the relationship between hegemonic, non-hegemonic, dominant/dominating masculinities in gay relationships, critically examining the ways in which gay men navigate through these different masculinities at different times, places and contexts. He argues that male rape legitimates an unequal relationship between gay men by constructing the perpetrator as masculine and the victim as feminine. Michaela Rogers explores trans men's experiences of intimate partner violence through the conceptual lens of cisgenderism, seen as a systemic, multi-level and pervasive prejudicial ideology based upon notions of gender normativity. Trans people are often invisible in official statistics and reporting on intimate partner violence, or they are subsumed into the LGBTQ umbrella. Rogers' important contribution addresses this gap, applying an intersectional approach to explore the subjectivities and specificity of partner abuse for trans men with different backgrounds, and who embody and practice different forms of trans masculinity. Heterosexual men's experiences of intimate partner violence have been a controversial issue in violence research. To some extent, struggles over framings and knowledge feed into antifeminist movements and masculinist politics around issues of intimate partner violence. Margunn Bjørnholt and Monika Rosten's chapter sheds light on the interface between masculinist politics and men's stories of victimisation. Through highlighting the ambiguities between men's rights organisations' mobilisation of collective emotions bolstering an antifeminist narrative of men as a discriminated group, and male victims' personal stories and feelings, Bjørnholt and Rosten elucidate the complex relations between the personal and the political in contemporary masculinist politics.

The need to involve men and boys in anti-violence and gender equality work more generally is increasingly emphasised, for instance, manifested in the internationally recognised White Ribbon and UN HeForShe campaigns. At the same time, programmes targeting partner-violent men and fathers, as well as prevention programmes aimed at teaching men and boys to identify and intervene against sexism, misogyny and violence, have emerged globally. This raises a number of issues, including best practice when involving men and boys in anti-violence work, programme efficacy and – particularly – the role of feminist and intersectional perspectives in prevention. The last five chapters in the book speak to this overall theme and critically engage with the ways in which work on universal, indicative and selective levels has been undertaken. In their chapter, Marianne Hester and Chris Newman explore the notion of 'treatment' in relation to programmes for men who are violent to their female partners, and the tensions this exposes with regard to the gendering of violence. They argue that the treatment of social problems exemplifies the shift towards more medicalised and individualised models of crime and social control, which are also reflected in parallel discussions regarding masculinities and intimate partner violence. The chapter

looks at the development of perpetrator programmes in these shifting discourses, raising questions about the ‘theory of change’ underpinning such programmes. Synthesising international scholarship and practice, Michael Flood’s chapter maps the strategies which are effective in engaging men and boys in preventing and reducing violence against women. Flood also explores the dilemmas and difficulties of contemporary efforts to engage men and boys, including how to inspire their initial interest, how to minimise defensiveness and backlash, how to address the intersections of gender with other forms of social inequality, and how to challenge privilege. In their chapter, Helena Päivinen, Heli Siltala and Juha Holma focus on interventions with fathers who have been violent in the family, arguing that working with the men’s identity as a father is a central issue in tackling family violence. Drawing on research with violent fathers in Finland, they show how a specific intervention tool, namely positioning theory, can be used to assist these fathers in taking responsibility for and changing their violent behaviour. Taryn van Nierkerk explores the discourses of masculinity and intimate partner violence drawn upon by social workers based within an organisation in South Africa. Through its interrogation of the meanings expressed by social workers in relation to their counselling of partner-violent men, this chapter grapples with the politics of difference and meaning of humanising engagements in the counselling space, engaging with what these issues mean for the development of a decolonial feminist intervention model. Van Nierkerk also suggests ways in which to move forward in terms of building theory from local forms of knowledge in the context of anti-patriarchal and anti-violent interventions for partner-violent men. In the final chapter, Adriano Beiras explores the challenges in working with violence against women in Brazil, specifically engaging with interventions for violent men. Through a nuanced reflection of the cultural and social specificities in Brazil as well as the distinctions between different parts of the country, he discusses the epistemological and methodological approaches that can be applied to increase the efficiency of perpetrator programmes as well as to broader social change.

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