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Introduction

In the context of a wider scholarship on men and masculinities and increased popular writing about men, there has been a growing recognition of the emotional and psychological issues facing men in contemporary societies. In the field of social work, there have been a number of important texts published in the last few years (Pringle 1995; Pease and Camilleri 2001; Christie 2001; Featherston et al. 2007). In therapy and counselling literature as well, there have been some key books published (Rowan 1997; Brooks and Good 2001; Glicker 2005; Wexler 2009). There have also been numerous books focused on working with particular categories of men including gay men, prisoners, fathers, disabled men, immigrant men, older men and young men, as well as men in particular fields such as men’s health, sexuality, child protection, violence and depression.

Approaches to working with men will be shaped by how we understand masculinity and men’s lives. Depending upon whether masculinity is framed primarily from a biological, psychological or sociological perspective, it will impact on the ways of understanding the issues facing men. It will certainly influence whether the focus is more on men’s pain or men’s privilege (Featherstone et al. 2007).

Biological and essentialist perspectives on men and masculinities, tend to legitimate male privilege and gender inequalities. Stephen Goldberg’s (1973) The Inevitability of Patriarchy is perhaps the best historical example of this argument. Goldberg argues that differences in concentrations of particular hormones give men an ‘aggression advantage’ over women. He believes this ‘aggression advantage’ means that men will inevitably dominate women, as ‘the hormonal makes the social inevitable’ (Goldberg 1973:49).

The central argument here is that if inequality is based upon some natural order, opposition is futile. In this view, there is no point in trying to equalise the genders because patriarchy is regarded as an inevitable product of biology. Nor is there any point in trying to change the basis of gender relations because it will only upset the natural order. Consequently, in this view, the feminist vision of a gender-equal society is doomed to failure. This socio-biological analysis is still ‘alive and well’ in much contemporary popular writing about men (Moir and Moir 2003; Biddulph 2008).

Psychological and sex role perspectives on men and masculinities posit that male behaviour results from customary expectations that are internalised by men. Thus, men are encouraged to ‘break… out of the straight-jacket of sex roles’ (Farrell 1975: 8) and ‘to free themselves of the sex role stereotypes that limit their ability to be human’ (Sawyer 1974: 170). This implication is that men can transform themselves without reference to wider social processes, the male role being something we could dispose of, allowing the human being in the man to emerge. It is important for [male counsellors] to understand how their own male privilege reproduces unequal gender relations if they are going to be able to challenge men’s complicity in reproducing violence and abuse.

One of the major limitations of sex role theory is that it under-emphasises the economic and political power that men exercise over women. Male and female roles are seen to be equal, thus
enabling men and women to engage in a common cause against sex-role oppression. What is also consistently missing in sex-role theory is the extent to which men's gender identities are based upon a struggle for social power. There is no evidence that liberating men from the traditional male sex role will lead to men relinquishing their privilege and social power.

Sociological perspectives on men and masculinities emphasise that gender and masculinity are socially constructed throughout life. FollowingConnell (2000), I believe that it is most useful to understand men and masculinities as involving six key dimensions: 1) multiple masculinities that arise from different cultures, different historical periods and different social divisions between men; 2) different positions reflected in these multiple masculinities in relation to power with some forms of masculinity hegemonic and dominant, while other masculinities are marginalised and subordinated; 3) institutionalised masculinities embedded in organisational structures and in the wider culture as well as being located within individual men; 4) embodied masculinities that are represented physically in how men engage with the world; 5) masculinities produced through the actions of individual men; 6) fluid masculinities that change in relation to the reconstructive efforts of progressive men and in response to changes in the wider society.

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Therapeutic, counselling and educational work with men is also often divided by whether men are framed as perpetrators in relation to violence against women in the home, sexual violence, sexual harassment, violent crimes or as victims in relation to emotional inexpressiveness, health issues, separation and divorce, substance abuse and work-related stress. Work with men has also been differentiated in terms of whether it has been supportive of feminism and gender equality or non-feminist (or even anti-feminist) and oriented towards reproducing traditional gender roles and inequalities.

Feminist counselling with women has been guided by the recognition that women's individual struggles are located in oppressive social arrangements (Goodman et al. 2004). Likewise, pro-feminist counselling with men must locate men within the context of patriarchy and the divisions of class, race, sexuality, age and other forms of social inequality, while at the same time exploring ways in which patriarchal belief systems become embedded in men's psyches (Pease 2009).

Therapeutic work with men that does not acknowledge the existence of gender power inequalities is likely to reproduce men's dominance over their female partners. The failure to view men's relationships with women in the context of a wider relational and structural context will end up endorsing men's sexism and coercive control over women's lives (Vecchio 1998). If therapeutic work with men is to encourage greater empathy and respect for women it will need to address gender-based inequalities in their relationships with women. As Rowan (2007) points out, the 'the playing field is not equal'. Men are positioned uphill with the wind at their backs and women are downhill facing the wind.

It has been increasingly recognised that white counsellors need to develop a critical consciousness about the way in which they benefit from white privilege and how they may inadvertently perpetuate racism in their counselling practice (Ancis and Smyrski 2001; Black and Stone 2005; Ryde and Lago 2009). If individual development is shaped by socio-political forces, then male counsellors need to become more aware of how their own male subjectivities are influenced by the dominant discourse of masculinity (Goodman et al. 2004).

Much of the writing that is concerned with counselling men tends to neglect male privilege and power. More work thus needs to be done to encourage male counsellors to address male privilege in counselling sessions with men. It is important for them to understand how their own male privilege reproduces unequal gender relations if they are going to be able to challenge men's complicity in reproducing violence and abuse. Towards this end, this article provides an introduction to some of the key issues.

As men, we must examine our lives to become more aware of the privileges we experience every day simply because we are men, as a precursor to changing what we do.

I first engaged with the issue of male privilege in response to being challenged by women about my entitlement as a man. As a straight white man, reading feminist theory and being in a relationship with a feminist woman, I was forced to confront some of my experiences of male privilege. My partner would come home from women's consciousness-raising meetings and challenge my limited participation in housework and my over-commitment to paid work at the expense of our relationship. I had to work out what these challenges would mean not only for my personal relationship, but also for my chosen career of social work and my political activism on issues of social justice. This engagement with gender privilege would take me into theorising and research with men about the pathways by which some men become pro-feminist and how to analyse men's power and resistance to change (Pease 2000).

Theorising Male Dominance and Male Privilege

Like other social divisions of inequality, gender is manifested at structural and cultural levels of social organisation, as well as at the level of interpersonal interactions and in the identities and subjectivities of individuals. Therefore, masculinities and
male dominance are best understood through the levels of the material world, discourse and the psyche. Rather than positing a single theoretical frame, it is most useful to straddle the tensions in these multiple levels of analysis. Consequently, feminist-informed materialist, discursive and psychoanalytic perspectives together offer the most promising insights.

At the psychic level, we need to understand the ways in which patriarchal ideology is internalised in the psyches of men and how this ideology interacts with material conditions to shape men’s experience. We also need to examine the relationship between subjectivity and the unconscious (Pease 2003). As Rowan (2007) argues, the process of transforming the male psyche will need to involve ‘unconsciousness raising’ as well as consciousness raising because some elements of hegemonic masculinity are deeply buried in the unconscious. Rowan uses the term ‘patripsyche’ to describe the formation of patriarchal patterns in the psyche. These internal patterns mirror the external oppressive structures, which he believes are kept in place by an oppressive male ego.

**For many men, being in control is an essential part of what it is to be a man.**

Feminists from the 1970s onwards used the concept of patriarchy to articulate the overarching framework of the various forms of male domination and men’s systemic exploitation of women. Johnson (1997) identifies three dimensions of patriarchy: male-dominated, male-identified and male-centred. Male dominated refers to men’s authority and control over the major social, political, economic, religious, legal and military institutions. Male-identified refers to the cultural ideals about good, normal and desirable forms of masculinity and the various ways in which women are devalued in our society. Male-centred refers to the way in which men’s experiences come to represent human experience more generally.

Because patriarchal discourses are so commonly shared and pervasive and are often internalised unconsciously, their oppressive dimensions are rarely recognised. As most men’s beliefs about male superiority are experienced as being natural and normal and are institutionalised and culturally exalted, men generally do not notice their advantages or the negative effects these advantages have for themselves as well as for women. They may even express opposition to blatant forms of sexist discrimination but not see the relationship between sexism and male privilege.

**Sexism and Coercive Control**

Mederos (1987) differentiates between the institutionalised patriarchal system, which refers to the structural advantages and privileges that men enjoy, and the personal patriarchal system which involves men’s face to face interactions with women both at home and in the public sphere. He makes the point that because all men are socialised within patriarchy, they will all believe to some extent that they have a right to make normative claims upon women. Men will differ in relation to what claims they believe they can make and how they may enforce them. These claims include deferential treatment, unpaid domestic labour and child care, sexual services and emotional support.

Men thus come to believe that they deserve something from women which they then experience as an entitlement. The totality of these entitlements and claims are what constitute male privilege. This sense of entitlement may not necessarily be conscious and it may only come into their awareness when they are deprived of this unreciprocated service.

While some men have learnt to see the oppression of women, far fewer men have learned to see male privilege. Belief in male superiority and male authority are deeply embedded in most men. Brittan and Maynard (1984) argue that all men are exposed to socialisation experiences that turn many of them into ‘male supremacists’. In this view, men are under pressure to internalise beliefs and feelings which naturalise their commitment to the subordination of women.

One of the key features of patriarchy is control. Mederos (1987) argues that all men are controlling to some extent and that there are no substantial differences between men who are violent to women and men who are not. Some men engage in control over women in response to their own experience of being controlled by other men at work. Given that most men judge their manhood in part by how much control they have, Johnson (1997) argues that these men’s control of women serves as a form of compensation for their lack of control at work.

Although men are privileged, it does not mean that men do not experience pain in their lives.

For many men, being in control is an essential part of what it is to be a man. To challenge men’s coercive control of women will be even more difficult than preventing men’s violence because it involves challenging the normative foundations of men’s privilege and their sense of entitlement to make claims upon women (Stark 2007). Challenging the legitimacy of men’s power over women takes us to the heart of men’s sense of entitlement.

**Understanding Male Privilege**

We cannot overcome sexism and patriarchal arrangements if we do not acknowledge and address male privilege. When gender inequalities are acknowledged, they tend to be discussed more in terms of women’s disadvantage than male advantage and privilege. Even many pro-feminist writers who recognise gender inequality do not theorise male privilege (Carbo 2001). So rather than talking in terms of women’s lack of resources, we should thus talk more about men’s surplus of
resources (Connell 2002). Eveline (1994; 1998) has drawn attention to 'male advantage' in contrast to 'women's disadvantage', pointing out that focusing solely on women's disadvantages and ignoring male privilege normalises and legitimises masculinist standards.

If we do not recognize the unearned privileges we receive as men, we will be unable to acknowledge the impact of these privileges upon the women in our lives. Schacht (2003) adapted McIntosh's (1992) list of white privileges to identify the various ways in which he benefited from male privilege. Some of the main unearned benefits he identified are listed below.

- I can be reasonably sure that most of the jobs I might apply for I will not only have a better chance of getting them than a comparably qualified woman, but I will paid more than a woman doing the same job.
- When I read a newspaper or watch the nightly news, I can largely assume that the vast majority of the stories will be about the accomplishments of men.
- Should I enjoy watching sports, I am virtually guaranteed that all the important most skilled participants will be men.
- If I am married or cohabiting, I can count on my 'wife' doing most of the housework and being responsible for most of the child care should we have children, regardless of whether she works or not.
- Should I physically assault my 'wife,' I can reasonably be assured that I will largely not be held accountable for my actions.
- When venturing out in public, I can reasonably rest assured that I will not be sexually harassed or sexually assaulted.
- Should I feel the desire to search for positive role models in positions of authority, nearly everywhere I look I can easily find a male to fill this need.
- When attending school I can often count on the teacher (he or she) to perceive my inquiries and presence as more important than the females that are in attendance.

- When undertaking conversations with women, I can largely count on my voice being heard more often than both of us and my comments being more validated.
- Should I choose not to partake in any of the above conditions, the mere fact that I can make this choice is in itself indicative and quite telling of the privilege upon which it is predicated.

Men gain these benefits whether they actively support male domination or not. Even those proactive against men's privileges will continue to reap the benefits of them. As men, we must examine our lives to become more aware of the privileges we experience every day simply because we are men, as a precursor to changing what we do. Towards this end, privilege lists such as these are important in bringing these issues into the foreground.

The list of privileges by Schacht also reveals him to be a middle-class white man. His relationship to patriarchy is different from a working-class black man. Indigenous men, immigrant men from culturally diverse backgrounds, working-class men, disabled men and gay men do not benefit from patriarchy in the same way as other men.

Many men deny that they have any privileges because they are subordinated by class, race or sexuality and so on. However, even if they are marginalised by other social divisions, they still maintain gendered advantages over women within their marginalised communities. Furthermore, Messner (2003) has identified that some of the strategies marginalised and subordinated men use to resist their class, sexuality and race-based oppression can often reproduce men's domination over women. It is thus important to maintain the tension between an analysis of systemic gendered oppression and differentiated forms of male power flowing from other social divisions (Haywood and Mac an Ghaill 2003).

The Unintended Consequences of Men's Privilege

Although men are privileged, it does not mean that men do not experience pain in their lives. Men can be both privileged and miserable at the same time. Kaufman (1994) argues that men's lives involve both power and pain and that much of men's pain arises from men's power and privilege to constitute what he calls 'the contradictory experiences of men's power.' Thus the patriarchal dividend is not totally successful in advantaging men because men experience emotional and physical costs associated with their dominant position (Whitehead 2007). Connell (1995) acknowledges that there are disadvantages for men associated with their gendered privilege. For Connell (1995) the many of the costs for men are by-products of the advantages they gain from the patriarchal dividend.

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When the costs of masculinity are documented in popular books about men, however, they are rarely framed in terms of the unintended consequences of men's advantages. Populist writers of books about men talk about a 'crisis in masculinity' as men find their traditional privileges and symbolic power being eroded (Horrocks 1994).

A number of writers have expressed concern about the ways in which men's physical and mental health issues have been used to position men as the 'new disadvantaged' (Connell 2000a; Whitehead 2002; Riska 2006; Pease 2009) Whitehead (2002) argues that 'the male crisis discourse' distorts the connections between hegemonic masculinity and men's health. The
idea of masculinity in crisis may itself be a strategy enacted by men to reinforce men's power (Allen 2002). Connell (2005) also makes the point that most of the costs associated with patriarchy for men are not necessarily experienced by the men who gain most of the benefits. Many current men's health policies and programs fail to recognise the social and economic context of men's lives and the impact of class and race divisions on their health (Connell 2000; Bentley 2007; Pease 2009).

**Undoing Men's Privilege**

The concept of doing gender, first introduced by West and Zimmerman (1987), focuses our attention on the interactional dynamics that men engage in to reproduce our privileges. This idea challenged the structural deterministic approaches to gender that seemed to leave little room for resistance and change. Undoing gender, which describes interactions that challenge gender inequality (Dutsch 2007), allows us to identify how we can challenge the reproduction of male privilege.

**Male counsellors... as dominant group members... have a responsibility to become more aware of their own gender privilege as part of the process of challenging men's dominant identities**

While feminism offers men the promise of a socially just and gender equal world, most men have developed a defensive reaction to feminism. As men, we remain threatened by the autonomy of women. Having to meet women in their autonomy and independence is a challenge to the domination men have assumed. It is as if it remains difficult at some level, whatever our rationalisation, not to feel that women are 'ours'. Possessiveness is so deeply embedded within our culture and so internalised in our identities that it is hard to work it through. Even to acknowledge the depth at which feminism threatens us as men would be a first step (Seidler 1991).

It is often difficult for men to acknowledge the oppression of women because they are implicated in it. Gender is differentiated from many of the other social divisions because it is experienced in the context of intimate relationships at home (Rideway and Carrell 2004). When it comes to men's wives, mothers, sisters and daughters, it is likely that they have participated in the subordination of these women who are a part of their life. Many men are reluctant to acknowledge that male privilege exists because they fear they will have to face guilt and shame for their part in maintaining their privileges (Johnson 1997).

In Connell's (2000) view, the primary motivating factor for men to support gender equality, will come from their 'relational interests' winning out over their egoistic interests. It is men's relationships with partners, daughters, mothers and sisters and so on that will provide the basis upon which men will come to support change (Connell 2000). Such a stance requires the development of what Kimmel (2000) calls 'democratic manhood', where men will take a stand against gender injustice on the basis of moral and ethical commitments.

**Conclusion**

If therapy is successful in enabling men to be more effective and to be in tune with their capabilities, it may enable them to be more dominant. Thus, if male counsellors are not addressing the pressures men are under to conform to hegemonic notions of masculinity, they may unwittingly reinforce men's oppressive relationships with women (Rowan 1997). It is therefore important to acknowledge these influences and explicitly address male privilege (Gilbert and Rader 2002). Male counsellors have an opportunity to raise men's awareness of male privilege and unearned entitlement when working with them on gender issues. Also, as dominant group members, they have a responsibility to become more aware of their own gender privilege as part of the process of challenging men's dominant identities (Black and Stone 2005). This means becoming aware not only of sexism at the individual level but also unearned male privilege at the structural and discursive levels (Case 2007).

If male therapists are not to reproduce gendered inequality, they will need to guard against complicity in reproducing violence and coercive control. This means that men who counsel men need to find ways of making their work accountable to women. Tamasese and Waldegrave (1996) at the Family Centre in New Zealand developed a model of cultural and gender accountability to enable people from different cultures and men and women to address cultural and gender bias in their work. They reversed the traditional mode of accountability where white people and men control the decision making. In this model, those in privilege need to be able to listen to the experiences of those who are marginalised.

**Male counsellors have an opportunity to raise men's awareness of male privilege and unearned entitlement when working with them on gender issues.**

In the Family Centre model, dominant and dominated groups form into separate caucuses who meet on their own prior to and after dialogue group meetings (Tamasese et al. 1998). The dominant group needs to discuss what the dominated group have raised and work out how to best respond to their concerns. Hall (1996) at the Dulwich Family Therapy Centre in Adelaide outlined how this model of partnership accountability was operationalised in relation to an issue raised by women workers about men's practices.
In these models of accountability, the more privileged group has to bear the concerns of the less privileged group and together they must find a way to resolve the issues. The premise is that dominant group is committed to shifting their attitudes and practices towards equality with the dominated group. For this process to work, the dominant group must privilege the views of the dominated group above their own.

It is important that counselling with men locates men’s lives within an understanding of patriarchal gender relations and that such work is committed to transforming those gender relations. While men’s gendered belief systems are only a part of the processes that perpetuate gendered inequality, they are amenable to intervention at the individual level and hence challenging men’s abusive beliefs makes an important contribution to respectful and egalitarian practices (Featherstone et al. 2007).

References