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The politics of gendered emotions: disrupting men’s emotional investment in privilege

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Abstract
This paper explores the implications of the neglect of emotions in critical masculinity studies and profeminist masculinity politics. This neglect in part results from feminist and profeminist critiques of the literature on emotional inexpressiveness as a tragedy for men that ignores male privilege and men’s social power. To focus on men’s emotions is seen by some profeminist commentators as psychologising men at the expense of sociological understandings of men’s social power. However, in neglecting the place of emotions in men’s lives, critical masculinity studies has overlooked the ways in which men’s emotional attachment to privilege can perpetuate oppressive gender relations and male violence against women. By exploring men’s emotional investment in unequal gender relations, the article outlines ways in which emotions can also be used as a catalyst to disrupt men’s attachment to male privilege.

Keywords: men’s emotions, emotional inexpressiveness, privilege, pedagogy of discomfort
Introduction

Much of the populist writing about heterosexual men (Bly 1990; Keen 1991; Biddulph 2004) has focused on their emotional inexpressiveness and restricted emotionality as key arenas of change for men. Connell (2000) has termed the set of interventions that respond to men’s restricted emotionality as ‘masculinity therapy’, whereby men are encouraged to overcome their emotional illiteracy and face their vulnerabilities to achieve higher levels of intimacy with women, children and other men. One of the implications of this form of masculinity politics has been to underplay and sometimes ignore male privilege and men’s social dominance and to portray men’s difficulty in expressing emotions as a form of victimhood that contributes to their physical and mental health problems (Sattell 1989; McLean 1996). While populist writing about men focuses on men’s emotions and neglects their social power, critical masculinity studies and profeminist masculinity politics have neglected the role of emotions in men’s lives (Rutherford 1992; Seidler 1997; Petersen 1998; Connell 2000).

In contrast to the populist writings about men referred to earlier, profeminist perspectives (Pease 2000a; Connell 2005; Hearn & Pringle 2006; Ruspini et al. 2011) locate men’s lives in the context of patriarchy, hegemonic masculinity and the social divisions between men. Profeminist approaches involve men in taking responsibility for their own and other men’s sexism, and a commitment to work with women to end men’s violence (Douglas 1993). They acknowledge that men benefit from the oppression of women and draw men’s attention to the privileges they receive as men and the harmful effects these privileges have on women (Thorne-Finch 1992).

Profeminist masculinity studies have also been critical of the association of emotions such as rage and anger with men’s violence, as these are argued to provide excuses for men to deny responsibility for their actions (Gondolf & Russell 1986; Hearn 1998; Pease 2002a). However, profeminist activists and critical masculinity theorists have often failed to grasp the importance of men’s emotionality, especially in relation to their emotional attachment to privilege, for perpetrating violence and maintaining unequal gender relations.

In this paper, my aim is to explore men’s emotional investment in male supremacy on the basis that men’s emotional attachment to power has been neglected in critical studies on men and masculinities. Towards this end, I revisit the literature on men and emotions, as it pertains to heterosexual men in the West, in the context of understanding men’s privilege and unearned advantage.

In conclusion I outline pedagogical strategies that I have used in memory-work research and patriarchy awareness workshops in Australia that have elicited men’s emotional responses to gender injustice. I locate these strategies within a ‘pedagogy of discomfort’ (Boler 1999) and I suggest that such strategies may be useful in challenging men’s resistance to acknowledging and addressing male privilege and abusive practices in Western contexts more broadly.
My references to ‘men’ throughout this paper pertain specifically to white, straight Western men, whereas the mainstream literature on men and emotions tends to discuss men as a homogenous category that fails to acknowledge diversity and difference in men’s lives. While critical masculinity studies has moved beyond the assumption of a single unified masculinity, most of the literature on men’s emotional inexpressiveness and its association with dominant forms of masculinity is premised on an unstated presumption of heterosexuality and whiteness. There is little acknowledgement in this literature on the emotional expressiveness of gay men or the influence of race, ethnicity or regional location on men’s emotions. Thus, the reader needs to be reminded that the references to men in the literature on male inexpressiveness refers to white, straight men in Western contexts. Of course these men are not homogeneous either and are differentiated by age, class, propensity towards violence and so on.

Furthermore, as individual men are differentially located in relation to the patriarchal dividend (Connell 2000), they also have differential access to personal and societal power. Power is not equally shared among men and men’s class, race and regional locations influence the nature of their dominance over women. The fact that men are divided among themselves along ethnic and class lines, and enact competing versions of masculinity within the same ethnic or class group, only makes the task of analysis more difficult (Brittan 1989). An awareness of these differences between men needs to be considered in addressing men’s power and privilege. However, notwithstanding these differences between men, we should not lose sight of men as a gender and the reality of systemic gender inequality.

Why emotions are of interest to a critical masculinity theorist

Sociologists recognise that emotions are reflections of macro-societal processes as well as individual psychology. This is of particular significance for critical masculinity studies (Berezin 2002). Emotions provide an important connection between the psyche and subjectivity of the individual on the one hand and the wider social order on the other. Hence, I reject the biological and organismic view of emotions (for example, Clarke 2011) which ignores cultural and social contexts, in favour of a socially constructed view of emotions (Galasinski 2004), which locates them within structured inequalities of power.

The literature on the sociology of emotions also challenges the dominance of the disembodied Western male mode of scholarship (Williams 1998). The contrast between rationality and emotions is seen to be part of the Western male intellectual tradition of scholarship (Nussbaum 2001). The masculine Western subject has been associated with thought and reason, whereas emotions have been associated with femininity (Ahmed 2004). It has been argued that the overrepresentation of male academics among authors of studies of the international political economy and structural dimensions of the social order, rather than in studies of emotions and the personal lives of men and women, is a by-product of this (Duncomb & Marsden 1993).
I argue in this paper that while some of men’s emotions are involved in the reproduction of male privilege and power, these emotions can also be used to motivate men to interrogate their own individual and collective privilege. I argue that emotions are a site of political resistance to oppression and privilege. Consequently, they have a relationship with social justice and they can play a key role in transforming gender relations.

**Revisiting men’s emotional inexpressiveness**

There is a considerable body of writing in masculinity studies on men’s emotions and claims about their limited capacity for intimacy. Many masculinity scholars have written about claims of men’s emotional suppression and emotional conflict, primarily during the 1980s and 1990s (Balswick 1982; McGill 1985; Brooks 1998; Brody 1999 in the United States and Middleton 1992; Rutherford 1992; Rowan 1997; Seidler 1997; Galasinski 2004; Walton, et al. 2004; Hanlon 2012 in the United Kingdom). Most of the literature on men and masculinity that is concerned with the men’s movement or personal change in relation to white heterosexual men emphasises men’s emotional inexpressiveness. In most of the literature cited above, men are said to be out of touch with their feelings and to need to express more emotions to allow them to be vulnerable.

This notion of the unemotional man is a contentious issue in the wider sociology of emotions literature. Studies reveal, for example, that men sometimes report having feelings such as grief, sadness, fear and vulnerability and that they choose not to disclose them (Duncomb & Marsden 1993). Furthermore, Galasinski (2004) challenges the view that men do not feel or do not express emotions. He believes that this literature essentialises masculinity in arguing that most men are unable to express or talk about their emotions.

The language often used to describe men’s limited range of emotionality is that of ‘the inexpressive male’ and ‘restrictive emotionality’. Balswick (1982) states that ‘male inexpressiveness’ can be categorised according to at least three criteria: 1) whether feelings are present in the man; 2) whether there is an attempt to express feelings; 3) whether the potential object of expression is a woman or a man. An expressive man is one who has feelings and is able to recognise them and verbally express them to both women and men. Steiner (1986) refers to this capacity to understand and deal with emotions as ‘emotional literacy’.

Various empirical studies have demonstrated that men report experiencing fewer positive emotions, such as affection, love and joy, and fewer negative emotions, such as fear (McGill 1985; Duncomb & Marsden 1993; Brody 1999; Galasinski 2004; Hanlon 2009). Men’s difficulty in expressing emotions is seen to have a number of adverse personal and social consequences for men’s intimacy with women, their capacity for nurturant fathering, their friendships with other men, and for themselves (Pease 2002a).
Many women have expressed dissatisfaction with their intimate relationships with men. A constant request from heterosexual women is for men to express themselves more than they do. Most heterosexual men have been challenged for not giving enough of themselves in their relationships (Seidler 1997). Seidler (1991, 1994, 1997, 2005) has written extensively about men’s emotional dependence upon women and men’s inability to comprehend the emotional work involved in maintaining intimate relationships.

Men’s interest in emotionality came to the fore because of the importance placed by many masculinity studies writers on the personal aspect of men’s lives. Men’s emotional illiteracy was seen by Rutherford (1992) to represent a silence or a sense of loss in the dominant construction of masculinity, whereby men were unable to develop a language or knowledge of emotions. Men were thus encouraged to search inwards to find that which was lost, or to engage in what Middleton (1992) referred to as ‘the inward gaze’.

Much attention is also given in this literature to the toll that emotional inexpressiveness has on men. Men’s physical health is placed at risk because men are unable to recognise the physical cues to illness and disease (Coyle & Morgan-Sykes 1998). The argument is that if men are not connected to their feelings, they will not be attuned to bodily indicators of physical illness. Balswick (1982) believes that this inability to express emotions has negative consequences for men because it robs them of potentially rich emotional experiences.

In this view, men are lonely and isolated from close emotional attachments. After years of devaluing and denying their feelings, they are said to end up being unable to feel anything (Seidler 1991). Some writers have argued that this approach to men’s emotions has pathologised men to the point of referring to them as having a form of male alexithymia (Walton 2007), which is a diagnostic term used to describe people who have difficulty expressing their feelings and talking about them (Tenhouten 2007).

While being able to express one’s emotions is viewed as being important, the ability to manage one’s emotions is also crucial (Robinson & Hockay 2011). Heterosexual men in particular are often under pressure to repress any emotions that might make them seem to appear vulnerable. Middleton (1992) argues that men need to deny their emotions so that other men will not take advantage of them. Further, Walton and colleagues (2004: 413) argue that ‘To experience emotions is human; to control their expression is masculine’. While the social difference in men’s lives is not acknowledged in this literature, white, straight Western men’s behaviour in relation to emotions is shaped by the gendered expectation that to express certain emotions is unmanly.

Lack of emotional fulfilment in men’s lives is often cited by writers on masculinity as a reason for men to change. Thus, changing men’s emotional lives has become the focus of concern in some forms of masculinity politics, particularly within the men’s liberation movement of the 1970s and 1980s and the mytho-poetical men’s movement of the 1990s and 2000s, where men were
often portrayed as victims who were more disadvantaged by gender roles than women (Walton 2007). However, such a view of men’s emotions ignores the gendered power inequalities within which emotions are produced.

A key problem for some feminist critics with the focus on men’s emotional inexpressiveness and emotional capacities was that it was seen as being self-indulgent and ‘letting men off the hook’. Robinson (1996: 231) was suspicious of talking about men’s emotional change into a ‘new man’ who was more emotionally expressive as ‘softening the face of patriarchy’. It was said that men could use discussions about their wounded male psyche as a distraction from analysing their privilege and power (Robinson & Hockay 2011).

While some might argue that these critiques do not do justice to genuine emotional trauma experienced by some men, one of the problems with much of the men’s emotions literature is that it ignores the effect of gendered power relations. Men involved in personal healing groups and therapy tend to place their emotions into the foreground in ways that neglect the political dimensions of gender relations (White & Peretz 2010). My interest here is how men’s emotional expression or inexpression is related to the reproduction of their patriarchal privilege.

Many women have reported that they experience men’s emotional distance as a form of gendered power, whereby men choose to withhold emotions and intimacy as a way of having control over women (Robinson 1996). In the context of how heterosexual men relate to heterosexual women, many men fear that if they are seen to be too emotional, it will undermine their superiority over women because it challenges the hegemonic expectation of male rationality and strength (Coyle & Morgan-Sykes 1998). Some men even talk about loving and intimate behaviour as feminine (Pease 2002a).

Sattell (1989) argued that many of the theorists who focus on male inexpressiveness misunderstand the origins of men’s emotional illiteracy. Their focus on men’s inexpressiveness as a form of tragedy does not challenge the social forces that construct these phenomena. For Sattell (1989), men’s inexpressiveness is a prerequisite for preparing them for their positions of power and privilege, as it enables men who wield power to reduce their emotional involvement in the consequences of their practices. It is important that those who make decisions that affect the lives of others are able to close their eyes to the pain they have caused. Thus, in this view, men’s inexpressiveness is a means to an end rather than an end in itself. It is part of men’s capacity to control others, and it can assist them to maintain their power and privileges. Thus, when men fail to develop and express their feelings, they are more able to oppress others. Men’s emotional indifference allows them to inflict pain on others without having to face the consequences (McLean 1996). Consequently, we must explore the male privilege that resides behind the emotional inexpressiveness associated with white, Western, heterosexual men.
While men’s pain associated with negative emotions is real, they are not simply victims of restricted gender roles. Rather, they sometimes repress their feelings because they do not want to be vulnerable to others. When men abuse power, if often requires them to be desensitised to their emotions (McLean 1996). This enables these men to perpetuate gender inequalities and abusive practices. Such emotional brutality plays an important role in the reproduction of gendered power structures. McLean (1996) observed that military training is an exemplar of this type of masculine socialisation, whereby soldiers are encouraged to dehumanise and demonise the enemy. In military training, soldiers are socialised to cut off their emotions to enable them to kill on demand (Donovan 2007).

Revisiting emotions and men’s violence

This view of the unemotional man neglects the fact that men are frequently seen as aggressive, angry and jealous – emotions that often precede violence (Walton 2007). Violent men are told that they have to control these emotions as part of the process of addressing their violence (Galasinski 2004).

Anger management models of violence intervention rely primarily upon the management and control of men’s anger. The aim of these models is to help men to learn to recognise the cognitive, physical and situational cues to their anger so they can redirect it in positive ways. The argument is that, if men learn to control their anger and learn other responses to stress, they will be able to react to personal frustrations without resorting to violence. These anger management models attribute violence to extreme, out-of-control anger, and it is now one of the most widely used methods to counsel violent men (Saunders 1989; Harbin 2000; Hall 2008; Faupel 2011).

However, this raises the question of whether men’s violence needs to be underpinned by violent emotions (Galasinski 2004). While men’s violence is sometimes accompanied by violent emotions, such emotions do not constitute the cause of the violence. Gondolf and Russell (1986) advanced six major criticisms of anger management as a strategy for working with violent men. They argued that the anger management approach to violence intervention: 1) implies that the victim provokes anger and precipitates the abuse; 2) fails to account for the premeditated controlling behaviours associated with abuse; 3) tends to diffuse the responsibility for the abuse and prolong the violent man’s denial; 4) is often represented as a ‘quick fix’ that may endanger women who have been abused; 5) frequently lets the community off the hook; 6) does not address the normative reinforcements for wife abuse and violence towards women in general.

Violence is often a response by men to situations where their positions of privilege are threatened (Walton et al. 2004). Many men believe that they have a right to exercise power over women and that ‘violence is a legitimate form of punishment in the exercise of that authority’ (McGregor & Hopkins 1991: 121). Empirical research demonstrates that violence occurs most often when men try to make their partners comply with their wishes; for example, when partners
refuse to cook, clean, take care of children or have sex (Kurz 1989). Research also shows that men use violence against their partners to stop them saying or doing something of which they disapprove, or to punish them for doing something they do not like (Paymar 2000). In this context, anger and violence maintains men’s privileged subject position, especially when this position is under threat (Walton et al. 2004). Thus, violence and abuse play important roles in reproducing traditional manhood. However, the role of emotions in shaping men’s dominant attitudes towards women (Donovan 2007) and reproducing gendered inequality has been left unexplored.

The upshot of this research is that it suggests that men make a choice regarding when and with whom they are going to become violent. It is important then not to confuse the emotion of anger with the decision to become violent. Anger is not the cause of men’s violence towards women (Pease 2002a). Emotional explanations for men’s violence are often presented as an excuse, and in this way they minimise men’s responsibility, agency and accountability for their actions in relation to women. Because emotions are so often used by men as an excuse for their violence, engagement with men’s emotions has not been a central part of profeminist programs to challenge men’s violence (Donovan 2007).

### The role of emotions in reproducing gender inequality

One of the problems with the vast literature on emotional literacy and emotional intelligence is that it does not address the relationship between emotional behaviour and classed, gendered and racialised positioning (Boler 1999). Drawing upon Foucault, Burkitt (2002) considered the relationship between power and emotions, and he emphasised the importance of studying the emotional dynamics of the exercise of power. He believed that emotions are connected to the status and power of particular groups that are divided by class, gender, race and other social divisions. While drawing upon a different theoretical tradition, Kemper (1990) made a similar argument about the links between power and emotions some years earlier.

Therefore, one’s position in the social structure is likely to have a significant effect on emotions. Those in positions of privilege who have the deference of others are likely to experience positive emotions associated with the compliance of others. In contrast, those who need to accommodate the power of others are more likely to experience negative emotions (Turner & Stets 2005). Of course these are not mutually exclusive groups, given that many people occupy positions of both privilege and subordination. Hence, people’s emotional experiences will be shaped by their occupation of and movement between these contradictory positions. However, the more powerless one is in general, and across many social positions, the greater the likelihood of having unpleasant emotional experiences and the greater the limitation in being able to manage emotions (Williams 1998). For example, Skeggs (1997) identified the increased levels of emotional distress experienced by men and women in the working class as a result of dealing with the insecurities of life.
This approach suggests that power inequalities between men and women are likely to be causally related to the different emotions they experience. Brody (1999) observed that men and women have different emotional connections to power. She argues that while most women experience power through a sense of accomplishment, men are more likely to experience power through the control of other people. She suggests that derogatory treatment of women by men may be related to these men's emotional need to enhance their own self-esteem. Men's sense of entitlement in relation to women is often premised on the view that men are superior to women and that they deserve more power and status. Brody (1999) relates the gendered division of emotional expression to gender roles, whereby women's caretaking role requires them to express warmth and vulnerability, while men's provider role requires aggression and pride and a decreased expression of warmth and vulnerability.

White and Peretz (2010) argue that our feelings about our beliefs underlie our identity. The very perception of justice or injustice elicits powerful emotions (Zembylas & Chubbuck 2009). Also, our emotional relationship to dominant social norms and exploitative social practices perpetuates those norms and practices. Boler (1999) explored how people become invested in particular social structures to the point where any challenge they face is experienced as a personal threat to their very existence. Consequently, when we challenge social injustice, we also subvert our emotional attachment to those injustices (Zembylas & Chubbuck 2009). Thus, while emotions are involved in the reproduction of structural inequalities, they can also play a part in their transformation (Turner & Stets 2005).

The role of emotions in challenging oppression and privilege

Emotions are clearly involved in various forms of political protest and social action (Flam & King 2005). People’s emotions are related to what they perceive as the cause of the injustice that they are addressing (Jasper 1998). Emotions associated with subordination have been used by marginalised and oppressed groups to resist injustice (Boler 1999). Ahmed (2004) stated that tuning into our emotional responses to oppression could heighten awareness of the material conditions of subordination. Thus, emotions have been important in the politicisation of oppressed people. In part, this is because these emotions are connected to the politics of pain and suffering.

A key emotion expressed in oppositional politics by oppressed groups is anger (Holmes 2004). As people tune into their experiences of injustice, they often find their voice through anger. Anger also conveys the message, especially to power holders, that there has been some form of injustice committed (Lyman 2004). Anger has thus been important for marginalised groups to articulate their experience of both structural inequalities and the experience of misrecognition. However, when women have spoken out in anger about violence and abuse, they have often been dismissed as being too emotional and insufficiently impartial (Ahmed 2004). Emotional challenges to power and privilege are likely to evoke defensive emotional responses from people in privileged groups (Turner
& Stets 2005). The anger of subordinate groups often evokes angry responses from the dominant groups, as they perceive the threat it poses to their privileges. As Lyman (2004: 117) says in reference to dominant group responses: ‘I feel defensively angry when you suggest that I examine my privilege’.

Young (2011) argues that most of us are part of causal relationships that lead to structural injustice. Consequently, she advocates a social connection model which says that individuals bear responsibility for structural injustice because they contribute to the processes that produce unjust outcomes. Similarly, May (1998) argues that all men have an underlying moral responsibility to challenge patriarchy because they participate in it. In his view, when women are harmed by men’s practices, men who did not participate in those practices should feel tainted by them. Furthermore, men who share sexist attitudes share responsibility for the harms that result from those attitudes. Thus, May (1998) believes that men should feel some shame in, for example, men’s complicity in the prevalence of rape, through not speaking out against it.

Shame is often an emotion that arises initially when people first become aware of their privilege. In discussing Indigenous issues, Ahmed (2004) argued that the experience of shame is important in recognising how the practices and inaction of white people have caused pain and loss for Indigenous people. In her view, acknowledging shame is also important in healing and reconciliation. Thus, shame is a necessary response to the acknowledgement of the suffering of Indigenous people. For Jensen (2005), an anti-racist activist, the overwhelming feeling of acknowledging white privilege is sadness. Such an emotion is appropriate when we consider the level of racial injustice in our society (Pease 2010). While it is important to be aware of social difference in the experience of shame and oppression, I argue that there are commonalities in the emotional dynamics of the exercise of privilege.

One alternative to being moved by past and present injustices to oppressed people is to be detached from them and to claim that we are not in any way implicated in them. It seems as though, when challenged about their privilege, some people need to choose between guilt and innocence (Lyman 2004). Injustices are perpetuated when people fail to respond emotionally to the suffering of other people. Thus, inequality is reproduced by suppressing or encouraging particular emotions. Nussbaum (2001) observed that there are learned rules and impediments that affect whether we feel compassion for people. She refers to the gendered dimensions of these impediments that limit the ability of many men to feel compassion for women’s experiences.

Towards a pedagogy of discomfort

How can we use emotions to disrupt the process of men’s defensiveness and avoidance when challenging male privilege and men’s violence? Educating members of privileged groups about social injustice always evokes emotional responses ranging from excitement to resentment and anxiety (Zembylas & Chubbuck 2009). When men challenge the dominant norms and practices of
masculinity, they often develop a different emotional relationship to those norms and practices. Challenging men’s privilege is likely to elicit strong emotional responses, as it touches on their investment in maintaining their current position. Thus, it is important to consider the role of emotions in critical pedagogical strategies that challenge men’s violence and privilege (Kenway & Fitzclarence 1997).

What emotional patterns reproduce patriarchal attitudes in men? How do we develop interventions that can best challenge these emotional patterns (White & Peretz 2010)? While a number of writers in critical pedagogy (Boler 1999; Ahmed 2004; Zembylas 2007; Zembylas & Chubbuck 2009) have identified emotions as being important to social justice education, emotions are largely ignored in profeminist and anti-violence work with men.

Critical pedagogies to challenge privilege need to disrupt cherished beliefs. They need to interrogate the ways in which privileged positioning informs the ways in which we experience the world (Zembylas & Chubbuck 2009). To challenge one’s sense of self-interest involves a process of becoming unsettled, and strategies are required for this purpose. Consequently, I develop a ‘pedagogy of discomfort’, as identified by Boler (1999). By ‘pedagogy of discomfort’, Boler is referring to the emotions that may arise when cherished beliefs and assumptions are challenged, including fear of change, anger and fear of loss of one’s identity.

Engaging men’s emotions in pedagogies that challenge their privilege

I propose two related methods of engaging men’s emotions in challenging their privilege. The first strategy is to foster social empathy in men by encouraging their understanding of the consequences of their privilege and structural power over women.

A practice that I have used to explore men’s power and privilege in the context of diversity and difference is the facilitation of Patriarchy Awareness Workshops based on the Racism Awareness model (Katz 2003). I first developed these workshops with two other profeminist men in the early 1990s when I was a member of Men Against Sexual Assault (MASA) in Melbourne. I had undertaken Racism Awareness Workshops developed by Action for World Development (an Australian ecumenical movement for justice and peace). The purpose of these workshops was to heighten the consciousness of white people about institutional and interpersonal racism and to encourage participants to take responsibility for challenging this racism. I had been inspired by these workshops and had very powerful emotional responses to many of exercises we engaged in. I subsequently came to believe that some of the ideas used to challenge white supremacy would also be useful in addressing men’s privilege and men’s violence against women.

Since the 1990s, I have facilitated hundreds of these workshops as both part of gender awareness and gender equality training within workplaces (including local councils, church-based organisations, schools, universities and the corporate sector) and as interventions in community-based and social movement
organisations and political parties. In all cases, the participants were recruited from the ranks of the respective organisations. Sometimes participants were invited to select themselves in and at other times the workshops were required by the workplace as part of professional development.

During the years that I have been facilitating these workshops, I have engaged with a diversity of men across all ages, occupations, class backgrounds, ethnicities, sexualities, religions, family statuses, bodily facilities, world views and propensity for violence. As noted earlier, while the men are thus differentially located in relation to the patriarchal dividend (Connell 2000), all men benefit from patriarchal privileges irrespective of their specific location within the gender order.

These workshops use presentations, small group discussions and simulation exercises to explore such issues as patriarchal culture, men’s experience of power and domination, alternatives to patriarchal power, the effect of men’s domination on women, social and personal blocks to men’s ability to listen to women, and visions and potential for men to change. The workshop provides an opportunity for men to move beyond their feelings of powerlessness in relation to gender issues and to identify ways of taking pro-feminist men’s politics beyond the arena of personal change to incorporate collectivist and public political action (Pease 1997).

One of these workshop exercises involves drawing a timeline from 5,000 BC to the present across sheets of butchers’ paper that are joined together. The sheets of paper are laid out on the floor, along with felt-tipped pens, in front of the male workshop participants who are sitting in a circle. The participants are asked to think about the ways in which men have used their power over women. This may be in the form of violence, discrimination or unequal treatment. It can include things that have happened to all women or a few women, things that have happened to women known to the participants, things that the men themselves have done, and things that they have heard about in the media or something from history.

Participants are given a few minutes to think and are then invited to come forward and name the event they want to record on the timeline and the date on which it occurred. After recording the event on the timeline, they return to their seats. Participants can come forwards as many times as they want, until there is nothing more they want to record. At the end of the exercise, the timeline is covered with numerous incidents of violence and abuse. There is no discussion during the exercise, and there is time at the end for quiet reflection on the events they have recorded. At the end of the exercise, the participants discuss their feelings about it. As the exercise always elicits experiences about women known to the men, it often involves vignettes of self-disclosure by the men about their own complicity in the abusive treatment of women. From my experience in running the workshops over a number of years, and from participant evaluations, the exercise always evokes emotional responses in the
men, ranging from sadness and distress to anger as they reflect on the extent of the processes of victimisation and violence against women throughout history, in contemporary society and in their own lives and the lives of women they love.

A second strategy to engage men to reposition themselves in relation to privilege and violence is to reconceptualise their emotional pain (Pease 2002b). Thompson (1992) argued that if men deny their own feelings and pain, they would not be able to acknowledge the pain of others. Furthermore, he argued that men will be unable to recognise their privilege unless their pain and hurt have been validated. For Donovan (2007), men need to gain the courage and ability to acknowledge and express ‘unmanly emotions’ that challenge dominant definitions of masculinity. He believes that if men owned and expressed their pain and fear, their experience of anger would be lessened and their violence reduced. Of course, the acknowledgement of men’s pain on its own is not enough; the plethora of masculinity therapy books and personal healing workshops for men are testimony to that. Rather, strategies are required for connecting men’s pain to their position in the social relations of gender.

A practice that I have used to reframe men’s pain is collective memory work, which is a method that builds on, and goes beyond, consciousness raising. The method was developed by Haug (1987) to gain greater understanding of the resistance to the dominant ideology at the level of the individual; to understand how people internalise dominant values and how their relations are colonised by dominant patterns of thought. Haug (1987: 13) described memory work as ‘a method for the unravelling of gender socialisation’. Her argument is that it is essential to examine subjective memories if we want to discover anything about how people appropriate objective structures.

By illustrating the ways in which people participate in their own socialisation and the construction of their own emotions, their potential to intervene and change the world is expanded. By making conscious the way in which we have previously unconsciously interpreted the world, we are more able to develop resistance against this ‘normality’ (Haug 1987) and thus develop ways of subverting our own socialisation. Further, by recounting histories of oppression, suffering and domination, those who occupy positions of privilege can find ways to recognise their privilege and pain, and can form alliances with those who are oppressed (McLaren & da Silva 1993: 77).

I have used this method to explore men’s socialisation into dominant attitudes and practices, and to explore resistance to the dominant ideology. In the context of a major research project on profeminist men (Pease 2000a), I developed four memory work exercises to explore aspects of internalised domination. These projects focused on father–son and mother–son relationships, and experiences of homophobia and objectification of women (Pease 2000b, 2000c, 2008).

Emotionally, this was a very powerful method. The men often broke down and cried as they read out their memories to the group, and other men reported tears running down their cheeks as they wrote the memories down in preparation for the meeting. In the research reported above, I found that memory work enabled
the participants to connect with their emotional histories, and it provided an opportunity for them to examine the emotional and psychological basis of their relationships with women and other men.

I was so impressed with the effect that the writing and telling of memories had upon the participants (including myself), and the conversations that flowed from them, that I have since set up memory work groups with no specific research agenda in mind. I have found that memory work has the capacity to initiate a process of ‘unconsciousness raising’, which brings the social dimension of one’s experience to the fore. (For a detailed account of the participants’ experience of memory work, see Pease 2000b.) Thus, while the emotional response to memory work has not been researched, it warrants further investigation as a pedagogical method of interrogating the emotional underpinnings of men’s adherence to privilege.

Conclusion

In this paper I have revisited the literature on men and emotions from a critical masculinity studies perspective to explore how men’s emotional investment in power and privilege reproduces gender inequality. In light of this understanding, I argue that men’s emotional investments in privilege can be disrupted and towards this end I outline pedagogical strategies for engaging men emotionally in processes that interrogate their privilege. If men are to be engaged in promoting gender equality, they need to recognise the role that emotions play in sustaining their privilege and address the barriers that inhibit them from experiencing compassion, empathy and sadness in response to the suffering of others. When men are emotionally engaged in the injustices experienced by women, they are more likely to interrogate their own complicity in women’s oppression and to recognise their responsibility to challenge their own unearned advantages.

References


