FOR YEARS WOMEN HAVE IDENTIFIED PROBLEMS WITH GENDER INEQUALITY AND discrimination within the workplace. The introduction of the Sex Discrimination Act 1984 (Cwth) legitimated such concerns by allowing often marginalised groups to seek legal protection against sexual harassment, discrimination practices, and unfair wage scales. The Act, however, did not become law without resistance by men from within the halls of Parliament and the offices of the corporate sector.

The resistance continues today as few women are willing to file charges against employers, supervisors, or teachers for fear of negative repercussions as well as time consuming and costly court procedures. Research has shown that less than 10 per cent of unwanted sexual behaviour incidents are reported and even less are prosecuted within a court of law (Holgate 1989). Such figures are problematic given that a great deal of research has repeatedly shown that a high percentage of women will be victims of unwanted sexual attention. One early study (Kinsey, Pomeray, Martin & Gebhard 1968) found that 24 per cent of women had been victims of some form of forced sexual contact during childhood. A study conducted by the United States Merit Systems Protection Board (1981) reported that
42 per cent of female federal employees had experienced sexual harassment at work. One Australian study found that 90 per cent of the surveyed women had been grabbed or fondled and 62 per cent had been physically restrained as a form of sexual harassment (Holgate 1989, p. 25).

It can be argued that resistance to anti-sexual harassment and discrimination legislation derives from patriarchal conditions within the workplace that include male control over decision making and policy enforcing systems that operate within hierarchical constraints. Such male power is threatened if there is an acknowledgment of the full intention of the Sex Discrimination Act. The resistance that develops can probably be best understood by considering the extent to which hegemonic masculinity creates and recreates divided gendered relations within organisations.

This paper will first identify the resistance men exemplify within the workplace to address matters related to sexual harassment and other forms of sexual violence. Secondly, a set of strategies for working with men in workplaces and other organisations will be described as a means of challenging that resistance. These strategies are a part of the ongoing work that Men Against Sexual Assault has been developing in Victoria and other parts of Australia.

**Hegemonic Masculinity in the Workplace**

Male norms and practices in the workplace over-emphasise strength, independence, aggression, group solidarity, rationality as well as a top to bottom flow of information for decision making processes. Such practices can be understood by recognising the manner in which hegemonic masculinity operates as a concept within organisational cultures.

Hegemony involves the construction of power relations and the velveteen of social groups that have the potential to maintain and create organisational cultures which keep women subordinated and marginalised. Various practices are used to establish power including an:

ability to impose a definition [to a] situation, to set terms in which events are understood, and issues discussed, and to formulate ideals and define morality (Donaldson 1991, p. 1).

Other practices may include agenda setting, gate keeping and the regulation of information flow. Furthermore, Connell (1987) has identified hegemonic masculinity through systems of punishment, enforcement, and the division of labour. Connell, suggests that hegemonic masculinity:

stabilises a structure of dominance and oppression [for] gender as a whole (Connell 1990, p. 94).

Combined, these practices allow for a systematic control of decision making processes which represents the means by which organisations can enforce policy statements including provisions mandated by anti-sexual harassment legislation.

Hegemonic masculinity can be realised in many forms beyond decision making processes including violent and aggressive resistance to women entering traditionally male-dominated organisational cultures. Recent studies reveal that most men feel resentment towards women for having sustained careers (Cockburn 1983). Bernard (1989) says that
men threaten women co-workers by showing hostility, denying them competence or presence, and transforming them in fantasy into whores, lovers, mothers, or any role that allows them to treat women as traditional females rather than peers.

Men have developed various strategies to try and keep women out of some workplaces or to 'keep them in their place' once they have entered the organisation. One of the ways in which they do this is by emphasising sex boundaries in friendship patterns and group relations. These single gender work cultures reflect and enhance job segregation. They help to preserve conventional views of proper masculinity and feminine behaviour while creating an environment for male bonding. (Bradly 1989) Such bonding reinforces gender inequality in the workplace by giving men access to practical sources of information and contacts while materialising and subordinating women (Cockburn 1983). A second strategy used by men to 'keep women in their place' is the use of sexual joking and obscene language. Trading obscene stories is a common practice when some men gather. To be equal, women must tolerate, join in and be prepared to tolerate in kind when sexual innuendo and jokes are used around them. (Cockburn 1983) Women must be prepared to engaged in coarse jokes and teasing and accept the male-based informal structure of the organisation (Fine 1987).

Many men seem to be unable to refrain from making sexually-charged remarks. From the point of view of the man, this is just playful sexual joking and teasing. Though, of course, many men are also trying to establish sexual relationships with women in the workplace.

Places of work provide opportunities for the search for mutual sexuality. A recent survey of 645 persons found that one-quarter had met their marriage partner at work (Hearn 1985). Thus, workplaces provide avenues for sexual advances. Further, when studies show that 74 per cent of workplace romances involve a man in a higher organisational position than the woman, mutual sexuality may be a half truth (Hearn 1985).

Men are generally allowed to behave in a blatantly sexual manner in workplaces, seemingly without impunity. Management tends to treat the expression of men's sexuality as largely unproblematic. Men's work environments are regarded as male territories. Thus, displays of heterosexual interest are seen as simply part of the territory (Starko 1988).

However, if women act in a seductive manner this is viewed as detrimental to the organisation (Gutek 1989). So women are required to desexualise themselves, while at the same time, maintaining some requisite level of silent femininity (Sheppard 1989). In fact, men endeavour to emphasise the womenness of their female co-workers as one of the ways to marginalise them. Further, sexual harassment is used as a strategy to try and drive women away from invading an all male environment (Starko 1988). Women more often report sexual harassment if they are working in non-traditional areas (Walby 1988).

The explicit sexist behaviour that men exemplify within the workplace and the use of decision making processes that reflect hierarchical constraints within organisations represent a form of resistance to the development and enforcement of anti-sexual harassment and discrimination policies. Such resistance is problematic but not insurmountable, as witnessed by the efforts of Men Against Sexual Assault. As an organisation that is comprised of men working towards eliminating sexual violence within a pro-feminist framework, the group has experienced some success in challenging men to become responsible and accountable for their sexist, racist, and homophobic behaviour.
Strategies for Change

Most men are not going to yield privilege, prestige, and power voluntarily. However, there is a need for a strategy that wins defectors from power systems (Cockburn 1983). Rape, battery, sexual assault, and sexual harassment will not diminish unless men can be persuaded or forced to change their expectations and behaviour.

MASA believes that society needs anti-sexist educational programs and workshops targeted at males in organisations where they congregate; this includes schools, universities, community groups, unions and workplaces. Towards this end, we have developed an educational program for addressing these issues. Although presentations will vary depending upon the age of the males, whether women are present in the group, the number of participants, the time available and the personal style of the facilitators, MASA endeavours to cover the following issues:

- examine the extent of the problem and report available statistics on the prevalence of sexual assault, while emphasising the under-reported nature of the crime;

- challenge the prevalent myths about rape; for example, 'I could not help myself', 'She asked for it', 'He is not normal', 'A real man does not take no for an answer', 'She deserves it', 'She lied', and 'She loved it' along with similar comments (Shapcott 1988);

- talk about the rape spectrum and encourage men to see rape not as an isolated act but part of a broad spectrum of behaviours and attitudes that involve all men;

- talk about the violent and sexist language that men use to talk about sex and how this language dehumanises our sexual interactions and makes sexual assault more acceptable (Biernbaum & Weinberg 1992);

- talk about socialisation into rape attitudes and emphasise that rape is not natural, by reference to anthropological studies distinguishing between rape-prone and rape-free societies (Sanday 1981). While not all men are rapists, every man has to some extent internalised the patriarchal construction of men's sexuality. As such, virtually every man learns to think like a rapist, to structure his experience of sex in terms of status, hostility, control and dominance (Beneke 1982), and this is illustrated by outlining the construction of the objectification, fixation, and conquering model of men's sexuality (Litewka 1977);

- discuss what men can do; for example, men can educate themselves, form a study group with other men to share ideas, start reading some of the recent literature about rape, and men can read personal stories of women who have been raped (Julty 1979);
Men can also examine their behaviour and how other men's behaviour makes women feel. By staring at women, joking about women as objects of gratification, harassing women, touching women inappropriately, men are participating in the gendered violence directed at women; therefore, all men need to monitor their behaviour and begin acting in ways that reflect equality with women (Stevens & Gebhardt 1984);

Men can also become an alternative model for other men. All MASA members come into contact with many men every day. To some men we can be important role models. When we begin behaving in appropriate ways, we show other men that there are alternative ways to interact with women and amongst ourselves (Stevens & Gebhardt 1984);

- talk to other men—once we feel we are developing an awareness and understanding of how we should behave as responsible men, we can begin sharing this information with other men. This can be done by discussing the implications of a sexist joke or comment with a friend. Alternatively, it may mean talking to other men about how one is offended by the comments or behaviour of other men (Stevens & Gebhardt 1984); and

- organise other men—once men have developed an awareness and sensitivity to the issue, they should actively organise other men. We suggest that they join MASA or form a MASA working group and use the media to communicate their ideas to other men (Stevens & Gebhardt 1984).

All of these strategies have been implemented with some success over the two years since the establishment of MASA. Most recently, we have separated these educational activities into a two day Patriarchy Awareness Workshop inspired by the Racism Awareness Project developed by Action for World Development.

The aim of the workshop is to address the problem of patriarchy and its impact on the lives of women, children and men. Patriarchy is defined as 'the institutionalisation of men's dominance over women and children in society'. Men's dominance is reflected in:

- male control over social institutions;
- men's greater access to opportunities to accumulate prestige and income in employment;
- patterns of male violence and abuse against women; and
- the allocation of privileges and obligations in heterosexual marriages.

The program of the workshop uses small group discussions, simulation exercises, and video to explore issues such as men's personal journeys in relation to gender issues; analyses of patriarchal culture; men's experience of power and domination (hegemonic masculinity); alternatives to patriarchal power; the impact of men's domination on women; social and personal blocks to men's ability to listen to women; and the visions, obstacles, and potential for men to change.
It is the policy of MASA to invite and pay feminist women working with the survivors of men's violence to observe and monitor the workshops. This procedure is to acknowledge that patriarchy is created by men and maintained by men to benefit men. Thus, when men get together, even if it is to critically analyse and challenge patriarchy, subtle forms of male bonding may develop. Feminist observers help us to keep the process on track and reinforce our view to participants that men's practices with other men should be accountable to women.

Conclusion

Men have resisted legislation that attempts to equalise status and opportunities in workplaces. This resistance can be conceptualised within a framework that recognises hegemonic masculinity whereby men attempt to systematically control, dominate, and 'keep women in their place' within originational cultures. However, we believe that workplaces and other organisations where men congregate provide suitable environments to challenge men's sexist attitudes and practices towards women in both the workplace and beyond.

Men are more likely to change if they are encouraged by their male peers and provided with appropriate role models. One of the facts of patriarchy is that men are more willing to listen to other men. Through educational programs such as those conducted by MASA, many men have come to recognise the need to become more accountable and responsible for their own controlling behaviours and sexist attitudes.

If we are going to end the many ways in which men do violence to women, it will require a major transformation in consciousness among men. MASA endeavours to be one small step in that direction.

References


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