

WORKING WITH MEN: REPLY TO CAVANAGH AND CREE

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I am writing in reply to Cree and Cavanagh's response to my review of their book, **Working with Men: Feminism and Social Work** (see **Scottish Affairs**, Winter 1988, pp.82-84).

In their response, Cree and Cavanagh directly address one paragraph to my review and then re-iterate the feminist objectives of their work. As I am in agreement with these objectives, I will concentrate on their specific response to the review. Unfortunately as there is no engagement with the ideas they said they found useful from the review, I can only address the misinterpretations they believe I have made of their work and, hopefully, take the debate forward by highlighting issues for future research.

First, Cree and Cavanagh note that the main aim of their work is to focus on feminist practice with men not, as I wrote 'to make visible the place of men in social work practice, education and research'. Throughout the review, however, I engaged with their book as a collection of feminist practitioners' work with men. The reference to making men visible comes from the authors' own introduction: 'Our aim is to re-dress the invisibility of men within social work literature and to describe some of the work at present being undertaken with men'.

Second, they suggest that, by misunderstanding the complexities involved in this work, I minimise the input of the contributors. In the review, however, I suggested that 'It is a pity that the editors were not able to pull together some of the implicit and explicit contradictions and tensions that contributors outlined throughout the book' (p.72). The review itself aimed to explore some of these tensions. In particular, the authors argue that I fail to appreciate the complexities of the account by Cavanagh and Lewis of interviewing violent

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men. What I was trying to suggest, however, was that this chapter perhaps did not go far enough in addressing the complexities of what 'valid' data might mean in this context.

Cavanagh and Lewis, on the one hand, refer to researchers who argue data is contaminated through challenge, while positioning themselves as researchers who believe that men who are not challenged are more likely to say what interviewers want to hear. The trouble with setting the argument up in this way is that both positions can be read as assuming that there are some pure data to be arrived at, by identifying the right technique. My point in the review was not to argue that this is necessarily what the authors believe, but that the data are shaped not just by techniques but by the feminist framework of the interviewers and also by what the men understand by the interview. True, there is a focus on how interviewers feel men respond to challenge and how the interviewers feel about the process, but while Cavanagh and Lewis refer to the reasons why the men's partners may want the men to take part in research, they do not ask the same question of the men who are participating. Asking questions about the meaning of the research interview for the men (including what similarity it has with other interview formats they have come across, such as therapeutic interviews) is part of working out the meaning of men's responses to the techniques focused on in the chapter.

While I have no problem with researchers using 'challenge' to encourage violent men to give 'fuller' accounts of their beliefs and actions (albeit accounts shaped by the interviewer's framework) - and Cavanagh and Lewis illustrate how this can be done to good effect within a feminist framework - I do take issue with their description of the 'unique context of a research interview'. This seemed to be contradicted by the authors' own observations that their challenge techniques are similar to techniques workers use in men's programmes. They also point out that the men in research interviews draw on tactics they use elsewhere, for example in their relationships with partners. Hence my point that it would have been useful to know what, if any, therapeutic involvement these men had had at the point of the research interview. None of this was meant to detract from the complexities identified by the article but to add to them.

Third, Cavanagh and Cree feel that I have not acknowledged the accounts of co-working difficulties in the book. In Wilson's chapter, there are references to the difficulty of putting co-working ideals into practice because of the response of male clients. I suggested, however, that it would have been helpful to have more detailed examples of the difficulties of co-working with men as colleagues and managers, where the problem *is* the male co-worker or manager. While I agree that Wright does recognise the need for male co-

workers to address their own gender issues (and I did quote in the review from her experience of co-working), other references in the book, for example to organisational discrimination, are general ones. I would have found it useful to have more explicit discussion about the form these difficulties take in practice, as newly qualified professionals may not be sure that what they think is happening in a co-working/managerial situation is actually happening.

In the review, I recognised that the task of addressing feminist work with men is huge and that not everything can be tackled at once. As Cree and Cavanagh said in their response, the book is a beginning. The review was lengthy because it tried to engage with the important points in the book and to highlight some of the issues not addressed or foregrounded by their work. I include these issues, in brief, as part of the constructive debate that Cree and Cavanagh are calling for and within which their book and, hopefully, this exchange can be placed:

- ◀ The need to address in detail the relationship between feminism and social work as bodies of knowledge and values. This has implications for providing services for men as users of social work services in their own right.
- ◀ The need to draw out further the implications for practice of the recognition that there is no single category 'woman' and no single feminist standpoint.
- ◀ The need to be clear about the position of children when working with men - in particular, the need to be cautious about equating women and children's victimisation experiences.
- ◀ The need to be clear about integrating work with violent men with child protection services, and for an awareness of the Scottish legislative context to inform this work.
- ◀ The need for research and theory on feminist work with men to address the issue of men as carers and parents and not simply mirror the lack of focus on this issue within much voluntary and statutory social work practice.

February 1998