Managing backlash and resistance

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Backlash & resistance: definitions

- Backlash / resistance: any form of resistance towards progressive social change

- With regard to gender, backlash / resistance maintains or reinforces gender inequalities
  - It is a *subset* of the many practices and processes which sustain gender inequality

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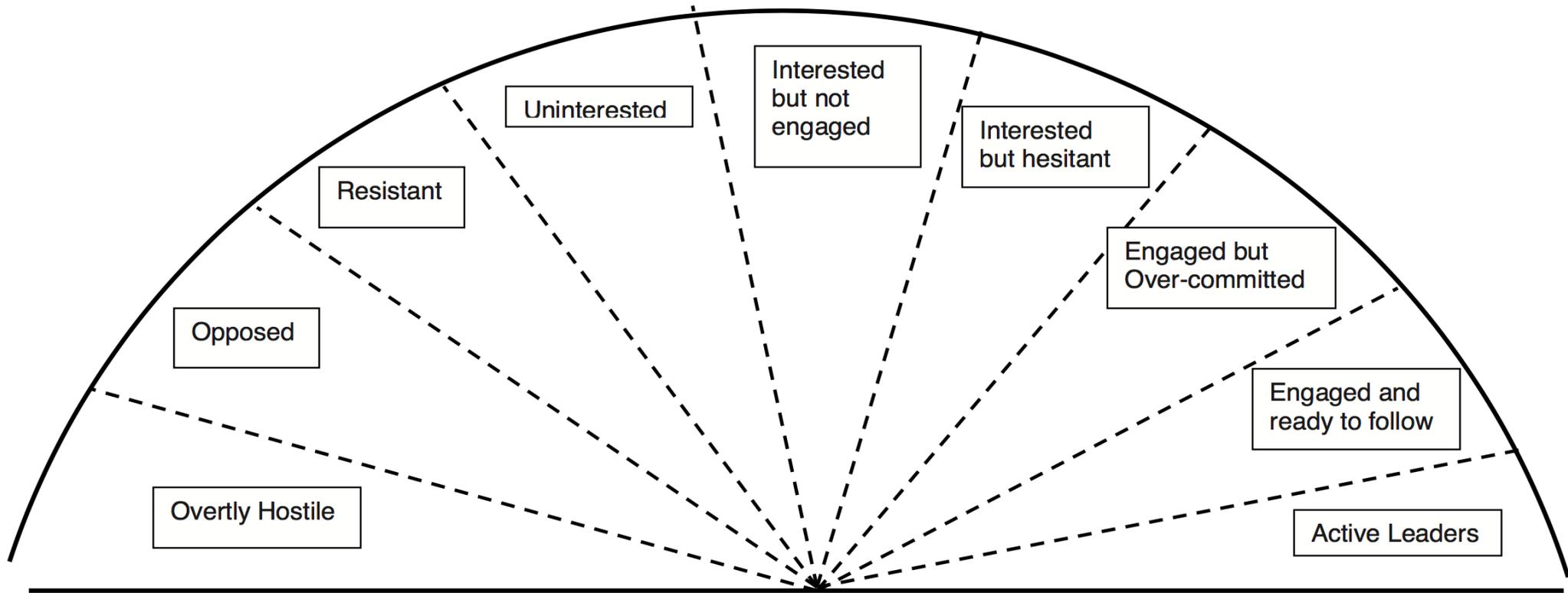
Characteristics of backlash

- An inevitable response to progressive social change
  - A sign of progress?
- Diverse, contextual, and historically specific
- Both individual and collective
- Both formal or informal
- More likely to come from the people who are advantaged by the status quo
  - Resistance to gender equality is more common by men than women

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Forms of backlash

- *Denial:* Denial of the problem or the legitimacy of the case for change
- *Disavowal:* Refusal to recognise responsibility
- *Inaction:* Refusal to implement a change initiative
- *Appeasement:* Efforts to placate or pacify those advocating for change in order to limit its impact
- *Appropriation:* Simulating change while covertly undermining it.
- *Co-option:* Using the language of progressive frameworks and goals ('equality', 'rights', 'justice', and so on) for reactionary ends
- *Repression:* Reversing or dismantling a change initiative

A continuum, from resistance to support

Overtly Hostile

Opposed

Resistant

Uninterested

Interested but not engaged

Interested but hesitant

Engaged but Over-committed

Engaged and ready to follow

Active Leaders

Derailment
BINGO

If You Won't Educate Me How Can I Learn	If you weren't so hostile, people would listen to you	You're Overly Sensitive	Don't You Have More Important Issues To Think About	You're Taking Things Too Personally
You're Arguing With Opinions Not Fact	You're Interrogating From The Wrong Perspective	Your Experience Is Not Representative Of Everyone	Can You Prove Your Experience Is Widespread	I Don't Think You're As Marginalised As You Claim
I Know Another Person From Your Group Who Disagrees	You Are Damaging Your Cause By Being So Aggressive		You're As Bad As We Are	But You're Not Like The Others In Your Group
If You Really Cared About This You'd Teach Me	But That Happens To Me Too	You're Just Looking For Something To Be Offended By	You're Seeing Problems Where None Exist	You're Too Emotional
I Was On Your Side But Your Anger Changed That	I Don't find This Offensive	Stereotypes Exist 'Cause There Is Truth In Them	You Probably Just Misunderstood	I Haven't Had It Easy Either, You Know

Denial (a common form of resistance)

- Deny that the problem exists; minimise its extent, significance, or impact; or rename and redefine it out of existence

- Blame the problem on those who are the victims of it

- Deny the credibility of the message

- Attack the credibility of the messengers of change

- Reverse the problem, adopting a victim position, claiming reverse discrimination, etc.

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Sources of backlash and resistance

- Fear of change. Inertia
- Sexist and violence-supportive attitudes. Socialised sexism
  - Particularly among men, but also women
  - Men's recognition of sexism is poorer than women's
- The defence of privilege
  - Men's aggrieved entitlement
- The denial of privilege
- Wider trends:
  - Simplistic notions of 'equality'
  - 'Post-feminism'
  - Neoliberalism (an emphasis on individual rights and market solutions)

Aggrieved entitlement

"AGGRIEVED ENTITLEMENT"

AMERICAN MASCULINITY AT THE END OF AN ERA

ANGRY WHITE MEN

MICHAEL KIMMEL
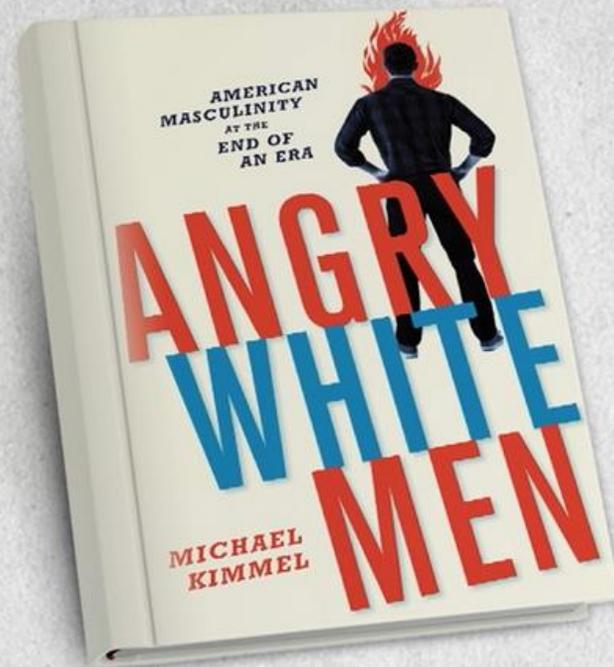
A SENSE THAT THOSE BENEFITS THAT WHITE MEN BELIEVED WERE THEIR DUE HAVE BEEN SNATCHED AWAY

Responding to, and preventing, resistance

- *Framing strategies:* How to articulate, represent, or frame the initiative

- *Teaching and learning strategies:* How to teach about the initiative and engage people in coming to understand and support it

- *Organisational / institutional strategies:* How to involve individuals, institutions, and organisational policies, processes, and structures in the initiative

Exercise: Responding to resistance

How would you respond to statements like these?

1. Sure, violence against women is a problem, but what's it got to do with me?

2. What about women's violence against men?

3. This is just male-bashing.

Framing strategies

- Frame violence prevention within a robust feminist framework. Recognise that:
  - Gender is personal, interpersonal, and structural;
  - Gender is embedded in wider structures, institutions, and social arrangements;
  - Gender involves unequal relations of power and a pervasive pattern of male dominance;
  - Gender intersects with other forms of social difference and inequality.
- Agenda: reduce gender inequalities and build gender justice

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Framing strategies *cont'd*

- Articulate the rationale and benefits
  - Draw on shared principles and goals, both organisational and personal
- Anticipate and answer common resistant reactions
- Emphasise that men will benefit
  - Gender equality is 'win-win'.
  - Although men will lose unfair privileges.
- Address claims about male disadvantage

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E.g., regarding gender and violence

- Acknowledge that, yes, men are routinely the victims of violence, and their perpetrators overwhelmingly are other men;
- Provide accessible critiques of inaccurate claims about female perpetration and male victimisation, including;
  - Accounts of the data on actual gender asymmetries in domestic or intimate partner violence, and
  - Critiques of the conceptual assumptions and methods in literature used to claim gender symmetry

Gender and DV: Key points

- The problem of domestic / family / intimate partner violence is largely a problem of violence by men, against women and children.
- Comparing men's violence against female partners & ex-partners and women's violence against male partners & ex-partners, men's violence:
  - Is far more common
  - Has much worse impacts
  - Is far less likely to be in self-defence
- If we only 'count violent acts', males look like 1 in 3 or 4 of victims. But as soon as we look at impact, meaning, context, & history, we find profound gender contrasts.
- Resource: http://www.xyonline.net/content/domestic-violence-and-gender-xy-collection

Framing strategies *cont'd*

- Develop responses to other resistant understandings, e.g.
    - 'Not all men'
    - 'Why focus on violence against women rather than addressing all violence?'

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Critique anti-feminist backlash

1. Offer alternative analyses of the issues on which they focus
   - Speak to men's pain.
   - Men's rights and fathers' rights advocates misdiagnose men's pain and thus misprescribe the cure
   - Examples: violence against men, men's health, suicide, etc.
2. Critique and discredit the backlash
   - It is a hostile and misogynist reassertion of patriarchal power
   - It offers a profoundly inaccurate account of gender
   - Its strategies and solutions are both dangerous for women and children and limiting for men themselves.

Critique anti-feminist backlash *cont'd*

3. Show that the backlash is harmful for men themselves

- Men's rights and fathers' rights groups:
  - Neglect the forms of disadvantage or pain which men actually experience;
  - Blame the wrong target (women and feminism, not unhealthy and destructive models of manhood);
  - Do not generate appropriate services for men and antagonise potential supporters;
  - Taint as backlash the need to address genuine aspects of men's experience.

Teaching and learning strategies

- Provide people with a balance of challenge and support:
  - Challenges to privilege
  - Support to foster personal and collective readiness to make change
- Create safe, respectful, and supportive environments for learning:
  - Clear structure and expectations; honest conversations; affirm people's self-concepts; ensure that participants feel heard and respected; provide opportunities for frequent feedback; etc.

Teaching and learning strategies *cont'd*

- Teaching strategies: participatory, interactive
- Social justice pedagogies:
  - Use personal stories of privilege and oppression;
  - Role playing and simulations;
  - Real life situations and contexts;
  - Men listening to women and women's experience;
  - Gather data;
  - Foster empathy;
  - Appeal to moral, ethical, or spiritual values
- Educators: skilled, compassionate, respectful

Organisational strategies

- Organisational support is critical in reducing and preventing resistance.
    - Resistance is more likely when there is little institutional support.
    - So…
- Secure support from key stakeholders in positions of power
- Address efforts specifically to those individuals and groups who are most likely to be resistant
- Form strategic partnerships and allies

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Conclusion

- There are effective ways to respond to, and indeed prevent, backlash and resistance.

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Online resources

- Engaging men in violence prevention: http://www.xyonline.net/content/violence-walking-tour-some-xy%E2%80%99s-content

- Engaging men in building gender equality: https://xyonline.net/category/article-content/working-boys-and-men

- Articles, manuals, & other resources on violence against women: http://www.xyonline.net/category/article-content/violence

- Critiques of men's rights and fathers' rights: http://www.xyonline.net/category/article-content/mens-fathers-rights

- References on engaging men in violence prevention: http://www.xyonline.net/content/t-men's-anti-violence-education-and-activism

- References on engaging men in building gender equality: https://xyonline.net/books/bibliography/bibliography-26