

Men's Growing Role in Preventing Violence Against Women

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OVERVIEW

It is impossible to prevent violence against women and girls unless men and boys are encouraged to take a proactive approach to bringing about the desired solution.

Why should we engage men and boys in preventing violence against women, what strategies are under way and do they work? Educational interventions among males often invite them to become proactive, taking action to stop the perpetration of specific incidents of violence, and to reduce the risks of violence escalating and strengthen the conditions that work against violence occurring. There are also barriers to men's role in preventing violence against women, including emphasizing traditional male privilege, which can isolate potential male supporters. Involving men in the work of preventing violence against women can also be seen as an effort to co-opt feminist agendas, or lead to the marginalization of women's voices and leadership. But it is imperative to note that successes are being made in many areas to increase men's exposure to sensitizing experiences with violence, and ending the "other" status that can separate men from supportive roles, or relegate them to perpetrator status. Progress is being made in areas that expose men to multifaceted, proactive approaches to ending violence against women largest established by their social networks, evolving gender roles, and tangible experience opportunities to make a difference as activists, educators and advocates. This paper will discuss the evolution of men's involvement in anti-violence campaigns, and their growing impact on equalizing dialogue and positively influencing anti-violence campaigns, as well as solidifying their role as stakeholders in the process of ending violence against women.

WHY INVOLVE MEN?

Why is it important to involve men in efforts to end violence against women? Preventing violence against women must address men because largely it is men who perpetrate this violence. For example, a nationally representative sample of 16,000 men and women in the United States documents that violence against women is predominantly male violence. Of the women who had been physically assaulted since the age of 18, 92% had been assaulted by a male, and of the women who had been sexually assaulted, all had been raped by males (Tjaden and Thoennes 46). Michael Flood writes that masculinity also plays a crucial role in shaping violence against women: at the individual level, in families and relationships, in communities, and societies as a whole. He noted that a number of studies have found that men's adherence to sexist, patriarchal, and/or sexually hostile attitudes is an important predictor of their use of violence against women (Flood 361). While masculine attitudes are one factor, another is male dominance itself. Male economic and decision-making dominance in the family is one of the strongest predictors of high levels of violence against women (Sugarman and Frankel 21). Therefore, to make progress toward eliminating violence against women, changes need to occur in men's attitudes, behaviors, identities, and relations. Men also generally pay a personal price for this violence. Violence against women fuels women's distrust and fear of men, and hurts the women whom many men love (Flood 360).

Luckily, there are growing efforts to involve men and boys in the prevention of violence by encouraging their participation in education programs, as targets of social marketing campaigns, as activists and advocates. Flood, in particular, advocates a multifaceted approach that

in part, begins with strengthening individual knowledge and skills, which will in turn enhance men's capacity to prevent violence; promoting community education, which involves reaching groups with information and the resources to prevent violence; and engaging, strengthening and mobilizing communities by bringing together groups and individuals who can identify and achieve broader goals for greater impact (Flood 361).

COMMUNICATION AND SOCIAL MARKETING

Communication and social marketing campaigns are one of the more common means of prevention of violence against women. There is evidence that social marketing campaigns can produce positive change in the attitudes and behaviors associated with men's perpetration of violence against women. For example, Soul City, a multimedia project in South Africa, combined prime-time radio and television dramas with other educational activities, and the evaluation "found increased knowledge and awareness of domestic violence, changed attitudes and norms, and resulted in a greater willingness on the part of the project's audience to take appropriate action" (Krug, et al. 1084). Several other campaigns focus on preventing domestic violence and promoting healthy relationships from the start. For example, Men Make Choices by the Texas Council on Family Violence (United States) facilitates and supports the involvement of men and boys in addressing the root cause of men's violence against women. Similarly, Violence Against Women, It's Against All the Rules by the Violence Against Women Specialist Unit (Australia) aims at increasing men's willingness to discuss the issues relating to violence against women and to reduce the use of violence against women; whereas Men Can Stop Rape's Strength campaign by Men Can Stop Rape Inc. (International) embraces men as vital allies with the will and character to make healthy choices and foster safe, equitable relationships (Cismaru and Lavack 189).

IMPORTANCE OF PERSONAL RELEVANCE

However, the success of the programs, in large part, is dependent on the understanding that in order for these campaigns to be effective, they must include components which help increase men's awareness of violence, and the potential positive impact they can have in ending the cycle. Erin Casey and Tyler Smith recently conducted interviews with 27 men who became actively involved with an organization dedicated to ending sexual and/or domestic violence. What they discovered is that men's decision to take a stand against violence against women, attend an event or a meeting, or join an anti-violence group was rarely influenced by a single event or factor, but was often the result of a combination of experiences and internal reflection that sparked or deepened their interest in the issue. Their anti-violence involvement was initiated, in large part, by discovering ways that violence was personally relevant to their own lives or those close to them or on making an empathic connection with the emotional consequences of violence. The vast majority became involved through or because of existing personal connections between their involvement and a sense of community; and participants felt that their initiation into anti-violence efforts was supported by their own community or was a part of an effort to build a sense of community for themselves (Casey and Smith 966). These findings are echoed in the narrative shared by Catherine MacKinnon in the chapter *Not a Love Story: The Pornography Wars* in Judy Rebick's book, *Ten Thousand Roses: The Making of a Feminist Revolution*. She was an anti-porn activist who partnered with the Women's Legal Education and

Action Fund (LEAF), who together intervened in a Supreme Court ruling concerning a video store owner in Winnipeg. In the 1992 Butler decision, the court ruled that simple explicit sex was obscene and accepted LEAF's argument of what harm violent and degrading pornography causes. The ruling stated, in part:

There has been a growing recognition in recent cases that material which may be said to exploit sex in a "degrading or dehumanizing" manner will necessarily fail the community standards test, not because it offends against morals but because it is perceived by public opinion to be harmful to society, particularly women (McKinnon 169).

LEAF's efforts were financially supported by a group of interdenominational church-going men who called themselves Men for Clean Press who supported the ruling. In two cases, the women in their lives had been victimized by attacks linked to content in materials sold at the video store, and they were searching for a way to make their views known in a group setting (McKinnon 169).

USING EXISTING SOCIAL NETWORKS

For the aforementioned reasons, engaging men is a multifaceted process that demands repeated and diverse opportunities for exposure to the issue of violence against women, as well as the space for men to discuss, reflect on, and make sense of the ways that violence is relevant to their worlds. Engaging men and encouraging them to view themselves as allies should ideally involve existing social networks, capitalizing on natural leaders in acquaintance circles. At the same time, engagement through social networks can build on "sensitizing experiences" that many men have likely already had and can foster the kind of meaning from those experiences that supports anti-violence engagement (Casey and Smith 965).

One powerful way to capitalize on existing social networks is to tap into organizations or existing structures that expose men to their peer groups. For example, religious institutions and leaders have a potentially powerful role to play in encouraging an ethic of nonviolence. The spiritual and theological understandings of Christian, Jewish, Muslim, and other world religions each contain teachings that could serve to undermine community tolerance for violence against women. Relevant examples of faith-based violence prevention initiatives include the Black Church and Domestic Violence Institute (USA) and interfaith strategies among religious bodies in Melbourne, Australia such as the Interfaith Council Declaration against Family Violence. Spiritual and religious leaders could be encouraged to challenge violence against women and gender inequality through public statements, sermons, teachings, and religious materials, and through the provision of assistance when this is sought (Davis, Parks and Cohen, 13). An added benefit of using a church setting for discussions on anti-violence is that for many men it could already be a place where supportive peer groups have been established, and a greater level of vulnerability that challenges acceptable demonstrations of masculinity have already been broken down. Social justice issues, such as violence against women, can lead to men questioning their own role in perpetuating acceptable ideals of masculinity, accepting a broader view and coming to the realization that their actions do not take place in isolation, and so in fact have a ripple effect on the women in their lives.

CHALLENGING STEREOTYPES AND MYTHS

Men's involvement in anti-violence campaigns is also occurring at younger ages, which can have a positive impact on their ability to challenge masculine stereotypes and help challenge the belief that violence is simply a women's issue and it is not their problem to address. Belief in rape myths is widespread in society. Heather McIvor writes in her book *Women and Politics in Canada* that a 1985 study of 436 Toronto men revealed disturbing patterns. Thirty-four percent believed that at least a quarter of reported rapes were "merely invented by women who discover they are pregnant and want to protect their own reputation", 45% said that at least 35% of women reporting rapes are lying because they want revenge against the accused", and 11% agreed that "many women have an unconscious wish to be raped, and many of them set up situations where they are likely to be attacked" (MacIvor 205).

However, if those beliefs are challenged – for example in a series of evaluations of violence prevention education, delivered in schools and universities in particular – it is clear that such interventions can have positive effects on males' attitudes toward violence against women. For example, male (and female) secondary school and university students who have attended rape education sessions show less adherence to rape myths, express less rape-supportive attitudes, and/or report greater victim empathy than those in control groups. Some programs have reduced men's reported likelihood to rape, while some have reduced men's actual perpetration of sexual aggression (Flood 364). Relaying information about the prevalence and impact of violence against women in general terms is likely insufficient to support men in seeing the issue as personally relevant; rather, helping men to form deeper connections appears critical. Such efforts are reflected in existing men's engagement programs, such as A Call to Men, a national training organization dedicated to galvanizing men's anti-violence participation, and Men Can Stop Rape, which encourages young men to reframe and then act on strengths in service of ending men's violence against women" (Casey and Smith 970).

IMPORTANCE OF MULTIPLE AND SUSTAINED APPROACHES

It is worthy of note that education programs that are intensive, lengthy, and use a variety of education and intervention approaches have produced positive and lasting change in attitudes and behaviors. For example, evaluations of the Safe Dates program among American adolescents (which included a ten-session school curriculum, a theatre production performed by peers and a poster contest) found that four years after the program, adolescents who had received the program continued to report less physical and sexual dating violence perpetration (and victimization) than those who had not (Foshee et al. 622). Among adult men in the United States enrolled in a multi-module program, five months after the program, while some men had rebounded – or shown a regression to previously held negative attitudes on violence against women – though others continued to show improvement on attitudinal and behavioral measures. Interventions among boys and young men, in general, should be complemented by other strategies aimed at addressing particularly intensive forms of support for violence in the peer cultures and group norms of some boys and young men, such as peer education and mentoring. Among males, there is consistent evidence that peer support for intimate partner violence is an important predictor of men's perpetration of sexual and physical

abuse. Men with “rape-supporting social relationships” – with male friends who give advice, for example, that girls owe them sex and who approve of or use violence against girls and women – are more likely to use sexual and physical abuse themselves (Flood 367).

CHALLENGING SOCIAL NORMS

An example of a highly successful campaign that addresses the potentially positive role of peer condemnation of violence against women and how it affects male attitudes can be found in the Australian “Hey Mate” series of anti-violence videos released by members of the country’s White Ribbon Campaign. The videos show men in a variety of settings, either intervening in one-on-one incidents of violence, or reacting negatively when a friend in a bar mentions he can slap negative behavior out of his girlfriend. The group reacts in a manner that makes it clear violence is not acceptable (“Let the World Know Where You Stand” 1).

These sorts of social norms campaigns begin by recognizing, and seeking to close, the gap between men’s perceptions of other men’s agreement with violence-supportive and sexist norms and the actual extent of this agreement (Fabiano et al. 109). By gathering and publicizing data on men’s attitudes and behavior, U.S. campaigns on university campuses have sought to undermine men’s conformity to sexist peer norms and increase their willingness to intervene in violent behavior. For example, after a recent social norms initiative on a U.S. university campus, college males reduced their overestimation of other males’ sexist beliefs and comfort with sexism, although the intervention had less impact among acquainted than unacquainted males (Kilmartin et al. 269). Social norms campaigns could be adopted in universities, workplaces, and other public institutions. Using a “bystander intervention” (Flood 367) approach, other campaigns have sought to place “a sense of responsibility and empowerment for ending sexual violence on the shoulders of all community members.” Their strength is that they teach men (and women) skills in de-escalating risky situations and being effective supports for survivors, as well as foster a sense of community responsibility for violence prevention. Approaching men (and women) as potential bystanders or witnesses to behaviors related to sexual violence can improve attitudes, knowledge, and behavior (Flood 367).

SENSE OF COMMUNITY

There is evidence from Casey and Smith that extending community responsibility for ending violence against women to men has reaped positive results. Anti-violence work can provide men with an opportunity to work with like-minded individuals that can help them establish connections with other men who share their ideals. For these men, involvement in anti-violence campaigns can be an important way to build community and foster a sense of communal support. One participant in a Take Back the Night event spoke of the feeling he experienced knowing that there was a community dedicated to helping men identify that issues such as sexual violence go far beyond female victims and affect entire communities. “...knowing there was a community willing to stand in the face of that truth and stand together and then say no and then do the work and try and change some things...meant so much to me and made it worthwhile and continues to do so” (Casey and Smith 965).

WHITE RIBBON CAMPAIGN

There is also a valuable role for men to play as leaders of anti-violence initiatives, as evidenced by the White Ribbon Campaign. It began in Canada in 1991 by Michael Kaufman and the late Jack Layton, it has now spread to more than 57 countries. The campaign was initially spearheaded to recognize the 14 women killed at the December 6, 1989 [École Polytechnique massacre](#) in Montreal when an anti-feminist gunman opened fire in the school to protest his failure to gain admission to the institution. The campaign has since grown to become an international effort of men and boys working to end violence against women. Its basic principle is the importance of men and boys to speak out against all forms of violence against women. In Canada, the campaign is run from November 25 (the International Day for the Eradication of Violence Against Women) until December 6, Canada's [National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women](#) (MacIvor 141).

Kaufman, who wrote *The Day the White Ribbon Campaign Changed the Game: A New Direction in working to Engage Men and Boys* in "Canadian Men and Masculinities: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives" said he and Layton wanted to prove that anti-violence action could be a mainstream issue for men, and expand beyond pro-feminist men's movements at the time, such as Men for Women's Choice. Kaufman in particular felt that if men embraced gender equality, and the majority refrained from using violence in their relationships then the message of anti-violence could go far beyond the small number of men who identified as pro-feminists. The campaign also placed faith in the knowledge that the majority of men who refrained from using expressions of violence in their personal lives did not realize how important it was for them to take a broader stand against the issue – either because they failed to see what an important issue it was, or did not realize they had a real role to play in ending violence against women. Kaufman identified these non-violent men as a "transmission belt" of communicators who would take the anti-violence message to men and boys in their lives in the workplace, home and community (Kaufman 146-147). The co-founders of the White Ribbon Campaign also believed that men would want to participate in the campaign. More importantly, wearing a white ribbon as a public pledge to not commit or condone violence could be a catalyst for discussion, and a call for more effective social action. "We believed we could successfully engage men across the social mainstream to *take action* to end men's violence against women, and to challenge sexism, in part by examining our own beliefs and actions" (Kaufman 149).

CHALLENGES

It is important to note what community-based, peer-involved and comprehensive violence prevention initiatives are making headway in changing attitudes and behaviors. However, there are still cautionary measures that should be taken to ensure male audiences in particular are being addressed on the issue in appropriate ways. For example, the American program Men Can Stop Rape and its focus on reframing dominant narratives of masculinity, it is not always appropriate to involve initially-intensive messaging on the role of traditional concepts of masculinity as their link to violence against women remains largely unclear (Casey and Smith 956). Although approximately one third of the men in Casey and Smith's study described linking violence against women to structural justice issues as a reason for their involvement, one third of the men in the study failed to make any explicit connection between

violence against women and larger social inequities, such as sexism. Although these men may have framed violence as problematic or people they love as in need of protection, there was an absence of exploration about the roles of gender and power in the occurrence of violence against women (Casey and Smith 967). It is therefore safe to assume the degree to which an awareness of gender-based social privilege is (or should be) a necessary prerequisite to anti-violence involvement remains open to debate.

The Casey and Smith study also highlights the importance of recognizing that the nature of many violence-related sensitizing or opportunity experiences (such as hearing a survivor's story, or receiving an invitation to attend an anti-violence event) do not always or even necessarily have to contain explicit linkages between abuse and sexism. However, sensitizing exposure experiences regarding racism or heterosexism likely contain, by their very nature, clear connections to notions of oppression and unearned social privilege (Casey and Smith 967). It may also be that initial awareness building and engagement efforts need to meet men "where they are" and that starting with conversations about male privilege may raise defensiveness and deter preliminary participation from some men who have important contributions to make (Casey and Smith 967). It must also be noted that experiences of power are far from uniform, and depend on individual concepts of hegemonic masculinity, and also complex gender hierarchies that emerge from a wide variety of intersectional analysis, including but not limited to race, sexual orientation, economic class, religion, etc. What this means is that blanket discussions of male privilege or power are unlikely to reach all men, as they experience these complex societal forces differently and if affects them in a wide variety of ways (Shifftman, O'Toole and Kiter 89).

It is also imperative that efforts to engage men in anti-violence dialogue does not fail to address the issue of male privilege entirely, as that lack of awareness may create risk for recreating patterns of sexism within anti-violence work as more men become involved. Several practitioners have noted a need the need for men's anti-violence groups to continually consult with and be accountable to women and women's anti-violence network to ensure that men's prevention efforts honour the considerable history of women's contributions to ending violence and to not replicate structures of inequity (Pease and Flood 552).

Kaufman discussed the recognition he shared with Layton about the necessity of honouring women's groups when the White Ribbon Campaign was initiated, stating that women's groups were initially "ambivalent" about the thought of men's involvement in the work to end violence against women. He said there was a large dose of skepticism in the feminist community about the campaign, which given historical perspective, made perfect sense:

No significant group of men had proven to women they were serious and committed to working to end violence against women. Although men had been part of the history for women's equality, these voices had, of course, been that of a small minority that had been all but silent on the issue of men's violence (Kaufman 141).

Kaufman said he and Layton were also aware there were fears that if men got involved in the anti-violence movement, they would attempt to take it over – perhaps not intentionally,

but by virtue of their monopoly on public discourse, and the rationale that men's voices would carry more weight. In some cases, there was hostility from women who had been victimized by men at the thought of welcoming them as allies in the struggle to end violence against women. Also, women enjoyed having autonomous spaces where they could voice their concerns, and enact ideas and strategies in an environment they controlled. The campaign was cognizant of those fears, the co-founder said, noting that what resulted was an initial hurdle campaign organizers had to overcome in the form of dismissal of men's efforts to end violence. What Kaufman and Layton created was a movement that placed primacy on women's voices, identifying violence against women as a women's issue first, but also advocating that it needed to be a men's issue as well. For that to work, the organizers focused on the rationale that it was men had a responsibility to become leaders because of the constructs of gender and sexism, and the reality that men hear men's voices. So the challenge became forming leadership roles for men to take anti-violence action and awareness to a new level within the male community in a way that did not take away from women's voices or leadership (Kaufman 150).

The reticence displayed by women confronted with a male-led White Ribbon Campaign was not the first time men who have attempted to become active in ending violence against women have encountered opposition or skepticism. Lee Lakeman, quoted in Judy Rebick's book *Ten Thousand Roses: The Making of a Feminist Revolution*, discussed the issue of male involvement when the Rape Relief Crisis Centre in Vancouver wanted to establish a transition house to increase their services to women who had experienced sexual or domestic violence. Male supporters in the community wanted to fund-raise to help the female administrators and volunteers at the Rape Relief Crisis Centre reach their financial goal for the transition house, and it sparked a lot of internal debate. "The fights about men were bitter. There were women who were convinced there was no way to work with or speak with men where men would not win. There were women who felt we should stick to women's issues" (Lakeman 70).

The Take Back the Night Foundation also encountered tensions from men who wanted to lend support to the cause. One of the first Take Back the Night marches was held in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania in October, 1975 after the murder of microbiologist Susan Alexander Speeth, who was stabbed to death while walking home. Early marches were often deliberately women-only in order to symbolize women's individual walk through darkness and to demonstrate that women united can resist fear and violence. The women-only policies caused controversy on some American university campuses in particular; activists argued that male allies and sexual assault survivors should be allowed to march in support of women and male victims of sexual violence. At Michigan State University, a male student sued the Dean's office for sexual discrimination for allowing an all-female march on campus. The lawsuit was eventually dropped, but not before many contentious confrontations, and threats by the female organizers of the march threatened to countersue for sexual harassment. In current practice, Take Back the Night events are not only inclusive of men, but include men as victims, bystanders, and supporters. Wesleyan University in Connecticut, for example, allows men to participate in speaking on their own experiences with sexual assault. Bowdoin College in Maine organizes a similar candlelight vigil and walk that encourages students of all genders to show solidarity for survivors. The mission of Take Back the Night has since grown to

encompass all forms of violence against all persons, though sexual violence against women is still the top focus. The word *night* was originally meant to be taken literally to express the fear that many women feel during the night, but has since changed to symbolize a fear of violence in general. This helps the movement incorporate other feminist concerns such as domestic violence and sexual abuse within the home (Roiphe 104-112). But what the evolution of the march symbolizes is that women have remained cautious and unwilling to extend blanket welcomes to men who wish to support anti-violence campaigns for fear of having their voices drowned out. Or because of a belief that as embodiments of a patriarchal system, men represent the problem and it can be difficult to engage them as part of the solution to ending violence against women.

CONCLUSION

There is a growing consensus that the most effective violence prevention efforts will be those which are intended to generate change at multiple levels—individual, relationship, community, institutional, and societal—and which use multiple strategies to do so. Evidence suggests that multilevel, multifaceted approaches will have a greater impact on attitudes, behaviors, and social norms as men are encouraged to find a voice on anti-violence issues and absorb a sense of responsibility for ending violent behavior and failing to condone attitudes which make it acceptable. These comprehensive approaches, such as the rationale behind the White Ribbon Campaign – which stresses the need for acceptance of violence against women as a men's issue, and also encourages men to take a leadership role in condemning violence – encourage dialogue and action at multiple levels, across gender lines and throughout diverse societal groups. Preventing violence against women will require sustained and systematic efforts at the levels of families and relationships, communities, institutions, and societies. Men must be engaged in this work: as participants in education programs, as community leaders, as professionals and providers, and as advocates and activists working in alliance with women. Work with men, for example in the Men Can Stop Rape campaign, has demonstrated significant potential in shifting the attitudes and behaviors associated with violence against women. These are positive steps, but to more effectively stem and ultimately stop violence against women we must erode the cultural and collective supports for violence found among many men and boys and replace them with norms of consent, sexual respect, and gender equality. To do this, we must also foster respectful gender relations in relationships, families, and communities. While some men are part of the problem, all men are part of the solution, as the White Ribbon Campaign and other aforementioned programs illustrate. The job is not done, but it is getting easier to identify approaches that have led to success that can be built upon and expanded to end violence against women once and for all.

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