

Engaging Men

By

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WHY MEN?¹

Imagine 500 men across Minnesota challenging themselves, other men, and male institutions about the social norms that support women's subordination and glorify violence? Now think of those men working with women to create public policies and institutional practices which uphold social standards that sustain healthy, safe and equitable relationships and communities. That is the vision and the mission of the Minnesota Men's Action Network: Alliance to Prevent Sexual and Domestic Violence (MN-MAN).

The Federal Violence Against Women Act of 2005 states that "nearly 1/3 of American women report physical and sexual abuse by a husband or boyfriend at some point in their lives". In Minnesota, a 2007 MN Department of Health study stated that sexual assault alone cost Minnesota nearly \$8 billion in 2005. In 2006 37,010 Minnesota women and children sought community advocacy services due to domestic abuse (76% of which were females over 13 years old) and 11,474 were provided emergency shelter. According to the most recent Federal Bureau of Justice Statistics report on Intimate Partner Violence (January 2007), only 21% of female victims of domestic violence contacted outside agencies for help. This suggests that approximately 133,000 or one in seven Minnesota women over the age of 13 are victims of domestic violence annually. The Minnesota Coalition Against Sexual Assault (MNCASA) estimates that similar percentages of Minnesota women are sexually assaulted at some point in their lifetime. This is supported by the 2005 National Crime Victims Survey, which found that 1 in 6 women in the United States will be victims of sexual violence.

¹ Throughout this article the reader will notice that we refer to men's violence against women and children. You will also note that we directly and indirectly refer to heterosexually identified men as perpetrators of both sexual and domestic violence. We do this because the perpetrators of sexual and domestic violence are overwhelmingly heterosexually identified men and the victims are most often women, girls and boys. We know that men and boys are victimized, usually by other men, but also by women and girls. And that same sex battering occurs at similar levels as abuse between heterosexual couples. We also know that statistics regarding sexual abuse varies depending on the level of social status or social vulnerability of different communities, e.g. Native American women and/or those with disabilities. It is not our intention to ignore or make invisible the whole spectrum of those injured by sexual violence but rather to bring to light the vastness of men's involvement in these crimes. By doing so, we hope to inspire men sitting on the sidelines to understand their unique opportunity and responsibility to step up to the task of stopping sexual and domestic violence before it starts.

For over thirty years, sexual and domestic violence prevention and intervention efforts have been almost exclusively developed, organized and staffed by women. Some men have been involved in prevention efforts as advocates, concerned citizens, or community professionals. However, the vast majority of men have been passive bystanders, while a staggering number directly perpetrated and/or contributed to the violence around them. It is time for well meaning men to act.

Men are in a unique position to help change the environment in which sexual and domestic violence occurs. As men, we are often involved in policymaking decisions in the public and private sector that create dangerous social norms that are simply perceived as “normal” male behavior. So, too, almost all men are involved in perpetuating these norms of women’s sexual objectification and subordination -- in personal and private interactions in locker rooms, at hunting camps, or in office cubicles. Having access to “male space” and having personally participated in these interactions, men wanting to end violence against women are uniquely qualified to challenge the status quo, help dispel the myths and reveal the consequences of these “routine” exchanges.

Men’s distinct responsibility to end men’s violence is not only associated with these personal exchanges or the fact that men control the major institutions of society, but, perhaps most importantly, because men commit over 92% of these offenses. Given men’s involvement in the problem it seems incredible that it is so often dismissed as a woman’s issue. And while men’s violence certainly is an issue for women, it is clearly a man’s problem and will not end until men stop it.

As men, we must acknowledge and accept responsibility for the fact that in our communities, we raise and cultivate men who rape, beat and kill women and children; that we tacitly or directly support cultural norms that dismiss women as second-class citizens worthy of disdain and abuse; and that we support multi-million dollar industries that normalize abuse toward women to such a degree that we stop recognizing it for what it is.

It is time for men to recognize that every rape joke or woman-killing joke, every reference to women’s anatomy and what we would like to do “to it”, every off-hand comment about keeping women in their place, every porn site or strip joint we visit, every time we refer to women as bitches or whores, and every scenario that supports the notion that women are inferior to men, sustains an environment where men routinely beat and rape women.

All women’s lives are impacted by the danger men pose to them, whether they are the direct victims or they have learned to circumscribe their behavior and their aspirations in order to avoid becoming one. Because it is men who are a danger to women, it is men who must accept responsibility for removing that danger. We are responsible for both our individual and collective behaviors. No man rapes or batters a woman in isolation. He relies on his family and friends, neighbors and community to support his right to dominate and abuse her. This support occurs through comments from individuals, messages in popular media, or in the collective failure to effectively intervene on the abuse, such as failing to arrest and prosecute offenders, or blaming victims for the violence, or forcing children to live with an abusive father.

Increasingly, Minnesota men are acknowledging their individual and collective responsibility to confront and challenge behaviors that harm and degrade women. An increasing number of men are identifying ways they knowingly, or unknowingly, participate in exchanges with other men (and women) that support a hostile environment toward women. This is a beginning. We need to do more.

Men must use the influence we have to change the social environment that supports the sexual objectification and social subordination of women. We are in board rooms and locker rooms, churches and sweat lodges; we own businesses and control government; we educate and entertain our children; we are often the gate keepers and purveyors of acceptable social standards. We can use this influence to promote organizational practices and public policies that respect the dignity of every human being, not as sexualized objects or social subordinates to use, exploit, or disregard, but as persons with inalienable rights to choose the opportunities and circumstances of their lives.

A growing number of male leaders in Minnesota are gathering throughout the state to do just that. They are in North Minneapolis and Anoka, in St. Paul and Winona, Alexandria and Duluth, Rochester and Bemidji, Mille Lacs and Fond du Lac, Marshall and Moorhead. They are joining a growing network of men in Minnesota committed to ending men's violence, and in fact stopping it before it starts. If sexual and domestic violence is going to end, men are going to have to stop it. This will take work and a committed effort to join women in this initiative until rape and battering are increasingly rare and we have built our communities so that families are nurtured and women, girls and boys live lives filled with joy, hope and laughter, free from the threat or reality of male violence.

ENGAGING MEN

While there have been individual men involved in working to end sexual and domestic violence, the collective male response has often been one of both passive and active resistance to the notion of ending men's violence. Because of men's resistance, many individuals believe it is necessary, even critical, to approach men carefully, with kid gloves if you will, tip toeing this way and that to keep from offending them or making them uncomfortable. This is understandable but not particularly effective. If we speak truthfully about men's violence and the social constructs which support it, many men will become uncomfortable. The question for us is not how do we keep men from getting uncomfortable but rather how do we create a space where they can get "comfortable" with their discomfort. And then how do we train competent facilitators to speak to men's discomfort, to expect it and engage men in examining how that discomfort can inform them of the depth of their male privilege. This privilege partially revealed in their expectation to remain comfortable, even in the midst of this widespread assault on women and children's lives.

Men's discomfort often arises because they recognize their involvement in the culture of violence toward women and children either as a perpetrator (newly acknowledged), a supporter of sexist rhetoric and actions, or a silent and complicit spectator to the hostilities around them. Often, a man can relate to each these scenarios, and if he is a man of conscience, that can be very uncomfortable. The question is what will he do with his discomfort? Will he lash out at the messenger or will he begin a deep inventory of his past and present relationships to women and the often titillating institutional supports for male dominance and aggression. It is his choice. Anyone who has had to do this type of personal inventory knows it would be easier to lash out at or ignore the messenger rather than do the hard work of changing; not only yourself, but an entire socioeconomic system. That's a hard sell. It becomes especially so, when you consider the benefits of sexism, including the privileges that come with manhood. So in this environment, how do we engage men and what makes us think they will be interested.

We engage their hearts, their minds, and their sense of justice.

When engaging men, we have found that it is very helpful to start with the statistics of violence against women and children. Many men are just not aware of how prevalent men's violence is. Even though information on men's violence has been available for over 30 years, many men have not considered those statistics. They don't see them as their problem. And they often don't listen to women, especially if they are talking about "women's issues".

A number of years ago, I was involved with a group of men who conducted a press conference to respond to an unprecedented level of domestic homicide reported in the just released Femicide Report from the Minnesota Coalition for Battered Women. The male cameraman was astonished at the statistics on violence against women. Although the statistics were for the state of Minnesota, he kept asking incredulously "these numbers are for the whole country right? You're not talking *just about Minnesota*? And I would say, "no these are Minnesota numbers". He could not believe it. The women organizers there later informed me that this camera man had been to many events where these kinds of statistics were announced. Their belief was that he just never listened to them until he heard them from a man. This speaks to both the insidious nature of sexism and men's particular responsibility to speak to other men.

Once we have shown the pervasiveness of the abuse, we can begin to assert that it could not be happening at this rate without wide spread cultural support. While showing the stats we point out that the perpetrators are men, men who women and children know. It is critical that we start with the violence. Minimally, that we speak about the frequency of the violence, who the victims are and who the perpetrators. We do this to put a context to the rest of our discussion on social norms, sexism and primary prevention. How is it that this many men could be raping and beating this many women? This is where we begin to speak about how we were raised as boys.

The worst thing I could be when I was seven years old was a girl. Don't run like a girl, throw a ball like a girl, don't cry like a girl, don't do anything like a girl. That's how I knew I was the right kind of boy. Now, if the worst thing I could be was a girl, it didn't take a rocket scientist, (even a 7 year old rocket scientist) to figure out boys must be better than girls. When I looked around in my boyhood world of the 1960s, this notion was reinforced again and again and again, and is still reinforced today. I recently went with my sister to pick up her sweet little 5 year old boy from day care and asked him what they did today. He said they had done a bunch of stuff including dancing. I asked him if he had danced. He said "no that's for girls". I said "for girls"? He said "yeah that's yucky stuff for girls". He's five years old and knows dancing is yucky stuff for girls. And because of that, this self respecting 5 year old boy would have nothing to do with it.

While some things have changed in the last 40 – 50 years since I was a little boy, some stay remarkably the same. Men and boys of all ages are still being assured that boys are cool and girls are not – at least as cool as boys. Because of this belief that we are better than girls, male hostility toward girls and women flourishes. Grown men and young boys insult one another by calling each other derogatory derivatives of womanhood and make friends with each other by making anti-woman comments and jokes. These friendly woman-hating comments are like a not-so-secret handshake into the boys' club. It's the pass card assuring each other of our male credentials. No sissy boys here. You don't dare challenge another man's abusive comments or behaviors toward women because your manhood becomes questioned. All men grow up with this notion in one form or another. It is part of the boys against the girls mentality. The idea

that the worst thing you could do is be on the girls team or in any way associated with girls, like maybe you're gay or a sissy or fem.

And this notion that we are better than women is the corner stone of men's justification for being in charge, privately and publicly, across the globe. "How could she possibly think she is really equal to men"? "How dare she challenge me"! Add to this the idea that some women are some men's rightful property and you have an environment where men assault women while other men sit quietly by as though it's none of their business, not something they dare interfere with - "his woman is his business".

Now add thousands of images and daily representations of women (and girls) as sexual objects. Not sexual human beings with feelings, thoughts, and opinions but simply objects for men's sexual consumption. The examples are as numerous as Hooters restaurants, internet porn, Abercrombie and Fitch marketing strategies, beer commercials, music, computer games, videos, cosmetic and fashion advertising, television programming, and the list goes on. By the time I was 16 years old I already knew girls were about sex and you could do what you wanted with and to them. Especially some girls. If they refused, it was ok to ignore the "no" - the situation just required a little more "salesmanship", or begging, or cajoling, or beer, or coercion, or name calling.

The problem with objectifying women is that it creates a climate where it is easy to assault them, or sell them, or buy them. They are after all just T & A. Just the T and the A. Not the heart and bones of another human being. And if she is my girlfriend or wife, than I have a certain ownership of that object. That girlfriend. That wife. And men are fed that idea relentlessly day in and day out.

It is critical that we start with the violence and keep going back to the violence. The violence is the context. Men talking about women's bodies and what we would like to do to them is a problem because one in three women is raped by men who consider them nothing more than the T and the A. These comments and those rapes are linked. Most women have lived with a continuum of sexually harassing and aggressive behavior in their day to day lives which many men deny, dismiss, or refuse to consider. In large part because it is so prevalent, so normal, "it's just a joke", or "he was just kidding" or "don't make a big deal out of it", or "I didn't mean anything by it", or "we were just having a little fun". The violence puts all these comments and all these behaviors into their proper perspective. It reveals the harm.

In essence, sexual and domestic violence is about power: who gets it and who doesn't. In a patriarchal culture it is men who have power and men who use it to get what they want. With power comes privilege and benefit. All men, including those who are well-meaning men, might hesitate to consider the unspoken privileges they gain because of the power imbalances that are won and maintained through violence against women. These privileges are not usually identified as such, but rather are taken for granted and promoted as the natural order of things, a birth-right, and even "god given". These privileges may be as simple as the expectation that women will be responsible for certain household duties or as complex and rewarding as pay inequities and unequal advancement practices at work or in public office.

As a part of my work with men who batter, I would regularly facilitate a group examining the benefits of their violence. At first the men would deny any benefit until I would suggest they must be getting something out of it otherwise why would they keep doing it. The men would then identify enough benefits to fill a 4 X 8 foot blackboard and then we would run out of space. These included things like, I got to win all the arguments, I got to spend the money how I wanted, I didn't have to do housework,

supper was on the table, she took care of the kids, I could dictate reality, she would agree with me, it proved my superiority, I got sex how and when I wanted, etc. etc. etc. After looking at a 4 X 8 foot blackboard with the very real, concrete benefits of violence, my first response was, why give it up? Then we would fill a 2 X2 foot space on the board detailing the negative consequences.

In a discussion about male privilege, it is good to step back and consider rape in its broader cultural context. In recent times, there has been more visibility on how rape has been used historically in the context of war- either as the spoils or as a weapon to affect enemy submission. It is likewise used as a tool to dominate others in conflicts that are often undeclared or not described as war, even though the sexual violence used in these conflicts is consistently engaged in by one group of people against another, and the impacts of the violence have devastating, social, racial, economic, and cultural consequences. Native American boys and girls were abducted and forced to remain in government boarding schools where they were routinely sexually assaulted by administrators and staff. African women, bound or born into slavery, were raped by white slave owners in the Americas and African men forced to be “studs” in the breeding of other African women. African American men were falsely accused of raping white women as a justification to torture those men and hang them. And rape has been an effective tool to keep all women in their place, in some cultures, for centuries.

Interestingly, many men use the historical prevalence of rape as evidence that it will always be that way, that you will never be rid of it, that it’s human nature. On this continent, however, there is substantial evidence to suggest that rape was a rare and unusual occurrence and that men did not routinely assault the women in their families or community. On the contrary, in traditional indigenous cultures men and women were valued equally and that type of behavior was not condoned or allowed to continue. Each individual was connected to the whole and women were held to be sacred. In that climate, rape and battery were truly aberrant behaviors and not part of the social network as we see today. And that is just the way it was...for thousands of years...until about 500 years ago when the Europeans invaded the Americas. And with them came the ideas of “might makes right” and “manifest destiny” and with that, rape.

Sexual violence and battering has been an unfortunate mainstay in this country’s history of plenty and the resulting inequities of power and privilege are imbedded in the institutional practices and policies we have come to accept as normal. And like all socially accepted inequities, the pain and the suffering is made invisible, or when visible, the afflicted party is culpable. Hence women used in prostitution are held responsible for the abuse perpetrated against them and battered women are said to be bitches. Subsequently, the perpetrators are often excused or made invisible and the status quo left intact.

Many men are opposed to sexual and domestic violence. It is our job to make visible to men how these notions of women’s inferiority, sexual objectification and male privilege are connected to that violence.

This language and this progression is how we try to reach men’s hearts. We take what is so common that the harm is invisible before our eyes and we make that pain visible. When we bring women’s reality forward, the reality of the abuse, the horror of the victim juxtaposed against the pleasure and privilege of the perpetration, the harm is revealed. And it reveals the cultural, social, and economic tentacles that support the violence but are often perceived as entertainment in the form of jokes, or websites, games, or marketing plans. It opens up before our eyes how women and children are sexually exploited and abused when we present these human beings to men as pleasure objects to use, abuse, exploit and discard. In this

process of objectification, men's humanity is subverted as well. If we start with the violence, the pain and the suffering, the jokes and comments and marketing ploys are all revealed for their callousness and cruelty. Then we can have a conversation with men about whether they want to continue to participate in this environment. Once men begin to accept the social reality of sexism and violence, we can begin to challenge them to change themselves, other men and male institutions.

How (you might ask)

Several strategies have been successful in getting men to meet initially to consider men's role in ending sexual and/or domestic violence. Here are sixteen strategies to engage men.

1. **Speaker** – Invite a well known speaker to come to your community as an individual event or part of a series of related topics, followed by an opportunity for men to discuss the issues and men's role in preventing violence.
2. **Rally** (take back the night) Organize men to take part in a rally to end sexual and domestic violence. Working with local women organizers, provide a pre-rally workshop for men.
3. **Feast** – In Native American communities hold a feast honoring women, prepared, paid and delivered by community men.
4. **Pow Wow** – Routinely sing honor songs for women and children and particularly those injured by sexual and domestic violence.
5. **Breakfast/Luncheon/Dinner** – Have some food together. Apparently this has been a consistently successful strategy to get men to the table. Have a 30 – 40 minute presentation about the extent of the violence, social norms supporting the violence, men's unique opportunity and responsibility to change the environment, and primary prevention strategies. In a couple of communities they insisted men have a ticket to get into the luncheon. The tickets were free but you had to have one to get in. Men were calling the organizers the day of the luncheon to see if there were any tickets left. They printed up a few more.
6. **Men's Forum's** – We have been successful at organizing and providing community men's forums.
7. **Film** – There are several films associated with male culture, men's violence and male responsibility to end sexual and domestic violence. One community showed the film Tough Guise at churches, community events, colleges, business and civic groups and then started an organization from interested men attending those showings.
8. **Conference** – Hold a men's conference with a focus on action. Providing a one or two day venue is a good opportunity for men to immerse themselves in the issues, network, brainstorm, and inspire each other to act
9. **Workshop** – Providing workshops at another organizations' conference is an excellent way to reach men and organize them.
10. **Fundraiser** – Organizing a fund raiser for local advocacy programs is a great way for men to be involved. Like a woman friend of mine said, "men have the power and the money, that's how they can help. Using their power and their money." That seemed really clear to me. Men will also attend fundraisers for victim service agencies. Use it as an opportunity to ask men to do more. There are men there who have influence and would be willing to use it.
11. **Event** – Organizing an event where men are able to make public their support for healthy, safe and equitable communities is an excellent and often simple way to begin to change the social norm of men's invisibility on this subject. Many communities are organizing successful Walk a Mile in Her Shoes events where men walk a mile in high heels to show their support

for ending sexual and domestic violence. If you thought it is impossible to get men to do stuff on these issues, watch how many men will come out and walk around in high heels. If they will do that, they will do anything, let's face it. This event shows us men are willing to be bold (and a little humble). We also know that men's walking in high heels, while risky, does not immediately challenge the institutional status quo of male power, but it may be a start. It may be an excellent place to recruit men interested in an ongoing network of men working with women to end men's violence. If they're willing to wear high heels you should be able to get them to a meeting to do some policy change.

- 12. Parades** – Another excellent opportunity for civic and community groups to blow the lid off the norm of men's complacency is by having floats, or marching with placards or other parade activities which clarify local men's commitment to ending sexual and domestic violence. You'll get a lot of hoots and hollers, I guarantee it, especially from women (some of whom may be your boss).
- 13. Bill boards** – Social marketing campaigns can be an effective way to change the norm and to let people know there is a group of local men working to prevent sexual and domestic violence. This can have an effect on public policies and organizational practices. Especially when used in conjunction with prevention campaigns.
- 14. Videos at sporting events** – PSA's at sporting events with men pledging they will not be violent can be a nice thing for your 10 year old son to see, not to mention your 8 year old daughter.
- 15. Projects** – Sometimes you will have men come together to decide how they may be most effective in a community or state and build projects from there. You will also have times when you have a project you want men to plug in to. They can be letter writing campaigns, election forums, lobbying for local ordinances, mentoring programs, theater or arts projects with schools, music events, video contests or documentary films. The list is as long as your imagination.
- 16. Pledge** – Using a pledge as a tool to engage men can be a useful first step. Especially if it is followed by other steps as well. Use the list of those who signed it to organize and implement other primary prevention steps.

What

Martin Luther King Jr. said "In the end we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends". This is why our focus is always on action and connection. It can be argued that what we think or feel is irrelevant in the face of injustice; only by acting will justice and peace come to our communities and then our homes.

Once men are engaged in an initial meeting or event, the goal is to move them to action. Social change work involves devising or adapting strategies that work. For a community just beginning to organize men, the goal is to get some of those men to come to a follow up meeting. You are looking for those men who can form your core group of thinkers and doers. At this second meeting, the facilitator should do a short reintroduction of the problem as a refresher for men who were at the initial meeting/event and for those men who have come for the first time. Again you are trying to tie the cultural norms, male socialization and institutional practices to the violence they see in their communities. This creates a focus on where you might begin primary prevention efforts because you have begun articulating and revealing

the social norms that contribute to the problem. After reviewing the social norms, the facilitator should also review what primary prevention is and how it has been effective in other public health arenas. After some discussion, men can begin to brainstorm where they have influence in their communities to affect these norms and, using the spectrum of prevention, can begin a process of how they might plan some primary prevention strategies.

The goal of the follow-up meeting or event is to affect positive change. If you are progressing toward change, men will continue to come. If your meetings or events become unproductive, you will lose members. Also, even though the topic is grim, the strategies need not be. It can actually be fun and engaging to consider all the ways we can challenge and change these social norms. To be in the company of men (and women) who share your values and are working with you to create a safe and just society is usually a very good place to be.

Where

Everywhere - Men can be engaged through business, schools, clinics, tribal offices, government centers, faith communities, ceremony, sports clubs, sportsman's clubs, bars, nightclubs, civic groups, pow wows, sporting events, anywhere where they congregate and are influenced, or are influential.

PRIMARY PREVENTION

Primary prevention requires us to understand the profile of sexual and domestic violence related-crimes and then identify how the environment encourages these acts of violence. Because we know that sexual and domestic violence are predicated upon a misuse of power and this violence is used to develop and /or maintain dominion over another individual, or group of individuals, it is critical that we look at how power and status are distributed in society. We look to correct the socially acceptable disparities and institutional manifestations of those injustices through a courageously critical eye.

The prevention of sexual and domestic violence will rely on our ability to create policies and protocols which reverse the inequalities so prevalent in society and particularly address male hostility toward women which crosses boundaries of race, ethnicity, religion, nationality, class or geographical location.

To be effective in our prevention efforts we need to understand that primary prevention will involve not only encouraging healthy, safe and equitable relationships, it will mean changing the institutional status quo to mimic and reflect those values.

A Few Things to Consider

The word healthy. What is a healthy relationship? Ask ten people and get seven different answers. What is healthy sexuality? Ask ten people and get a lot of winks and giggles and nods. Much of our prevention language includes this term "healthy", but after describing three or four agreed upon examples of what healthy might mean (safe, honest, good communication, trust) well meaning colleagues begin to diverge in their beliefs. Not everyone agrees that men and women in relationship should have equal say. Not everyone agrees that same sex couples should be allowed to marry. Not everyone thinks sadomasochistic sex is healthy, even if it is consensual. Some believe that there is such a thing as healthy adolescent sex; others are appalled at the suggestion. So the term healthy is a conundrum. What does it mean and how do

we describe what we mean by healthy when we speak with others? How do we create prevention policy if we can't agree on the definition of healthy? In a culture replete with images of unequal, unhealthy relationships, it can be difficult to envision its opposite.

It seems a critical strategy to use the words associated with the healthy interactions we are espousing so we are clear about what it is we want when we say no more sexual or domestic violence. When MN-MAN speaks to the vision of a world without sexual and domestic violence, we describe institutional and interpersonal interactions that are safe, healthy and equitable. When we expand on that we indicate that we want to nurture relationships and institutional practices which support fair, honest, consensual, trusting, equal, mutually satisfying and accountable relationships. This still doesn't quite get to it, but it is a beginning. We are engaged in an ongoing process, with others, of defining and then articulating this vision.

In this process of change it is useful to spend time in our organizations to determine where we have agreement and where we diverge as it relates to healthy and/or acceptable behavior. This brings us to our shared understandings of our work. This has to occur if we are to codify these beliefs into public policy.

The term healthy also has the propensity to encourage the listener to consider interpersonal relationships only and not the institutional relationships or structures that guide much of our social behavior through a complex series of rewards and punishment. The term healthy alone does not adequately articulate those institutional policies, procedures, and investments we seek to promote.

Power. We start with the premise that sexual and domestic violence is a crime that represents power imbalances between the perpetrator and the victim. These imbalances are interpersonal and very often rely on a foundation of institutional/cultural/economic inequities that supports the subordinate vulnerability of some while encouraging the dominant power of others. Basically...that rape and battery is about power and control. How do we integrate this understanding in our organizational practice or public policy development? What type of language do we use when creating our vision of a world without sexual and domestic violence? How do we include this understanding of interpersonal and institutional power differentials?

Primary prevention and prevention. MN-MAN has been successful at being clear about our message when we use the term "primary prevention". This serves to differentiate between the *prevention benefits* of action taken *before* the harm is done (like educational programs for youth) and those *prevention benefits* of actions taken *after* the harm is done (like an arrest which creates a deterrent and prevents a subsequent assault). It can be argued that both activities are preventative. The term primary prevention distinguishes the two and helps people understand the distinction more easily.

We routinely use the term **intervention** for what is commonly known in medical fields as secondary and tertiary prevention, actions occurring after the harm, and **primary prevention** for action taken before the harm occurs. This keeps it very simple in presentations and when focusing on policy development.

Intervention policies are developed to *respond* to an injury *after* it has occurred. **Primary Prevention** policies are developed to *prevent* the injury *before* it has occurred. Both are effective and critical to end sexual and domestic violence.

Ethics. Once serious and trusting discussions begin about what is healthy and/or acceptable behavior between individuals and within institutional practice, you should come face to face with value systems and ethical dilemmas. Who decides what harm is? How do we justify our attempts at putting our beliefs into law? Is all sexually explicit material problematic? If no, what material is it that we deem dangerous or toxic? What about censorship? Do we have agreement that we should be “legislating morality”? Is that what we are trying to do? What exactly are we doing?

SPECTRUM OF PREVENTION

The National Sexual Violence Resource Center, in its 2006 report, *Sexual Violence and the Spectrum of Prevention: Towards a Community Solution*, encourages a broad community approach. In this report, authors from the Prevention Institute describe a synergistic approach to prevention utilizing the “Spectrum of Prevention” which encompasses six levels of community involvement: 1) Strengthening Individual Knowledge and Skills, 2) Promoting Community Education, 3) Educating Providers, 4) Fostering Coalitions and Networks 5) Changing Organizational Practice and 6) Influencing Policies and Legislation. It is the authors’ contention that it is the integrated application of all levels of the spectrum which will lead to the most effective strategies for changing the social environment where men’s violence against women and children is allowed to prosper.

The spectrum of prevention is an excellent tool to focus peoples’ attention to the broad spectrum of activity necessary to create social change. Specifically, it is useful in getting people to focus on public policy and organizational practice. It helps to assist people in reorienting themselves to systems based solutions rather than focusing exclusively on individualized educational programming. There is a propensity to “individualize the social” in both our intervention and primary prevention efforts. As difficult as it is, it seems easier to try to change an individual’s behaviors through educational programming rather than challenge historical institutional injustices such as sexism, racism, and classism. But the root of a successful prevention campaign gets to the root of the problem and transforms it. This is both the challenge and the appeal of primary prevention work.

Using the spectrum of prevention as a guide assures our focus remains on action. While conversation exploring the complex and intricate ways in which men abuse women and children is compelling, and critical as we devise antidotes, we must not become satisfied with the discussion alone and consequently avoid the hard work of challenging social norms which support sexual and domestic violence. We must commit ourselves to an understanding that our discussions serve as catalysts for change, which require action. And this can often be the result. Men are inspired to act as we collectively acknowledge our unique opportunities and responsibility to prevent this violence.

CHALLENGES

Seeking to involve men in the movement to end violence against women is a new endeavor for most communities. Equally challenging is that primary prevention is a new concept to most people. People are more familiar with intervention strategies and policies and consequently have a tendency to revert to them out of habit. While some people do have experience in prevention work, most of those activities have been education focused. The spectrum of prevention is useful to encourage people to integrate the entire spectrum. When we utilize the entire spectrum we begin to appreciate that very little primary prevention

work has been done in public policy or organizational practice change. This presents us with an exciting and difficult challenge. We are creating the model policies and practices that others will be adapting in the future.

Sexual and domestic violence are often perceived as problems between two individuals and consequently not viewed as a public health issue. It is only when we bring in the sheer numbers of assaults and identify the victims and the perpetrators do we begin to see cultural and societal aspects of the problem. Because people have perceived this as a personal issue they have often proposed solutions that focus on individuals rather than institutions. Our challenge is to integrate both and resist the temptation to ignore the larger, more delicate problem of institutionalized disparities and oppression.

OPPORTUNITIES AND THREATS

In the summer of 2008, MN-MAN conducted seven regional advocacy focus groups for sexual and domestic violence programs. Many advocates wanted to know why men would be interested in doing this work. What motivates them?

I have heard some men say that maybe more men would be involved with women in this work if women were more welcoming. Some men dismiss advocates as man-haters and say they understand why they may be that way but...it is still hard for a well meaning man to work with them because they don't really like men, or trust them. And those men believe that those women who work with the consequences of male violence every day have a distorted view of manhood. Rather than considering the truth of what women tell us of their experience and try to understand the depth of their hope and despair and anger and disappointment with men, we dismiss them again and wonder why they don't trust us, or are wary of our "help". Rather than consider their view of manhood and integrate it into our own, we insist once again at being the correct interpreters of reality, especially when it comes to men, and women, once again, having a distorted view. And this presupposes, in part, that women's advocates don't really like men.

After nearly 30 years of working with advocates and feminist activists I continue to be amazed at the graciousness of women toward men. And the unfailing love they have for the men they know and the hope they have that those men will one day step up to join them in their efforts to end men's violence and the socioeconomic oppression of women. And that men might see, once and for all, the intricate patterns of domination and subordination men weave into their personal and institutional lives with women.

If you look at the prevalence of sexual and domestic violence and pay inequities and institutional injustices being perpetrated against women, you could say there is gender hatred occurring in this country, but I don't think you can make much of a case that it is women hating men. And even in the face of these experiences, women are hopeful, and cautious.

So as men it is helpful to acknowledge and put women's distrust into context and direct our disappointment or aggravation at the men who so often betray the women they have professed to care for as a friend, a colleague, or lover. Many women have had the experience of trusting men to work with them on this issue and then to find those men involved in abusive behaviors themselves, or viewing child pornography, or going to strip clubs, or dominating and shouting at women in meetings.

It has also been women's experience that men will appear to be allies with women to end men's violence in an attempt to be sexual with them, or positioning himself to win a custody battle with the mother of the children he abused, or to avoid detection of his own battering or incestuous assaults on his daughter. This unfortunately is the environment in which women hope to trust men.

Additionally, there is a concern that men will join women to prevent violence but refuse to consider their own sexism. That men will take over and not listen to women or consider women's expertise. Then men become more of a hindrance than a help. And if challenged by the women they are working with, they may become defensive and angry and leave. Just another good guy, in a line of good guys, victimized by man-hating feminists. And then instead of using his influence in the community to help local women's organizations, he uses it to dismantle or sabotage their efforts. So sometimes women are careful with men.

And, in spite of all this, many women still do trust men to help. Some right away, others after a while. And many women's advocates have found men that have proved themselves worthy of their trust. So this partnership between men and women is alive and well and continues to grow, bit by bit.

So perhaps the greatest opportunity is that men will become more grounded in an understanding of how men's violence and sexism is woven throughout the culture and then use their influence to change that aspect of culture.

If a man is willing to listen to the women in his life, and examine his own defenses, he has the rare opportunity to become the change he is striving to make in the world. And he can become an effective ally with women in our combined effort to create a just and joy-filled society.

MALE ALLIES

To be a successful ally we must listen to and take leadership from women, particularly feminist women. We must listen as they speak of their experience of sexism and violence. Men's violence and domination of women occurs across a continuum of behaviors women experience as toxic and hostile. From jokes that dismiss rape and battery, to the guy who won't leave the woman alone at the bar, to the boss who routinely reaches across the chest of a sitting female employee "accidentally" brushing against her, to the young men grinding on young women on the dance floor, or the comments about bitches and hos and dumb blondes and hot brunettes. It goes on and on. It is most helpful if we can learn to understand what it must be like to live with this all the time, especially after having been physically or sexually abused and/or...knowing that the threat is real and ever present as the odds of a woman being physically or sexually assaulted by a man are 1 in 3. And those odds go up the more socially vulnerable you are.

To be a helpful ally we need to contextualize our behaviors and thoughts and jokes in a culture of male dominance and violence. This isn't pretty. It's hard. Especially if you have never considered it.

What is hard is the ice cold reality of the suffering and injustices.

What is hard is realizing that you may have been a party to the cause of some of that suffering.

What's hard is accepting that you can't have fun at women's expense any more.

What's hard is you may have to really do half the housework (if you haven't been)

What's hard is you may have to stop using sexually explicit material that objectifies human beings while eroticizing domination, degradation and violence (porn)

What's hard is you may have to say something to your male friends and colleagues.
What's hard is you may lose some friends.

Whether we choose to be allies with women to end men's violence is a choice. We have the luxury to be involved or not. Unfortunately the women and children we love don't have a choice; they live with the threat of male violence every day. But we have a choice.

Accountability

If we choose to be involved, we must be accountable to women and children because it is their lives that are at stake. This means a willingness to account for our behavior and its impact on women, even, and maybe especially, when we "didn't mean it". It means making amends for behavior that has caused negative consequences and being consistent in our support of women's right to equal access to resources, status and safety. It means interrupting sexist comments or behaviors and going back to men whom you have bonded with through sexist comments or behaviors and telling them it was a mistake and that you won't be doing that again in the future. It means, in part, changing how we live. Can women count on us to be generally supportive, safe and understanding about the sexist attacks they routinely endure? How will they know? They will know by our actions.

It is imperative that we listen to the leadership of women. In particular to those women who are working daily with the women, children and men who are survivors of sexual and domestic violence. To be effective allies it is critical that we become partners with advocacy programs and other women led organizations working to end violence and support gender equity. Because of the climate in which we were raised and are living in today, men will naturally have blinders to some of our sexism and privilege. To be effective partners we must be willing to be challenged by women and seek their input on prevention actions we propose. To do this it is important to have a formal or informal advisory group of feminist women and those working to end men's violence to act as consultants and advisors (and monitors) of our activities. Believe me; it is easy to get off track as a man working on these issues. This partnership will ensure that our best intentions are beneficial to those most affected by violence and we are staying on the right track.

CONCLUSION

It is fair to conclude that we do not know yet the power of men's involvement to end men's violence against women, girls and boys. That resource is, for the most part, untapped. The Men's Action Network believes the potential is substantial and likely definitive.

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