

A CALL TO MEN

National Association of Men and Women Committed to Ending Violence Against Women

ENDING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN A Call to Men: It's time to become part of the solution

Anthony Porter

It's time for those of us who are "well-meaning men" to start acknowledging the role male privilege and socialization plays in domestic violence, sexual assault as well as violence against women in general. As well-meaning men, we must begin to acknowledge and own our responsibility to be part of the solution to ending violence against women.

What is a "well-meaning man?"

A well-meaning man is a man who believes women should be respected. A well-meaning man would not assault a woman. A well-meaning man, on the surface, at least, believes in equality for women. A well-meaning man believes in women's rights. A well-meaning man honors the women in his life. A well-meaning man, for all practical purposes, is a nice guy, a good man.

It is with this understanding that our work, our vision, is not to beat up on well-meaning men, but instead to help us understand through a process of re-education and accountability, that with all our goodness, we have still been socialized to maintain a system of domination, dehumanization and oppression over women.

There are three key aspects of male socialization that have created, maintained and normalized violence against women:

- Men viewing women as "less than"
- Men treating women as property
- Men seeing women as objects

All three are major contributors to violence against women, perpetuated consciously or unconsciously by all men, including well-meaning men.

As well-meaning men, we must begin to examine the ways in which male socialization fosters violence against women. We must examine the ways in which we "keep" women in marginalized roles throughout every aspect of society that enforces and maintains our male dominance.

As well-meaning men, we must explore and challenge the ways in which we continue to perpetuate the myth that women are the “property” of their husbands. One of the principle reasons that domestic violence continues to be seen in many of our communities as a “private” issue is our belief as men that “she belongs to him.” While we know that it’s not true, nevertheless, that myth is deeply embedded in our society.

As well-meaning men, we must unearth the roots of objectifying women. In a male-dominated society, where men value women less and see them as property, an environment is created which overwhelmingly supports men’s objectification of women. Whether it’s the music and entertainment industry, corporate America, communities of faith, or even on a street corner, women are treated by men as objects throughout every stratum of our society. We must acknowledge, own, and struggle with the change required to end this reality.

As well-meaning men, we must begin to examine the ways we separate ourselves from men who commit crimes of sexual violence and men who batter, while simultaneously giving them permission to do so. We make monsters out of them as a means of supporting our position that we are different from them. We pathologize their violence, blaming chemical dependency, mental illness, anger management issues. While in most cases, these are not the reasons they commit these assaults, we still remain focused on “fixing” them. As well-meaning men, we put a great deal of energy and resources into “fixing bad guys.” The more attention we focus on them, the more we are able to maintain and strengthen our status as “good guys.”

But this focus on maintaining our good-guy status does not allow for the space needed to understand and acknowledge that violence against women is a manifestation of sexism. And once we admit that violence against women is a manifestation of sexism, we must also acknowledge that all men are part of the problem.

You see, the “bad guys” operate in the same realm of sexism and violence as we “good guys.” The only difference between them and us is that, at a certain point, we stop, they continue and cross the line to what “well-meaning men” define as illegal.

So, what is required for well-meaning men to become part of the solution to ending domestic violence and sexual assault?

First, we must begin the process of getting re-educated. Socialization is what we have been taught:

- We need to be re-socialized.
- We have to examine and challenge our own sexism.
- We have to stop colluding with other men, get out of our defined roles in society, take a stance.
- We must remember that silence is affirming: when we choose not to speak out, we support the behavior.
- We must educate and re-educate our sons and other young men.

- We must challenge our homophobia, which serves to get in the way and stop us from actively getting involved in the fight to end sexism.
- We must accept our responsibility that domestic and sexual violence won't end until well-meaning men become part of the solution. While a criminal justice response to violence is necessary, cultural and social shifts are also required.
- As well-meaning men, we must accept leadership from women; we must accept that, left to our own devices, our sexism will continue to surface, consciously or unconsciously. Owning and accepting our sexism and our role in ending violence against women also means taking direction from those who understand it best, women.