

# A CALL TO MEN

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

## HOW TO END VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

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By Ted Bunch

My most memorable experience of what a full sense of privilege probably feels like was when I first received my E-Z Pass for my car. E-Z Pass is a device that allows tolls to be automatically deducted from the driver's account so that cash is not needed and therefore you get processed through tolls much faster when traveling. As I approached the toll, the tollgate began to rise and I drove through with no delay. I looked back at the long line of cars in the cash lane. I remember thinking as I watched the gate rise for me to pass that this must be what it is like to be a white man in America. I had access and privileges that made me feel welcome and preferred.

My male privilege as a black man is different; it does not go everywhere I go. For instance, if the police stop me while I am driving my car, I instinctively know to keep my hands on the steering wheel at the 10:00 and 2:00 position. I don't believe that the average white male experiences the police in the same way. This is because his male privilege is directly connected to and cannot be separated from his race privilege. However, even men of color, while being marginalized by racism, continue to experience the privileges and entitlements associated with being male. The benefit of this privilege operates in virtually every household, from the oldest male member to the youngest male child. Our privilege consists of rights, power and advantages given to men by men. Men control these rights and monitor them often at the expense of women.

***Naming The Problem:*** Domestic violence, rape, sexual assault and all forms of violence against women are the manifestation of sexism. The violence and abuse by men toward women is rooted in our history, our laws and woven into the fabric of our society. It must be contextualized within the construct of sexism, because male privilege, patriarchy and misogyny support this violence. The privileges, entitlements and advantage that we as men receive from the existing social and political construct provide us with support to act in overtly and covertly demeaning, oppressive, controlling and abusive ways toward women. Our culture and norms are founded on the belief that women have less value than men, and that the role of women is for the benefit, use, entertainment and pleasure of men.

For many years, concerned citizens, activists, advocates and many other dedicated people have made great efforts to end men's violence against women. The anti-rape and sexual assault community as well as the domestic violence community have been a tremendous change agent and have made remarkable progress in the effort to create safety, justice and fairness for women. Unfortunately, despite years of great effort, sacrifice and loss of life, the terror that women experience has not decreased. Men continue to get away with their violence, abuse, intimidation as well as the misuse of power for the purpose of controlling and dominating women. This is no

reflection on those communities or any other effort for change. However, it is a reflection on men and the lack of concern that we as men have for most issues affecting women. This is especially disturbing because the pain, suffering, exploitation and immeasurable loss that women experience is almost always due to violence and abuse at the hands of men.

Domestic violence, rape and sexual assault are the most devastating health issues and social problems facing our society. There is no other problem, disease or illness that claims as many victims. In almost every case the perpetrator is a male and the victim is a female. No other crime or social ill has such a destructive effect on families, children, communities or the workplace than men's violence against women. For this reason, if for no other, it is vital that men become involved in the effort to end men's violence against women. Each man individually, and we as men collectively, must take a stand and own up to our responsibility to challenge other men and end the violence that we allow to be perpetrated against women in our communities.

The American Medical Association estimates that almost 4 million men severely assault their intimate female partner or spouse each year. Men's violence against their intimate female partner is the leading cause of injury for women, and is the cause of at least 35% of all emergency room visits. Every day approximately 4 men kill their present or former intimate female partner. As many as 75% of those men murder the women they were partnered with during or after a separation. It is estimated that 25% of men batter during a woman's pregnancy. Men's violence and abuse toward women who are pregnant is the leading cause of birth defects and infant mortality. The U.S. Department of Justice reports that men will rape 1 out of 4 women and commit more than 250,000 acts of rape and sexual assault every year. It is estimated that 84% of rape and sexual assault goes unreported. In addition, more than 80% of those women and girls will be under the age of 25. It is a fact that more than 3 out of 4 rapists will know the women they rape. In fact there is not a moment or second during any day that men are not violating, assaulting or exploiting women. There is no time that women are safe or free from fear.

If we as men choose not to become involved in ending our violence against women it is because we choose to remain invested in maintaining our privilege and advantage. Our privileges and entitlements can only come at the expense of women. Any violence, abuse or degradation committed toward a woman by a man supports the status of men as the dominating group while also reinforcing the oppression of women. There is no neutral position or stance for men to take. We can either choose to become part of the solution or remain part of the problem.

***The Use of Accountable Language:*** Violence against women is a violation of human rights. If any group were to attack another group of people who are law abiding, peaceful, loving and productive members of a society, the group that was the aggressor would be brought up on human rights violations. Here in the United States men, women and children are socialized to protect the status of men. We protect men in our language and our terminology. We almost always frame the issue of domestic violence and violence against women as a "women's issue". By categorizing domestic violence, rape, sexual assault and other forms of violence against women as a "women's" issue we automatically minimize the seriousness of the problem and therefore the importance of it and ultimately the attention men give the issues. The majority of our citizens are women. Yet, we continue to define them as a "special interest group" or as a "minority group" not because of their numbers but because of their lack of influence, resources and perceived lack of value.

We must all begin to use language that speaks to the issue of men perpetrating violence and that is accountable. Rarely, if ever, do we refer to violence against women as an issue for men to confront. The lack of desire to name the problem is not by coincidence. It is just one way that we protect men by placing the focus on women and on their victimization, there by diverting attention away from the men who perpetrate the crimes. We all have learned well to value and protect men while giving less value or concern for women. The use of our language and the way we organize our thinking around issues concerning women is often presented in a way not to offend men or make men uncomfortable. We label men's violence against women with terms like gender violence, relationship abuse, intimate partner violence and other similarly generic and neutral terms. The inaccurate naming of the problem continues to remove responsibility and accountability from men. Even the term "domestic violence" does not speak to the issue and places no responsibility on the offender.

Most offenses that men perpetrate against women that are illegal and arrestable go unreported and without any form of consequence. The overwhelming majority of the men that do enter the criminal justice system do not experience prosecution and the small percentages that are prosecuted receive little or no penalty. In operating the largest batterers' program in the country, it is clear that men who abuse, batter and assault share much more in common with all men than they share differences. The belief systems and sense of entitlement are one in the same. Both groups of men, those who are well meaning and those who perpetrate violence, have been socialized to support the idea that they have rights that take precedence over the rights of woman and children.

***The Socialization of Men:*** Specific beliefs, norms, and expectations are taught to men and boys, which assist them in maintaining and reinforcing the control of their socially constructed and sanctioned male dominance. The foundation that our traditional male socialization is built upon has three key elements of belief about women. The first is the belief that women have less value or worth than men. The second is that women are to be considered as property belonging to men. Finally, women are viewed as objects (to be objectified by men) which again reinforces their status of having less value. We receive constant messages from every segment of our society that reinforce and strengthen this foundation. Due to this belief system, when women are victims of violence, rape or abuse, many men tend not to identify with the victim and do not experience any meaningful concern toward her circumstance or situation. Moreover, most men consider themselves to be well intentioned and one of the "good guys". These men do not see themselves as men who would ever engage in violent or abusive behavior. In their minds, they are exempt from fault and therefore have minimal concern about how other men behave toward women.

However, most men often blame women for their victimization and excuse men for their abusive behaviors. We tend to judge a woman before we believe a woman. We do this by showing support for men and skepticism toward women. We often create a defense for men in our minds or with other men to excuse the abuser or rapists' behavior. We too often seek to eliminate his fault while we blame her for his abuse. Men almost immediately begin to examine what she wore, where she was and offer other excuses that have absolutely nothing to do with a man's choice to violate a woman.