



## Building a Movement of Men Working to End Violence Against Women

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**ABSTRACT** *Michael Kaufman discusses the need to both address and involve men in ending violence against women (VAW), a few of the pitfalls and guiding principles, and shares his thoughts on what is the most developed example of this work, that is, the White Ribbon Campaign.*

**KEYWORDS** *gender based violence; men against violence; responsibility; White Ribbon Campaign*

### Tending to men's stuff

My new vegetable garden last summer went like this: days of labour turning the heavy clay soil, digging in fresh top soil and compost, planting, watching the first shoots poke through the ground, tending the still fragile plants, watering and weeding, and, two months later, feeling great pleasure when I spotted the first solitary tomato ripe enough to eat. Then suddenly it went wild: a tangle of tomatoes, potatoes, zucchini, cucumber, peppers, corn, pumpkins, herbs and eight varieties of lettuce. It had required much patience and hard work, but the explosion of green stuff in the course of one or two weeks seemed almost a surprise.

You might say I have been one of a handful of men tending another garden over the past 20 some years. Men's stuff, as I sometimes described it (rather than the more pretentious, and much less accurate, title 'the pro-feminist men's movement' – less accurate in the sense that when you knew the names of most participants, the word 'movement' seemed a tad pretentious). Work with men, young and old, on gender issues. Work with men to end violence against women (VAW). Building healthy workplaces, free of harassment. Building healthy relationships and shifting men's roles in the family. There were lots of rows, some well attended, others less so. But, like that first tomato, the pickings were few. Successes were often measured in satisfaction or in connection with one or two other men and with new friendships around the world. The inspiration gleaned from the work of other men and women. The look of relief and the

words of thanks by some teenage boy at the end of a talk in a high school auditorium. The letter or phone call or personal word about what one of my books had meant to someone.

The somewhat cozy nature of this work has been turned on its head over the past year. Suddenly, everywhere I turn (or visit or read about) there is yet another initiative to address or involve men and boys, about gender issues in general and ending VAW in particular. Like the garden that explodes in a tangle of summer glory, these events and initiatives, conferences and workshops, research and organizations, have not popped out of nowhere.

The groundwork was laid by the ongoing work of women's organizations around the world. But, unlike the development of feminism in North America, Europe and Australia, it seems to me that in much of the rest of the world, feminism has developed with a strong sense of the need to reach and involve men as a central aspect of the feminist project. Although full of concerns and much justifiable caution, women and women's organizations in Latin America, Africa and Asia are insistent about the need for programmes and initiatives to reach men. The groundwork has also been laid by the hard work of a growing number of men and men's organizations writing, researching, and organizing on gender issues and on ending VAW.

In spite of so much work, I worry that many of the newest initiatives may not yet be drawing on the accumulated lessons of working with men on these issues.

### **Why both address and involve men and boys in ending VAW?**

In various articles and book chapters, I have explored the causes of men's violence, focusing on the relationship of two sets of factors. On the one hand, men's social power and privileges in male-dominated societies and the social permission of violence against women, and, on the other hand, men's contradictory experiences of power, childhood experiences as witnesses or recipients of violence, and the impossible emotional demands patriarchy places on boys and men to fit into the tight pants of masculinity. This second set of factors, of course, must not be seen as an excuse for

the violence, but as part of its causal chain (Kaufman, 1985; 1993; 1994; 2000).

The relationship of boys and men to violence against women is multifaceted and very complex. However complex, it is a relationship that touches all men directly or indirectly: far too many men are committing the violence. Meanwhile, the vast majority of men have remained silent about the violence and through this silence have allowed the violence to continue. And finally, even among those many men who do not use violence, their lives are still touched deeply by the construction of the same hegemonic masculinities that, at times, entail the use of violence.

The need for public education campaigns that challenge men to stop the violence should be apparent. Unfortunately, in most parts of the world, efforts have been infrequent or non-existent. There are even fewer efforts to reach boys at a time when they are forming their self-definitions as men and their relationships with other males and females.

Beyond the importance of addressing boys and young men, I believe that some of the most effective ways to address young men and boys on this issue actually require involving them in efforts to end VAW. In a report to the government of the province of Ontario in Canada, I suggest this is so for several reasons (Kaufman, 2001: 70-73).

VAW is not an activity easily amenable to behavioural modification. It is very different from, say, educating young people about drunk driving and other issues that can be addressed largely through media campaigns and the provision of information. VAW occurs because of a complex and contradictory range of factors deeply embedded in culture, economy, law, and, most intractably, the psychic structures of masculinity. By and large, it is not the result of lack of information, although misinformation may in some cases fuel it.

The gender expectations placed on boys tend to emphasize control through aggression. Not only does this limit their human potential, but it ups the stakes when it comes to violence and conflict: the ability to dominate becomes a display of manhood. Only by involving boys and men in a redefinition of manhood will we effectively challenge these patterns of domination and control.

Thus, for reasons I have elaborated elsewhere

(Kaufman, 2000; 2001), involving men and boys in this work requires, among other things, celebrating and modelling nurturing roles for boys and men. This not only will have a positive impact on the reduction of violence, but will have a positive impact on a range of issues that currently affect women and girls in negative ways.

Males must also be involved (and not simply spoken to) because, more than anything else, men and boys will listen to other men and boys, far more than they will listen to the anger or pleas of women or to a disembodied media voice. If we are to effectively reach men and boys, men and boys must be involved. This requires more than having a man's voice used in a radio ad. By involved, I mean the active participation of men and boys in conceiving, developing and delivering anti-violence efforts.

Through such direct involvement, we are most likely to find the language, approaches and techniques that will actually reach and change the behaviour of boys and men. Our goal must not be to feel good because we are saying the right things to men; rather it is to be effective.

One reason for the effectiveness of such participation is that through participation, men and boys will feel a sense of 'ownership' of the problem. This does not mean that it is their issue as opposed to women's nor that resources should be directed away from women, women's organizations, or programmes aimed at or involving women. Rather it is simply a recognition that it is men committing the violence and, hence, it is an issue for men. Through active involvement, boys and men will feel they have a personal relationship to the issue and a stake in the process of change. Such a feeling, in turn, will unleash greater energies and unlock new resources that can be used to end the violence.

A final reason to directly involve boys and young men is one that is not usually discussed. The many ways that boys (just like girls) experience the problem of VAW – as witnesses of violence against their mothers or by being the brunt of physical violence by the same person committing violence against their mother – is a breach of the human rights of these boys. A growing body of literature tells us that witnessing violence can have the same impact as directly experiencing the violence or, better, it is a form of direct experience (Jaffe et al.,

1990; Osofsky and Fenichel, 1996; Groves McAlister and Zuckerman, 1997).

Article 19 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child makes clear all states are obliged to:

take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who is responsible for the care of the child. (UNICEF, 1997: 3)

In other words, we must address and involve boys because they too are directly affected by VAW.

### **A drain on women's resources?**

Wherever I have travelled to do this work, a critical issue comes up: whether this work with men will be a net drain from programmes aimed at women and girls, or whether men will take attention away from the concerns of women. Such concerns must be taken seriously.

At the very least we can say that recognizing the need to address men and boys means governments and agencies must devote even more resources. In other words, the increased scope of the work can be an impetus for increased funding to violence prevention efforts. Beyond that, however, I believe that reaching men to prevent VAW is by definition an expenditure of public funds to meet the interests and needs of women. It is not money being spent 'on men' any more than money spent to reduce malaria is being spent 'on mosquitos'.

Reducing levels of VAW will not only improve the lives of women, but will have a positive financial impact on women's programmes, many of which are strapped for funds because of the severity of the problem. How? Effectively reaching men will reduce VAW which will reduce the financial burden on women's programmes.

Involving and mobilizing men will actually expand the base of those who financially contribute to women's programmes, or will increase the social and political will to support women's programmes. Done properly, in co-operation with women's programmes, work to address and involve men and boys will be of net benefit (financially and otherwise) to women.

### **Generalized guilt or blame simply won't get us anywhere**

Whatever those approaches may be, there is one thing to avoid: any attempts to elicit a generalized guilt or to cast a blanket of blame.

I once saw a button that I believe was put out by a pro-feminist men's group which wanted to show its anti-patriarchal credentials. It proclaimed: 'Men Rape'. I was appalled. Yes, some men rape, but the overwhelming majority of men do not. This was an example of a framework based on generalized blame and generalized guilt. It not only proclaimed guilty those who were innocent, but displayed a rather pathetic level of guilt on the part of the men who produced such a button: guilt simply for being men in a patriarchal society. Such a framework has no place in work with boys and men to end VAW.

It is important in the work that we avoid any tendency or any temptation to use language of generalized guilt or generalized blame. Yes, boys grow up with a set of privileges as males in a male dominant society. We want boys and men to learn about that, to confront that, to disavow those privileges, to see how women have suffered and, paradoxically, the price men have paid for those privileges. And, yes, they have learned to put on that 'suit of armour' and, up to a point, play the part. We want them to question their self-definitions of manhood and see how they (and women, and children, and the planet) will be better off when they jettison that armour. But they did not create that society. They did not create out of nowhere that armour when they were 5 or 7 or 12, or even 16, and feverishly try to make it fit. They act a certain way not only to bring them rewards but out of real fear and insecurity.

Furthermore, while the vast majority of men have, in the past, remained silent about VAW, the majority of men, at least in many countries, have not used physical or sexual violence against a woman.

Because of all these things, it is entirely inappropriate to use a language of generalized guilt or blame. It simply is not accurate. It also makes a mistake because it reduces sexism to individual relations and individual identity, rather than

understanding patriarchy and sexism as systemic and institutional as well.

Nor is it at all useful as a pedagogical approach. Language that leaves males feeling blamed for things they have not done, or guilty for the sins of other men, simply will alienate most boys and men. It will promote backlash. It will push these individuals up against a wall. It just will not get us anywhere.

And so, rather than use the language of blame and generalized guilt, I suggest we use the language of responsibility. Not a generalized responsibility for the problem, but responsibility for change. The framework I prefer is what one US student involved in the White Ribbon Campaign has described as the 'men as allies framework'. The White Ribbon Campaign on his campus, the University of North Carolina, uses a slogan describing men's role in ending VAW as: 'Allies at all times' (Moore, 2001).

### **Guiding principles for effective work with men and boys to end VAW**

In early 2001 I facilitated a workshop for 50 men and women, from eight countries in Southeast Asia, focused on working with men and boys to end VAW. Although it was not part of our original design, the group developed a set of guiding principles for work with men and boys. We felt these principles could apply both to education/prevention work and to work with those who have committed acts of VAW. As I believe these guidelines form a useful starting point for the development of a range of initiatives, let me quote the statement in full:

We, the participants at the Southeast Asia Regional Workshop on Men and Gender Violence held in Lapu Lapu City, the Philippines from April 16–20, 2001 are taking action to end violence against women through addressing and involving men and boys. We understand that men's violence against women results from the power imbalance between women and men, and societies' permission of violence, including being silent about the violence. We also understand that men use violence against women to compensate for their own fears and insecurities. Their own upbringing and past experiences (while giving them privileges as men and power over women) have limited them as human beings. Thus, ending violence against women will improve the lives of women and girls as well as men and boys.

We recognize that this work, which involves both prevention and intervention, must be guided by the following principles:

- Equity, equality and justice are the foundations of this work.
- Consultation, co-operation, collaboration, and coordination should be done with women and women's groups.
- We make it clear to the men and boys that gender violence in any form is unacceptable and must be stopped.
- Women's safety and dignity are paramount within this work.
- We recognize the diversity of men. Not all men use violence.
- Men who use violence against women must take responsibility and be held responsible.
- We understand men's potential to change and be agents of change. We support them and encourage men who do not use violence to speak out against violence against women.
- We use a humane, empathetic, and positive approach with men.
- We build partnerships across society and encourage men from all social and economic classes and across the religious, ethnic, and political spectrum to get involved.
- We recognize that ending violence against women involves challenging traditional definitions of manhood and men's roles in society beginning with childhood.<sup>1</sup>

A number of these principles can be illustrated, in action, by the work of the White Ribbon Campaign.

### **The White Ribbon Campaign**

When three of us in Toronto, Canada, started the White Ribbon Campaign in 1991, it would have been hard to imagine that it would quickly become a national institution and within a decade spread – to varying degrees of public profile and activity – to become the largest effort in the world of men working to end VAW. There are WRC activities or use of the WRC symbol in at least 25 countries, including, in Europe (Austria, Belgium, Denmark, England, Finland, Germany, Lithuania, Norway, Spain, Sweden), in Africa (Morocco, Namibia, South Africa), in Latin America (Brazil, Nicaragua), the USA, Australia, and Asia

(Australia, Cambodia, China, India, Japan, the Philippines, and Vietnam).

The premise of the campaign is straightforward: there are many men who do not commit acts of VAW. But these men have traditionally been silent and, through that silence, have allowed the violence to continue. Wearing a white ribbon from November 25, the International Day for the Eradication of VAW, up to December 6 (the anniversary of the Montreal massacre in which a man killed 14 women) or participating in a WRC activity is a means to break that silence and encourage self-reflection. Wearing the ribbon is a public pledge never to commit, condone, nor remain silent about VAW, and it is a call on governments and all institutions controlled by men to seriously address the issue. White Ribbon's basic philosophy is that while not all men are responsible for committing VAW, all men and boys must take responsibility for helping end it.

It is strictly non-partisan and attempts to include men from across the social and political spectrum. We work with women's organizations and urge men to listen to the voices and concerns of women. In Canada, we have a formal partnership with the Canadian Women's Foundation to raise money for anti-violence women's programmes, as well as raising money for local women's programmes and services. We conduct media campaigns and involve high-profile men in speaking out against the violence. And we work on issues around fatherhood, encouraging men to be more active and nurturing parents.

The campaign is now putting more emphasis on its public education efforts (including a revamped website) and is developing a strong advocacy capacity. One of the most important components of our programming has been to develop educational materials aimed at boys and young men and to do outreach to schools. In the mid-1990s it developed an Education and Action Kit which has a range of in-class curriculum activities, extra-curricular activities, practical guides for organizing White Ribbon and fund raising activities, and hand outs on the issue.

We put out an annual 'Famous Guy' poster. The poster is entitled 'These Guys Know It's Time to Put an End to Men's Violence Against Women' and

contains signatures of a number of prominent Canadian men: rock singers, actors, labour and business leaders, artists, writers and scientists. The posters have dozens of blank lines as an invitation for young men and boys to sign on, to put their names on the line. The posters are put up in schools and workplaces, in government offices and stores for men to sign.

Perhaps most importantly, the WRC encourages men and boys to do whatever is appropriate in their community to reach and involve boys and men. There are endless examples: from the group of students who make a video about VAW, to the hundreds of schools that sell white ribbons to raise money for local women's shelters, to the trade

unions that distribute ribbons and pamphlets to their members, to the sports teams that wear white ribbons while they play. The importance of these activities is not only the activities themselves. It is giving boys and men the structure, the encouragement, and the tools to work as allies with girls and young women.

These activities, and thousands more like them popping up like vigorous plants all around the world, tell us, in no uncertain terms, that men are finally beginning to speak out for the end of VAW. It is a development long nurtured and long overdue. It is time we use our energies and accumulated experiences to make sure we harvest a good crop.

#### Note

1 This workshop included 50 men and women from Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam, and Canada. It was supported by the Southeast Asian Gender Equity Program of the Canadian International Development Agency and was hosted by Kauswagan Community and Social Centre in collaboration with Men Opposed to VAW and Children (Cebu).

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