

Not all men are guilty of violence and sexism – but all men have a responsibility to stop those crimes

 [telegraph.co.uk/men/thinking-man/not-men-guilty-violence-sexism-men-have-responsibility-stop/amp/](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/men/thinking-man/not-men-guilty-violence-sexism-men-have-responsibility-stop/amp/)

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As a boy I was always told I had to take responsibility for my actions. If you do something wrong, it's only right that you suffer the consequences. But what if you feel like you're being reprimanded for something you're not directly responsible for?

Well, men, as an homogenous mass, are increasingly being called out for their behaviour and blamed for causing the mental and physical suffering of various different sections of society. As such, many men now feel they are being unfairly targeted simply for being male.

The predictable response to men being portrayed negatively in the media, and beyond, [comes via the #NotAllMen trope](#). It's quickly become the go-to moniker of those determined to distance themselves from stories of sexism, violence or sexual abuse. So, if someone on Twitter writes about 'sexist men', a legion of (often anonymous) accounts pile in to reply "Not all men".

While it's perfectly obvious that not *all* men are sexist, it would be absurd to suggest sexism isn't a mostly-male pursuit. Equally, it's true that not *all* men are violent, but in the same breath almost 90pc of violent crimes are carried out by men. And, sure, not *all* men are rapists, but almost 97pc of sexual assaults have a male perpetrator.

What's more, it's not just women who suffer these crimes. Men are most likely to be the victims of violence, it's estimated that only 1 in 10 male rape victims report their experience to the police, and men are subjected to psychological abuses such as homophobia and racism. Only, again, men are the biggest culprits.

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It's too easy to dismiss these as 'women's issues' – aided by the fact it's mostly women who campaign on them – but, given the reality that men are the biggest transgressors and often the victims, isn't it more accurate to call these male issues? I'd say so. And I'd also say men aren't currently doing enough in terms of preventing these behaviours – and that's what desperately needs to change.

There's an interesting paradox at play when it comes to the male responsibility-psyche, too. The more fervent of the naysayers will gladly point out all the wondrous things men have accomplished. As they take collective responsibility for the many male achievements that have improved everyone's lives, rabidly demanding praise for their forefathers having invented the wheel, they also point-blank refuse to accept that men might just be responsible for many of the world's flaws, too. They fail to understand that, just because we've laboured over most of the world's buildings, we can't simply absolve ourselves of responsibility for what happens inside them.

What's more, the #NotAllMen brigade are actually indicative of a much wider problem; that men have, for too long, refused to acknowledge that their behaviour can be the breeding ground for some of the most grotesque issues faced by men and women, boys and girls. As young boys lift skirts in the playground, use casual violence to resolve disputes and develop a domineering attitude towards girls, a sense of impunity arises every time such an incident is put down to a case of 'boys will be boys'.

Boys will act as boys have always done if we allow those behaviours to continue unchecked, and while calling out negative behaviour is important, it's far more important to ensure they don't develop in the first place.

By telling our sons a man must be strong, we encourage violence as a means through which they attempt to assert dominance. By promoting promiscuity we create an entitlement to sexual gratification - and increase the likelihood they'll try and achieve it through any means necessary. By promoting stoicism we denounce emotional intelligence, and ensure young boys grow up at odds with their true feelings.

Boys are all-too-often admonished for daring to show off their 'feminine side', they're told that only financial success is acceptable, they're taught that only pecs and a six-pack are desirable ... I could go on.

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Failure to adhere to these masculine principles creates a miasma of anxieties within groups of young men. Numerous studies have shown that masculine anxiety is a determining factor in male-on-male and male-on-female violence, sexual assault, sexism, racism, homophobia and the awful suicide statistics we've become so familiar with. Isn't it about time we try and alleviate the pressure on young men to conform?

And, lads, here's where we all come in.

It's time we take collective responsibility for how our social engineering is encouraging these problems. It's time we take collective responsibility for building up well-rounded, emotionally intelligent, empathetic young men. And it's time we take collective responsibility for the future – by educating young boys that they can be different.

For those readers thinking I'm teaching you to suck eggs, you're wrong. You're exactly the person who needs to hear this. Because if, like me, you're already trying to be better, we're relying on you to spread the word.

We have to start having those difficult conversations, calling out those behaviours and allowing ourselves to grow up in a world free from the shackles of masculinity that can cause sweet young boys to lose their way.

Be that driver for change. Your sons and daughters will thank you.

Chris Hemmings is a journalist and author of '[Be A Man – How macho culture damages us and how to escape it](#)' – out now