

Topic 2. The causes of men's violence against women

There are those who believe that violence by people in general and men in particular is solely the result of biology. It is true humans have the biological capacity to be violent. But what turns that capacity into reality?

After all, we know that many men (including most men in Canada) will never use physical or sexual violence against a woman.

Research over the past 150 years tells us²⁵ there were once many small societies with little or no violence against women, violence among men or violence against children. In fact, half of the tribal societies investigated by anthropologists showed little or no violence. This tells us that violence among humans is not inevitable, but is a result of the way we set up our societies. These same researchers discovered that societies with violence were those in which women were second-class citizens. Where there was a high level of equality between men and women, there was little or no violence. (Societies where men played an active role as fathers also had much lower levels of violence).

Men's violence against women has its roots in the ways we have historically regarded women and men. For the past 8,000 years in an increasing number of societies, men have held positions of privilege while women have been cast in subservient roles²⁶. In effect, women were treated as property. Until changes occurred over the past 100 years, women were denied such basic rights as the right to vote, to pursue a career, to own property or to pursue higher education. Some countries still deny women these basic rights.

Violence is a way of maintaining the power and control of one group of individuals over another. Wife abuse, for example, is in part a way that some men have controlled and terrorized their spouses.

Even though laws and social policies have changed in an effort to mitigate inequality between women and men, gender stereotyping persists generation after generation because of the messages we give children about how we value women and men.

These messages are relayed through song lyrics, advertisements, movies, television, video games, and through the influential words of other adults around them.

Young boys and men often have more opportunities, power and privilege in academics, athletics, employment, the criminal justice system, and their intimate relationships.

Some believe they are superior to women on all levels (i.e. intellectually, socially, financially, and parentally) and therefore have the right, or at least some deserved role, to use abusive, dominating behaviour to gain and maintain their positions of authority and prestige.

²⁵ Peggy Sanday, *Female Power and Male Dominance* (Cambridge:Cambridge University Press, 1981)

Peggy Sanday's study of ninety-five tribal societies, almost half, 47 percent, were free of rape. Only 18 percent showed what she called a significant amount of rape. The remaining 35 percent had a very limited amount. Another study of 186 non-industrialized cultures, by I.L. Weiss, suggests that those societies with strong beliefs in women's inferiority and high levels of male physical aggression were the ones with a higher percentage of rape.

(I.L. Weiss *Journey into sexuality: An Exploratory Voyage* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1986) both referred to by Ilsa L. Lottes, "Sexual Socialization and Attitudes," p. 196.)

Also Scott Coltrane has used anthropological data to compare men's behavior in different cultures in "The Micropolitics of Gender in Nonindustrial Societies," *Gender & Society* 6 (1992), pp. 86-107.

²⁶ Richard Lee as contributor to Michael Kaufman, "The Construction of Masculinity and the Triad of Men's Violence." in Michael Kaufman, ed., *Beyond Patriarchy: Essays by Men on Pleasure, Power and Change* (New York, Oxford University, 1987)

In order to end woman abuse, women must become equal to men and be valued and respected equally in society.

Questions about inequality, oppression and privilege inform how we think about women in a broad context and impacts how communities will approach preventing woman abuse. What is most important in answering these questions is to reject the rigid gender role stereotypes. Any thought or actions which demean, disrespect, or maintain the inequality of women contributes to a societal attitude that condones woman abuse and therefore woman abuse is not a serious problem.

Violence against women is also the result of some men feeling entitled to a life of privilege delivered to them by women. Sexual assault, for example, occurs when an individual (usually a man) feels it is his right to have sex with whom he wants, when he wants, regardless of the other person's wishes.

Violence against women also results from the fact that societies have traditionally permitted the violence to occur. Until recently, we in Canada did not have strong or effective laws concerning violence against women. When we did, they were seldom applied. We have long considered violence against women a private matter.

Violence is not only about the power of men over women. It also comes from men's own life experiences and fears.

For some boys and men, the use of violence is a way of proving to themselves and those around them that they are "real men."

Raised by emotionally distant or demanding fathers and a culture that discourages emotional response, some boys grow up with a reduced ability to feel what others feel; that is, their empathy is reduced. If you do not feel what others feel, you are more likely to commit violence because you are not fully aware of the damage you are doing.

Many boys and men are taught to suppress their emotions. They have been taught that feelings make them weak and feminine. But feelings are a part of being human. When we try to suppress feelings, they often re-emerge in the form of aggression and violence.

Many boys grew up witnessing violence in the home or directly experiencing violence themselves. Although this leads some boys and men to refuse to use violence themselves, it has taught others that the use of force is acceptable in personal relations.

None of these factors is an excuse for individual acts of violence performed by some boys and men. But by understanding these factors, we get closer to changing the conditions that create violence in the first place.

Educators interested in learning more may wish to read:

- "The Seven P's of Men's Violence" by Michael Kaufman
http://www.whiteribbon.ca/educational_materials/default.asp?load=seven
- "Ten Things Men Can Do To Prevent Gender Violence" by Jackson Katz
<http://www.jacksonkatz.com/wmcd.html>
- "Manhood and Violence: The Deadliest Equation" by Michael Kimmel at:
<http://www.whiteribbon.com/articles/manhoodandviolence.pdf>

Topic 3. Issues for girls and boys about having respectful interactions and eventually growing up to have healthy equal relationships.

Although the template for our relationships is often established by our parents, we all have the chance to create our own future. When we are young we begin to develop attitudes and beliefs that will serve as the lens from which we will view our adult interactions. During our teenage years and young adulthood, we often create patterns that last a lifetime. This is one reason why it is particularly important that the White Ribbon Campaign's Campaign in a Box devotes a lot of attention to promoting healthy equal relationships for youth aged 11 to 14 years. During these years, we have the opportunity to significantly influence and prevent men's violence against women through prevention education.

Healthy equal relationships are, by definition, free of violence or the threat of violence. Violence destroys trust, it destroys love and it destroys mutually satisfying physical and emotional relationships (whatever that might involve for a particular couple).

A healthy equal relationship is, by definition, a relationship between two independent and strong individuals. Even though romantic movies show couples losing themselves in each other, even though popular music suggests we won't survive without the one we love, the truth is that true and strong love is built on a mutual respect for each other's independence. This means giving our 11 to 14 year old youth the ability to recognize and practice respectful interactions between each other in order to establish the building blocks and framework of healthy equal relationships for their lifetimes.

This means it is important that girls and boys, young women and young men, learn to avoid patterns that involve emotional manipulation, control or abuse. It means that decision-making must be shared in relationships. It means that neither should control who the other person's friends are.

Among girls, we encourage assertiveness and a demand for respect. Girls who come from a household where they have long witnessed violence against their mother, or where they have experienced violence themselves, sometimes have a hard time respecting themselves and expecting full respect. Cultural representations of femininity, in media/advertising, also promote poor self-esteem in girls. This is also true for girls from some cultures where, traditionally, women and girls have been second-class citizens. Although we in Canada, in our multicultural community, hold strong to beliefs of cultural diversity and the cultural mosaic, we also hold as sacred the beliefs inscribed in the conventions of the United Nations that all humans deserve equality and human rights, regardless of sex. It is important for all countries to strive to uphold the conventions of the United Nations. If we are to bring about true equality, it is a job for us all.

Among boys, we, of course, also encourage assertiveness (as opposed to aggressiveness or dominance) and a demand for respect. But given the inequalities in society, we also put special emphasis on encouraging boys to listen to the voices and experiences of girls. We insist they play their part to keep violence out of their relationships. We say to boys that everything, whether it is a choice of how they talk to girls and all youth their age, what to do on a date or what sort of physical relations to engage in or not, is a matter of mutual discussion, mutual respect, and consent.

Topic 4. Women leading the efforts to end the violence

Although White Ribbon is proud to see its campaign spread around the world, the real heroes and leaders of the work to end violence against women have been women and women's organizations. For over three decades, women have worked against great odds simply to raise this issue in public awareness. Their efforts have led to important legal changes. For example, until 1983, Canadian law did not recognize a husband raping his wife as a crime. One of the most impressive legal victories came in 1992 when the Canadian Parliament passed the most progressive law on sexual assault in the world. It states not only that "no means no," but that explicit consent is required. Meanwhile, women's organizations have not only pushed for clear and strong laws, but also that police and the courts must implement the laws.

While all this was going on, women were organizing a huge network of shelters for abused women, hotlines and crisis centres for women who have been sexually assaulted. These shelters and crisis centres rely on government funding, support from their communities, hard-working staff and many dedicated volunteers.

We encourage you to contact women's resources in your community to learn more about what they do, to learn from their experiences and to contribute financially and in other ways to their ongoing success.

Visit the following women's organizations to learn more about women leading the efforts to end men's violence against women.

- www.shelternet.ca
- www.womanabuseprevention.com
- www.springtideresources.org
- www.metrac.org
- www.ontariowomensdirectoriate.gov.on.ca
- www.orcc.net

Topic 5. The White Ribbon Campaign

The premise of the campaign is straightforward: although most men will never commit acts of violence against women, men have traditionally been silent about the violence. Through that silence, men have allowed the violence to continue. When a male wears a white ribbon he is making a public pledge never to commit, condone or remain silent about violence against women. The white ribbon is a call on governments and all institutions controlled by men to address the issue seriously. White Ribbon's basic philosophy is that while not all men are responsible for committing violence against women, all men and boys must take responsibility for helping end it.

The white ribbon is both a personal and a collective statement that our future has no violence against women.

White Ribbon is not an act of collective guilt. Rather, it is an act of collective caring and love for the women in our lives. We believe that our mothers, sisters, daughters, wives and friends should never have to live in fear of violence at the hands of men.

The WRC is strictly non-partisan and includes men from across the social, political, ethnic, and religious spectrum. It does not take positions on many important social issues, choosing instead to bring together the widest array of men (and in some areas, men and women) to focus exclusively on ending woman abuse and sexual assault, as well as sexual harassment and stalking.

There is no formal chapter or membership structure. Rather, the campaign operates as a decentralized network. We do this because we do not want scarce resources going to run a big bureaucracy. But the most important reason is that we believe people in their own communities know best how to get out the message to their neighbours, fellow youth, workmates, family members, and peers.

We work with women's organizations and urge men to listen to the voices and concerns of women. We encourage local White Ribbon efforts to raise money for local women's programs as well as for the WRC.

We conduct media campaigns and involve high-profile men in speaking out against men's violence against women.

We also work to encourage more involved and more nurturing fatherhood. Research tells us that boys who come from homes where the father uses violence against the mother or the children are more likely to use violence themselves. We also know that sons of fathers who are authoritarian and emotionally distant are more likely to use violence in their own relationships. (Of course, many boys who grow up witnessing abuse or experiencing domineering fathers will never go on to use violence themselves.)

Begun in Canada in 1991, the White Ribbon Campaign has now spread to over 50 countries spanning six continents.