

Successfully Involving Men and Boys to End Violence Against Women Lessons from Around the World from the White Ribbon Campaign*

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Why is it critical that men and boys embrace the tasks of promoting gender equality and ending violence against women? And perhaps just as importantly, how can we work more effectively to ensure that men and boys do embrace this challenge? This short paper will focus on the first of these questions.

For the past two-and-a-half decades, a small but now rapidly-growing number of men and women around the world have been working to find answers to precisely these questions. In one sense, these seem to be obvious questions: if males comprise half the population and, what is more, still maintain unequal positions of social, economic and political power, then surely men must be mobilized if we are going to achieve our goals of equality and equity, including an end to all forms of violence against women.

Yet, until the past few years, these issues have been largely absent from the discussions and strategies of women's organizations, NGOs, the United Nations, and governments. This absence is both a reflection of the nature of the problem *and* a reflection of who has led these struggles. After all, part of the feminist project is to *stop* the monopoly that men have had over social discourse, culture, and decision-making: as a result, the project of a gender-equitable world has focused on developing women's voices and has focused on meeting women's needs. For another thing, far too many men either remained opposed or indifferent to these issues. Even those many men who have been sympathetic to women's struggles have tended to see these issues as primarily about women and not a matter that they should be using their own energy, time, and resources to address. For many women, including those who were working in difficult

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environments for women or with women-survivors of violence, this hostility (among some men) or indifference (among others) seemed to confirm their worst suspicions about men and their capacity to change. Meanwhile, many women's organizations and others were rightly worried that scarce resources devoted to these issues be deflected.

In a sense, all these roadblocks and issues actually answer the first question I posed above. The continued societal power of men (and, along with that, the tenacious structures of unequal gender relations and our assumptions about men and women) *are* the reasons why it is critical to engage men in a project of promoting equality. This is true whether we want to engage male lawmakers to enact more progressive legislation or engage police and judges to make sure the legislation is administered properly; this is true if we want opinion-makers in communities, such as religious officials, to advocate more just and equal relations; this is true if we want men to engage in safer sexual practices to help reduce the spread of HIV/AIDS; this is true if we want men taking on more responsibilities in the home – a task which is not only important for the liberation of women but important for the lives of our children; this is true if we want those with disproportionate control of wealth, including government budgets, to devote more resources to meet the needs of women and girls. And those are but a few examples.

It is for reasons such as these that, increasingly, NGOs, national governments, women's organizations, and UN agencies – which, as noted above, previously either discounted or ignored the importance of engaging men and boys to promote gender equality – have come to the conclusion that such engagement is critical if we are to achieve gender equality and to greatly reduce violence against women. Our ability to meet these goals resides not only in a continuation and extension of existing strategies, but the addition of new strategies to address and involve men and boys. They have come to this conclusion based not on wishful thinking nor ideology, but by observing that however important existing strategies have been, they have not been sufficient.

This conclusion represents a very important development. In some ways it represents a logical growth out of forty years of women's struggles; in other ways, it represents a new direction, one that for many years seemed counter-intuitive and met much resistance.

Such a conclusion is consistent with arguments that I and others have advanced over the years. We have suggested there are serious consequences in *not* addressing and involving men and boys in our efforts:

- it fails to acknowledge men's roles as gatekeepers of the gender status quo and their capacity to thwart, ignore, or merely pay lip service our efforts. We must ensure that goals of gender equality and ending violence against women become part of the political, cultural, legal, and economic mainstream.

- By thinking we can ignore men, we *de facto* perpetuate the assumption that gender issues are only about women and women's experiences; this effectively marginalizes women and women's struggles.

- Leaving out men limits us from getting to some of the underlying structures and dynamics involved in the oppression of women. This is because gender power is a dynamic relation between the sexes and among each sex. Programs to empower women and girls are critical, but face limits if we are not also reshaping the world of men's power.

On the other hand, by addressing and involving men and boys to challenge gender inequality and work to end violence against women, we potential accomplish a number of things:

- we can develop a widescale social consensus on these issues. By doing so we can potentially mobilize much greater resources to meet the needs of women and girls. In other words, the concern that engaging men on these issues will take resources way from meeting the needs of women and girls is a serious concern but also based on an incomplete argument. Money spent on a program to raise awareness among men and boys about the problem of violence against women or the dangers of unsafe sex might be money spent *on* men and boys but it is money that is being spent to meet *the needs of* women and girls.

- helps us isolate those men who are working to preserve men's power;
- help us raise the next generation of boys and girls in a gender equitable framework;
- by changing attitudes and behaviors among men and boys, immediately improve the lives of women and girls in the home, workplace, school, and community.
- gain new insights into the complex workings of gender systems.

New directions require the development of analytical frameworks that allows us to understand a series of new challenges. Including men within a gender discourse and hoping to find ways to enlist men and boys in supporting struggles for gender equality and ending gender-based violence (in all its forms) requires an understanding of complex and often contradictory forces. The most obvious of such contradictory forces are those which might explain why men,

that is, members of the half of humanity with relative power and privilege, might support changes that will actually undermine that power. Over the years, I've suggested that possible basis for an understanding of these complex forces shaping the lives of men and boys is what I've referred to as "men's contradictory experiences of power."

We now have an increasingly rich body of literature that explores these new conceptual frameworks. We also have a range of programs all over the world, a number of which have undergone independent evaluations, that show that we can effectively work with men and boys.

The development of these programs represents a major and long-awaited step towards the creation of greater gender justice and greatly reducing levels of gender based violence.

Further reading by the author available at www.michaelkaufman.com/articles:

Michael Kaufman, *Cracking the Armour: Power, Pain, and the Lives of Men* (Toronto: Viking Canada, 1993).

Michael Kaufman, "Men, Feminism, and Men's Contradictory Experiences of Power," in Harry Brod and Michael Kaufman, editors, *Theorizing Masculinities* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1994)

Michael Kaufman, "The Construction of Masculinity and the Triad of Men's Violence," in *Beyond Patriarchy: Essays by Men on Pleasure, Power and Change*, ed. by Michael Kaufman (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1987).

Michael Kaufman, "The Aim Framework: Addressing and Involving Men and Boys To Promote Gender Equality and End Gender Discrimination and Violence" UNICEF, 2003.

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