

I. Involving Men and Boys to End Violence Against Women: The White Ribbon Campaign

By Michael Kaufman

Introduction

The need to challenge men to end violence against women should be apparent. After all, it is men, or at least some men, who are committing the violence while the vast majority of men stay silent, allowing the violence to continue. Public education is critical for removing the shroud of silence that has often allowed lawmakers, health care professionals, police, and judges to disregard the problem of violence against women. It shifts the discourse from one that speaks of the private nature of the violence to one that casts it as a public crime. Through public education, men can begin to explore how their own attitudes and behaviors may contribute to this continuum of violence and can challenge one another to change them.

To work effectively with men and boys on this issue, we must (1) involve them directly in the work to end the violence; and (2) engage them, not through a vague sense of collective guilt, but through their inherent goodness and their love for the women in their lives. This must be done with respect for all men and without condoning the violent behaviors and attitudes of some men. This case study discusses possible causes of men's violence, reasons why men's involvement is critical to end it, and the White Ribbon Campaign, a successful effort to involve men.

Understanding Men's Violence

An understanding of the complex nature and causes of men's violence against women must form the basis of any strategic approach to engage men in ending it. A feminist analysis focuses on: 1) patriarchal power, 2) a sense of entitlement to privilege, and 3) societal permission for men to be violent.

Studies of violent men and research on masculinities have identified additional factors that contribute to men's violence. Some men use violence as a compensatory mechanism when they feel they have not been able to live up to unrealistic expectations about what it means to be a powerful man. In other words, men's violence is not just a result of men's power, but is caused by fear of not having that power. Men's violence is also the result of a societal process through which boys experience physical and emotional distance from their fathers and reject the caregiving qualities of their mothers. This process reduces men's ability to empathize with others' feelings and to understand others' needs. Masculinity, as currently constructed, also hinges on the internalization of a range of emotions and their redirection into anger and sometimes violence. Finally, some men witnessed as children violence by their fathers against their mothers, or were themselves victims of violence. This exposure leads some to be violent, often with a deep self-loathing for themselves and their violent behavior.

Why Men's Involvement Is Critical

We must collectively challenge patriarchal power, men's sense of entitlement to privilege, and societal permission for men to be violent. This requires the sort of legal,

judicial, educational, political, cultural, behavioral, and attitudinal changes that have been part of feminist practice and of social change over the past thirty years. But we must also find ways to link men's own experiences with an understanding of women's oppression. Ending violence against women is not simply a question of providing information about its harms. To end patterns of domination and control, we must also involve men and boys in a redefinition of manhood.

Men and boys listen to other men and boys far more than they do to the anger or pleas of women or to an impersonal media voice. That's why, first and foremost, men must participate actively in anti-violence efforts and in leading strategies to reach other men. Through participation, men and boys will feel a sense of ownership in the problem. They will feel they have a personal relationship to the issue and a stake in the process of change. Those feelings, in turn, can unleash greater energies and unlock new resources that can be used to end the violence.

The White Ribbon Campaign

In 1991, a small group of men in Canada decided they had a responsibility to urge all men to speak out against violence toward women. While they knew most men in Canada were not violent, they also knew that the vast majority remained silent about violence and that this silence permitted the violence to continue.

They started the White Ribbon Campaign to encourage all men to look at their attitudes and behavior and to challenge other men to stop all forms of violence against women. They adopted the white ribbon as a symbol of men's commitment to end the violence. The ribbon represented a personal pledge never to commit, condone, or remain silent and was intended to be a catalyst for discussion and a public challenge to men who might use violence against an intimate partner, another family member, or a stranger. This was a call to policy makers, opinion leaders, police, and court personnel to take seriously what was a national and international epidemic. Wearing the ribbon became an act of love for the women in these men's lives.

In the past decade, they moved from an idea organized in a living room to active campaigns in schools and communities across Canada. There are now White Ribbon Campaigns in Asia, Europe, Africa, the Middle East, Latin America, Australia, and the United States.

The White Ribbon Campaign brings men together from across political, social, and economic spectrums. Campaign participants can disagree on many important issues of the day, but they must all agree on one point: that men must work together and with women to end violence against women. The men involved in the program are united against intimate partner violence, against sexual harassment, and against men's controlling behavior in relationships. They support increased funding for women's programs, including women's shelters and rape crisis centers. They are united in fostering equality among the sexes and the greater participation of men in nurturing and caregiving roles. By building this unity, they find ways to work together cooperatively in a positive environment.

The Campaign works in the school system to reach boys, having produced a series of toolkits for educators to use with teenagers in over a thousand middle and high schools across Canada. To reach men as workers and consumers those involved in the Campaign partner with corporations and unions, which can bring its ideas to offices and shops. Corporate and union support is also important because the Campaign receives no federal funding from the Canadian government and relies solely on support from these groups, private foundations, and concerned individuals.

The Campaign also works with women's organizations to respond to policy issues regarding violence against women. This work can include lobbying, public demonstrations, press conferences, and other media coverage. For example, each year public relations firms donate time and resources to produce radio, television, and print advertisements that are distributed free of charge to the media. In addition, the Campaign maintains a web page and distributes a newsletter to its members and supporters.

The signature event of the White Ribbon Campaign in Canada centers on an annual White Ribbon Days running from November 25th, the International Day for the Eradication of Violence Against Women, to December 6th, the anniversary of the 1989 Montreal Massacre (when a man murdered 14 women university students). During that week, forums are held, leaflets distributed, and pancake breakfasts and other events are given to increase awareness about the violence and to raise funds for women's programs. Public service advertisements are broadcast on television and radio and printed in newspapers and magazines. White ribbons are distributed in schools, universities, places of worship, the workplace, shops, and on the streets.

The Campaign also responds year-round to daily requests for information, ideas, and resources to end violence against women. And members participate in other events and issues to draw new groups of men to the Campaign. Women's organizations are viewed as experts on the issue of violence against women and are looked to them for leadership, especially with regard to legislative, judicial, and programmatic issues. Thus, Campaign members co-host events with women's organizations and fundraise for women's programs. These activities bring participants closer to the problem and to those women directly affected by it. There is a formal partnership with the Canadian Women's Foundation, and a major contribution is made each year to support their work with youth.

Research indicates that children without emotionally nurturing parenting are more likely to have difficulties regulating their own behavior, which may lead to violent behavior as adults. Thus, the Campaign also partners with fatherhood groups to celebrate men as nurturers and caregivers. Through an annual DadWalk in Toronto and other cities, men are encouraged to be active, involved, non-violent, and caring fathers. This and similar activities support a model of fatherhood that allows boys to have closer, more nurturing relationships with their fathers, and to become happier, more secure adults less apt to use violence against women.

Conclusion

Feminist analysis offers new gender roles, within which men relate to women as equals and leaders worthy of respect and love. Efforts like the White Ribbon Campaign are based on the premise that men are good and that these new gender roles are achievable. To end violence against women, and so that they do not inflict their own pain on women, children, and other men, all men, not just those who have already committed violence, must be encouraged to heal. The White Ribbon Campaign, with its message of change, invites men into a dialogue with each other and with women to redefine gender roles and end violence against women.

Other Resources

1. This paper draws extensively from my forthcoming article, "Addressing and Involving Men and Boys in Ending Violence Against Women—the White Ribbon Campaign," Bob Pease, editor, London: Zed Books, 2002.
2. Michael Kaufman, "The Seven P's of Men's Violence," Available on-line at www.whiteribbon.com and www.michaelkaufman.com
3. Michael Kaufman, *Cracking the Armour: Power, Pain and the Lives of Men* (Toronto: Viking Canada, 1993 and Penguin, 1994) and "Men, Feminism, and Men's Contradictory Experiences of Power," in Harry Brod and Michael Kaufman, Eds., *Theorizing Masculinities*, (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1994).
4. Michael Kimmel's *Manhood in America*. New York: The Free Press, 1996.
5. The White Ribbon Campaign's website is www.whiteribbon.com. The address is 365 Bloor St. East, Suite 201, Toronto, Canada M4W 3L4. Telephone number is 1-416-920-6684. Fax number is 1-416-920-1678.
6. Gabor Maté, "A Solution to Violence is in our hands," *The Globe and Mail*, August 2, 2000, A17.

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