

Including Men in our Movement

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Sexual Violence is a human issue. Every person is affected by it. Every gender identity has been victimized and has victimized another. “Males” and “Females” have both contributed to perpetuating our rape culture. With a primary prevention hat on, that means everyone has to work together EQUALLY to cultivate a culture where safety, equality and respect are norms which happen to be the opposite of sexual violence.

I remember learning that in the first documented stories of SV, women were burned at the stake and males had their property taken away. I remember laughing thinking how far we have come. At least for the most part, we won't be killed if we come forward. A big light went on for me, “Oh now I understand why our world is this way.” I like to call this oppression. Really now, what year were “women” allowed to vote? I don't think too many people disagree that women were and are oppressed.

Our movement began slowly and as people started talking, a collective voice and rage grew and rightfully so. Without Andrea Dworkin screaming at the top of her lungs, we would not be having this conversation. She was like Wake the F. Up. This is so not ok and we can't do it alone. It takes everyone. We must break the Silence and Denial. Thirty years ago, Andrea Dworkin and Catherin MacKinnon, authored a Pornography Ordinance that was brilliant beyond brilliant. It was a civil law. All one had to do is prove harm. They were not at all anti-men. They wanted a world free from sexual violence. They were doing policy work!

However, for as long as I can recall, OUR MOVEMENT HAS HISTORICALLY BEEN “ANTI MEN.” What we have done is become the oppressor, and is doing exactly what we are trying to stop within our own walls. I believe that is the number one reason we do not have more men in our field. It is quite ironic because if we are fighting each other, then we are not working together to change our “rape culture.” It keeps on rollin and getting worse because of the super great desensitization factor. Let me tell you what I have observed over the years.

1. Historically when we talk about sexual violence, one of the first things we have done is talk about how females are the persons victimized and males are the ones victimizing. That glosses eyes over faster than almost anything. Not only have plenty of these men been victimized, they have also witnessed others that have been including the subsequent negative effects. No one wants someone they care about getting hurt, being in pain or having to deal with the effects for the rest of their lives. And the truth is most humans would not sexually assault another.

2. Pro-nouns also make a huge difference in the Glossy Eye factor. Again, when we use *He* for the person harming and *She* for the person harmed, here comes the defense and then we spend way too much time on how males are harmed too and although rare, females harm too. Blah blah blah. This approach also can be alienating because in language alone it is heterosexist. However, when we use **gender inclusive language**, everyone is included in the conversation from the beginning and therefore also the solution. We don't have to spend our time making it ok for men. That also can be very patronizing. (Please note that gender inclusive is not gender neutral. Negative gender role socialization must be addressed.)

3. Also alienating to males is when we use patronizing language like it is the hugest deal in the world they are there or do a huge disclaimer like I know some of the males in here might get a little uncomfortable but...

4. During one of the lunches at the National Sexual Violence Prevention Conference last year, there were a couple of speakers that were alienating all the men at our table. Each one of them said “*should I even be here*”? Every conference before that has been even worse.

5. We have created a culture of alienation. Over the years, many males have told me they do not feel safe in our movement, like they do not belong and like they are looked at as perpetrators. That is pretty hard to take for any reason, but most people that work in our movement do it because they care deeply about ending sexual violence, have been harmed and/or would never harm another. Their penis, if they have one, is not why they are sitting in the room.

6. In some respects, “We” have also made men our saviors; thinking they are the only ones that can stop sexual violence. When they speak, we all listen in AWE and probably pay men more to speak at our events. We are so happy that a man has joined our movement that we want to hear everything they have to say. Some get an “I am your savior complex”, some do not. Believe it or not, this has also been much of a turn off to men. They just want to work together to end sexual violence. They don’t like the extra attention. I have heard that more than once.

To think that males are responsible for ending sexual violence, because most perpetrators are male, is missing a huge opportunity to create generational change. We all agree it takes everyone to change the culture. Regardless of gender identity and percentage of responsibility, everyone contributes to this culture.

The HARMFUL GENDER ROLE SOCIALIZATION that is at the core of the rape culture is generational and perpetuated by moms, dads, teachers, media...oh, I mean by everyone, everywhere. Who models and teaches our young people about gender identification? Even though my father is 100% responsible for the abuse of his children, my mother taught and reinforced all of the factors that perpetuate sexual violence in culture. Silence, Denial, Unhealthy gender role socialization – girls in the kitchen, boys outside to play, girls don’t say no, look pretty and be skinny, boys will be boys and on and on. She normalized pornography, sv and other forms of violence in the home. I always knew something wasn’t right and that pornography was a contributing factor.

I would like to beg the men in our movement to never apologize for all men or the individual male that harmed another. You are not responsible for another human harming another. Only the person committing the act of harm can actually prevent that act. Please don’t apologize for what my perpetrator did to me.

But, please do join the positive social change party to cultivate safety, equality and respect as norms. Please work with everyone regardless of gender identity to change this rape culture. All the factors that contribute to it need to be removed from the planet. Silence, denial, sexual violence normalized, oppression, unhealthy gender role socialization and more... is gone. We must all work together to end those conditions. I don’t care what body parts the peeps by my side have as long as they are committed to this work.

How do we get more men in our movement you ask? We need to really look at the language we are using. We must remove he/she pronouns and other hetero language. We must make sure our language is inclusive of everyone. Turn myths and stereotypes into truths. Please try to stay away from role plays, showing the negative, or using individual stories as primary prevention educational tools. Every story is different. Showing

females as persons victimized and males as persons harming contributes greatly in our movement to a culture where men are the enemy. When we show the negative we reinforce it. Primary prevention is about social change. Primary prevention is about cultivating the change we wish to see in the world.

The ending sexual violence movement became about men against women although I do not believe that was the original intent. By fighting each other, sexual violence is allowed to thrive and we don't get to the real issue. We have to change now to allow equal partnerships to thrive. **STAND & SERVE**, our primary prevention initiative, is gender balanced. It happens naturally. We want to build and live in a world where safety, equality and respect are norms. We are all Peers, We are all the Solution.