



ENDING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

A Call to Men: It's time to become part of the solution

By Anthony Porter

Its time for those of us who are “well meaning men” to start acknowledging the role male privilege and socialization play in domestic violence as well as violence against women in general. As well meaning men we must begin to acknowledge and own our responsibility to be part of the solution to ending domestic violence.

What is a “well meaning man”? A well meaning man is a man that believes women should be respected. A well meaning man would not assault a woman. A well meaning man, on a surface level at least, believes in equality for women. A well meaning man believes that women’s rights is fair and just. A well meaning man respects his wife or the woman he is partnered with. A well meaning man for all practical purposes is a nice guy, a good man.

It’s with this understanding that my work, my vision, is not to beat up on well meaning men, instead to help us understand through a process of re-education and accountability that with all of our goodness we have been socialized to maintain a system of domination, dehumanization and oppression over women.

They’re three key aspects of male socialization that has created, maintained and normalized violence against women:

1. Men viewing women as less than.
2. Men treating women as property.
3. Men seeing women as objects.

All three are major contributors to violence against women, perpetuated consciously or subconsciously by all men, including well meaning men.

As well meaning men we must begin to examine the ways in which male socialization fosters violence against women. In regards to the issue of men viewing women as less than, we must examine the ways in which we “keep women” in marginalized roles throughout every aspect of society enforcing and maintaining our male dominance.

While we know that women are not the legal property of their husbands, as well meaning men we must explore and challenge the ways in which we continue to

perpetuate these norms. One of the main reasons domestic violence continues to be seen in many of our communities as private vs. public is because of our belief as men that she belongs to him. While in reality we know that it's not true, but nevertheless it's deeply embedded in our socialization.

The objectification of women finds its roots in men's socialization to value women less, while viewing them as property. In a male dominating society were men value woman less and see them as property, which further dehumanizes them, creates an environment which overwhelming support men's objectification of women. Whether it's the music and entertainment industry, corporate america, communities of faith, or on a street corner, women are treated as objects by men throughout every aspects of our society. As well meaning men we must acknowledge, own and struggle with the change required to end this reality.

As well meaning men we must begin to examine the ways we separate ourselves from men who batter while simultaneously giving them permission to do so. We make monsters out of them as a means of supporting our position that were different from them. We pathologize their violence, blaming chemical dependency, mental illness, anger management, etc... while none of these are the reasons we remain focused on "fixing" them. As well meaning men we put a great deal of energy and resources into "fixing" men who batter, the more attention we focus on them maintains and strengthens our status as good guys. Not only does it strengthen our status, as good guys it also does not allow for the space needed to understand and acknowledge domestic violence as being a manifestation of sexism. Once we admit that domestic violence is a manifestation of sexism we must also acknowledge that all men are part of the problem.

Men who batter do so as a choice, and they get permission from those of us who are well meaning men. As well meaning men we give men who batter permission in several ways, one of the most basic and dangerous ways we do this is through silence. We stay quiet, we mind our own business, and we operate within a mindset that says the violence is a private issue. Almost every adult American man can finish this phrase "what goes on in this house, _____."

We also minimize the consequences, while having limited means of accountability. A man assaults his wife he's charged and tracked in family court, a man assaults a woman who's a stranger and he charged and tracked in criminal court. These laws are not made and enforced by men, who batter they are made and enforced by well meaning men.

It's time for us to also lengthen our examples of domestic violence. We have historically looked at the violence being only physical assault or sexual assault. We need to include other examples given to us by women, such as; verbal abuse, psychological abuse, emotional abuse, economic abuse and neglect. It makes sense why our list of examples of domestic violence is so short, you see well meaning men don't commit acts of physical assault or sexual assault, but many of us if not all of us commit the other acts mentioned, which I now call acts of violence against women.

You see the bad guy commits the same acts of violence as well meaning men. The only difference between them and us is that at a certain point we stop, they continue, they cross the line to what has been defined by well meaning men as illegal. What we need to acknowledge is that the foundation of physical and sexual assault are the acts of violence that most of us participate in.

So what's required for well meaning men to become part of the solution to ending domestic violence?

- First, we must begin the process of getting re-educated. Socialization is what we have been taught, we need to be re-socialized.
- We have to examine and challenge our own sexism.
- We have to stop colluding with other men, get out of our defined roles in society and take a stance.
- We must remember that silence is affirming, when we choose not to speak out, we support the behavior.
- We must educate and re-educate our sons and other young men.
- We must challenge our homophobia, which has been designed to get in the way and stop us from actively getting involved in the fight to end sexism.
- We must accept our responsibility that domestic violence won't end until well meaning men become part of the solution. While a criminal justice response to domestic violence is necessary, a cultural, social shift is required.
- As well meaning men we must accept leadership from women, we must accept that left to our own devices our sexism will surface consciously or subconsciously. Owning and accepting our sexism and our role in ending domestic violence also means taking directions from those who understand it most, women.

And last I like to remind us that living in the United States of America means living in a construct that was purposely designed as a race, sex, class based system of domination. So when speaking of ending domestic violence we must ALL accept and own the reality that we are not doing the best work we can until the voice of African American women informs us that we are.

Anthony Porter is available for comments and discussion

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