Male Domination & Racism: How They Interfere with the Anti-Violence Against Women Movement

– By Tony Porter

For decades, women have struggled, worked and lobbied to get laws passed and enforced to hold men accountable for domestic violence. Many years have been spent developing and monitoring an appropriate criminal justice response to domestic violence. While the criminal justice response continues to develop, those in the movement are also aware that, in and of itself, it will not end domestic violence. Over the years many women have come to agree that in order to end domestic violence, prevention is required, and men – well-meaning men – must become part of the solution as advocates and practitioners.

This is not to say that men have been absent from the domestic violence movement. They have had a presence, though mostly as a part of law enforcement and batterers intervention. This new direction of men participating more directly in the movement requires men to challenge each other, while educating and re-educating themselves, starting with boys. This education process redefines many of the norms traditionally associated with manhood, therefore positively impacting and supporting the pre-violence development of boys. The education and re-education is to address the aspects of manhood that support a culture of domestic violence within heterosexual relationships.

What Men Can Do

Men must begin to examine the ways in which male socialization is structured to maintain systems of oppression over women. Men must first understand and then challenge the ways in which women are marginalized throughout every aspect of society. Men must understand the way in which they also individually contribute to the enforcement of maintaining a male-dominated society.

Men must explore and challenge the ways in which they continue to perpetuate the myth that women are the “property” of men. One of the principle reasons that domestic violence continues to be seen in many of our communities as a “private” issue is the belief of men that “she belongs to him.” While we know that it’s not true, nevertheless, that myth is deeply embedded in our society.

Men must unearth the roots of objectifying women. In a male-dominated society, where men value women less and see them as property, an environment is created which overwhelmingly supports male objectification of women. Whether it’s the music and the entertainment industry, corporations, communities of faith, or street corners, men treat women as objects throughout every stratum of our society. Men must acknowledge, own, and struggle with the change required to end this reality.

Men must begin to examine the ways they separate themselves from men who commit crimes of sexual violence and men who batter, while silently giving these men permission to do so. Well-meaning men make monsters out of them as a means of supporting their position that they are
different from them. They pathologize this violence, blaming chemical dependency, mental illness, and anger management issues. While, in most cases, these are not the reasons they commit the assaults, well-meaning men still remain focused on “fixing” them. They put a great deal of energy and resources into “fixing bad guys.” The more attention they focus on them, the more they are able to maintain and strengthen their status as “good guys.”

This focus on maintaining “good-guy” status does not allow for the space needed to understand and acknowledge that violence against women is a manifestation of sexism. And once men admit that violence against women is a manifestation of sexism, they must also acknowledge that all men in one way or another perpetuate sexism and are, therefore, part of the problem. You see, the “bad guys” operate in the same realm of sexism and violence as the “good guys.” The only difference between them and "good guys" is that, at a certain point, “good guys” may not cross the line of illegality, although they may participate in some controlling or harmful behavior. Other men continue and cross the line to what is defined as illegal, such as physical or sexual violence, or stalking.

Steps to Action

So, what is required for men to become part of the solution to ending violence against women?

- Acknowledge and understand how sexism, male dominance and male privilege lay the foundation for all forms of violence against women.
- Examine and challenge their individual sexism and the role that it plays in supporting men who are abusive.
- Recognize and stop colluding with other men by getting out of their socially defined roles, and take a stance to end violence against women.
- Remember that their silence is affirming. When they choose not to speak out against men’s violence, they are supporting it.
- Educate and re-educate their sons and other young men about the responsibility they have in ending men’s violence against women.
- "Break out of the man box": Challenge traditional images of manhood that stop them from actively taking a stand to end violence against women.
- Accept and own their responsibility that violence against women will not end until men become part of the solution to end it. Men must take an active role in creating a cultural and social shift that no longer tolerates violence against women.
- Stop supporting the notion that men’s violence against women is due to mental illness, lack of anger management skills, chemical dependency, stress, etc. Violence against women is rooted in the historic oppression of women and the outgrowth of the socialization of men.
- Take responsibility for creating appropriate and effective ways to develop systems to educate and hold men accountable.
- Create systems of accountability to women in their community. Violence against women will end only when men take direction from those who understand it the most – women.
So, as you can see, men have a tremendous amount of work to do. Many funders (government, corporate, and private) have begun to support prevention efforts. Within the last decade resources have been allocated for domestic violence prevention initiatives. These efforts have significantly increased the number of men working and volunteering in the domestic violence field. Most of the attention has been focused on challenging the afore-mentioned requirements for men to be part of the solution to ending violence against women.

As men enter the movement, a significant amount of attention also has been placed on the role of men in ending domestic violence. What exactly is men's work? And there has been a priority placed on the importance of leadership remaining in the hands of women. These questions and concerns need to remain at the forefront of domestic violence prevention work.

As we go about the work of domestic violence prevention, another concern has arisen that deserves our attention. Many of the local, state and federal grants for domestic violence prevention are allocated to address society’s concerns with "at risk" people and communities. "At risk" largely refers to communities of color as well as financially poor communities.

It should be noted that many disapprove of the term "at risk" as it applies to people of color, financially poor people and their communities. When this term is used for the most part in writing and answering questions in grant applications, it outlines the obstacles and challenges of the community from a dominate culture viewpoint. Programs largely employ a top-down process, which lends to goals, objectives, and projected outcomes routinely being decided without input from the community of people they are designed to serve. What this means is that those "at risk" are held solely responsible for their situation. This historical practice of no shared responsibility has limited the success of these grants right from the start.

So in keeping with this formula of grants being offered to work with "at risk" communities, many domestic violence prevention initiatives have been focused on working with boys of color and boys from financially poor communities. As a result, this has not only opened the doors for hiring more men, but also for hiring men of color, specifically.

At the same time in the anti-violence against women movement, concerns are being addressed regarding the lack of equality in leadership and decision making among white women and women of color. Currently, white women hold the majority of leadership positions. Women of color and their allies are addressing these concerns and strategizing to make the appropriate changes to bring about equality.

Domestic violence as we know it in the United States is rooted in sexism, particularly for those engaged in heterosexual relationships. Sexism, male dominance, and male privilege lay the foundation for all forms of violence against women when men are the culprits. As we come to this work collectively to address sexism and male domination, we are challenged by the fact that there also are several other forms of oppression interfering with our movement building.

For the most part we all go to work each day with the sole intention of doing a good job and providing for the people we are paid to serve. To truly be at our best it’s vital that the intersections of oppression that are playing out among us as service providers be addressed. Domination and the overlapping of oppression, such as racism, sexism, classism and heterosexism, to name a few are impacting and interfering with our day-to-day efforts to end domestic violence.

When we speak of dominating groups in the United States of America, we think of those who
are men, white, Christian (preferably Protestant), middle-class to wealthy, heterosexual, middle-aged, and able-bodied. This is not a scientific formula and it's not exact, though the reality is the more of these characteristics a person possesses, the increased legitimate access to resources that person has. And when you get right down to it, the primary benefit of oppression is for the dominating group to maintain legitimate access and control over resources.

Let's now discuss those who are being marginalized. They are women, people of color, non-Protestants, financially poor people, LGBTQ, younger and older people and those with differing abilities. The oppression of marginalized groups by dominating groups is what we define as "isms": sexism, racism, classism, heterosexism, ageism, and able-ism. Some also define this within a power analysis, with dominating groups having more "power" over marginalized groups.

The intersection of oppressions that I would like to focus on (while acknowledging there are many more) is the relationship and experiences of men of color, white men, women of color, and white women. In many, if not most traditionally run domestic violence programs, power imbalances exist favoring white women over women of color. Hiring, firing, day to day operations, and policy decisions in general are controlled largely by white women.

As stated earlier, men of color are being hired to work with "at risk" boys. Largely, they are hired by white women. Their immediate supervisors more often than not are white women. At the same time women of color within the same organization are often at odds with white women regarding power imbalances within the organization. Women of color expect men of color to be loyal to their concerns, as the struggle to end racism is one that they share. Men of color want to be or being loyal to women of color have concerns of their jobs being "at risk" depending on the positions they take or don't take. Women of color experience this as men of color colluding with white women, and even as an aspect of sexism, which says "let the women fight it out among themselves" and feel further marginalized. While all of these dynamics play out, white men have the privilege to get involved or not. In most cases there is not an expectation from women of color, white women, or men of color for white men to take a position on the issues. As in most cases in society, white men get a pass.

Anti-violence against women programs around the country find themselves at different places when addressing these dynamics. Some are having healthy conversations, some are having hostile conversations, and some are not conversing at all. The movement has to acknowledge as a collective that we can work to end one form of oppression (sexism) while perpetrating and upholding others. While this has been verbalized at many if not most programs, little seems to have been done.

This conversation needs to continue and action is required. Effective strategies in movement building require that all forms of oppression are dealt with simultaneously and no form of oppression is viewed as of greater importance than the other. And, finally, as difficult as it may seem, we have to acknowledge that many of the very organizations we love that are dedicated to helping women and holding men accountable are designed to uphold a race construct. To truly meet our goal of defining ourselves as programs working to meet the needs of all people, deconstruction of all oppressions is required. Our current approach is clearly having a negative impact and interference in our movement building efforts to end men's violence against women.
Tony Porter
Co-Founder, A Call to Men

A gifted public speaker, Tony Porter is an educator and activist working in the social justice arena for over 20 years. He is nationally recognized for his efforts to end men's violence against women. Tony is the original visionary and co-founder behind A Call to Men: The National Association of Men and Women Committed to Ending Violence Against Women. He is author of the eagerly anticipated book, *Breaking Out of the Man Box*. Tony formerly served as the Director of Addiction Services for a hospital in New York. He is a faculty member for New York State Office of Alcohol and Substance Abuse Services Academy of Addiction Studies where he co-authored their curriculum for clinicians who work with chemically dependent African-Americans.

Resources

Books

Educational DVDs
- *Beyond Beats an Rhymes* - Produced by Bryon Hurt
- *Breaking Out of the Man Box* - Produced by Ted Bunch and Tony Porter
- *Something My Father Would Do* - Produced by Family Violence Prevention Fund
- *Tough Guise* - Produced by Sut Jhally

Other Resources
- *Bunch, T and Porter, T* - Public Speakers/Community Organizers – A CALL TO MEN - www.acalltomemen.org
- *Ehrman, J* - Public Speaker, Former NFL Player – www.CoachForAmerica.com
- *Hurt, B* - Film Maker and Anti Sexist Activist – www.bhurt.com
Katz, J - Public Speaker, Co-Founder MVP – www.jackonkatz.com
Okun, R - Men's Resource Center for Change – Editor Voice Male Magazine.
www.voicemalemagazine.org
Men Can Stop Rape – www.menstoppingviolence
Men Stopping Violence – www.menstoppingviolence
PowerPoint Presentation

Male Domination & Racism: How They Interfere with the Anti-Violence Against Women Movement
Cultural Competency, Sensitivities & Allies in the Anti-Violence Against Women Movement

THE MAN BOX

[Image of a young boy being taught by an adult]

THE MAN BOX

[Image collage of various male figures]

THE MAN BOX

[Image of a young boy with a baseball and an adult]

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Chapter Eight: Male Domination & Racism: How They Interfere with the Anti-Violence Against Women Movement

WomenuofuColoruNetworku

THE MAN BOX

The Socialization of Men

WHAT’S OUTSIDE THE MAN BOX?

Women of Color Network – 2009
OUTSIDE THE MAN BOX

- Anything associated with being a woman
- Anything associated with being a gay man
- Sensitive
- Being vulnerable
- Being weak
- Showing emotion
- Soft
- Needs to "Man-Up"

THE COLLECTIVE SOCIALIZATION OF MEN

- Having less value in women
- Treating women as property
Chapter Eight: Male Domination & Racism: How They Interfere with the Anti-Violence Against Women Movement

THE COLLECTIVE SOCIALIZATION OF MEN

- Having Less Value in Women
- Treating Women as Property
- Objectification of Women

THE COLLECTIVE SOCIALIZATION OF MEN

LESS VALUE + PROPERTY + OBJECTIFICATION = VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

The Foundation

AMMUTATION
RAPE
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE
SEXUAL ASSAULT
VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN
ALL MEN
Cultural Competency, Sensitivities & Allies in the Anti-Violence Against Women Movement

Naming the Problem

- Men's violence against women is the leading cause of injury to women
- 35% of all emergency room visits

Naming the Problem

- Each year millions of men severely assault the women they are partnered with.
- Each day several men murder their present or former female partner. The majority of these murders occur during or after a separation.

Naming the Problem

- Men rape and sexually assault more than 300,000 women every year.
- Men will rape 1 out of 6 women.
- Men will sexually assault 1 out of 4 women on college campuses.
Cultural Competency, Sensitivities & Allies in the Anti-Violence Against Women Movement

Race and Sex Construct

Interference With Movement Building

Women of Color

As a result of the construct that exist. We are not doing the best work we can until the voices of women of color inform us that we are.