

"This profound and vitally important book illuminates the roots of male violence against women and makes it clear that men must get involved in stopping it.... Jackson Katz is a true revolutionary and a national treasure."

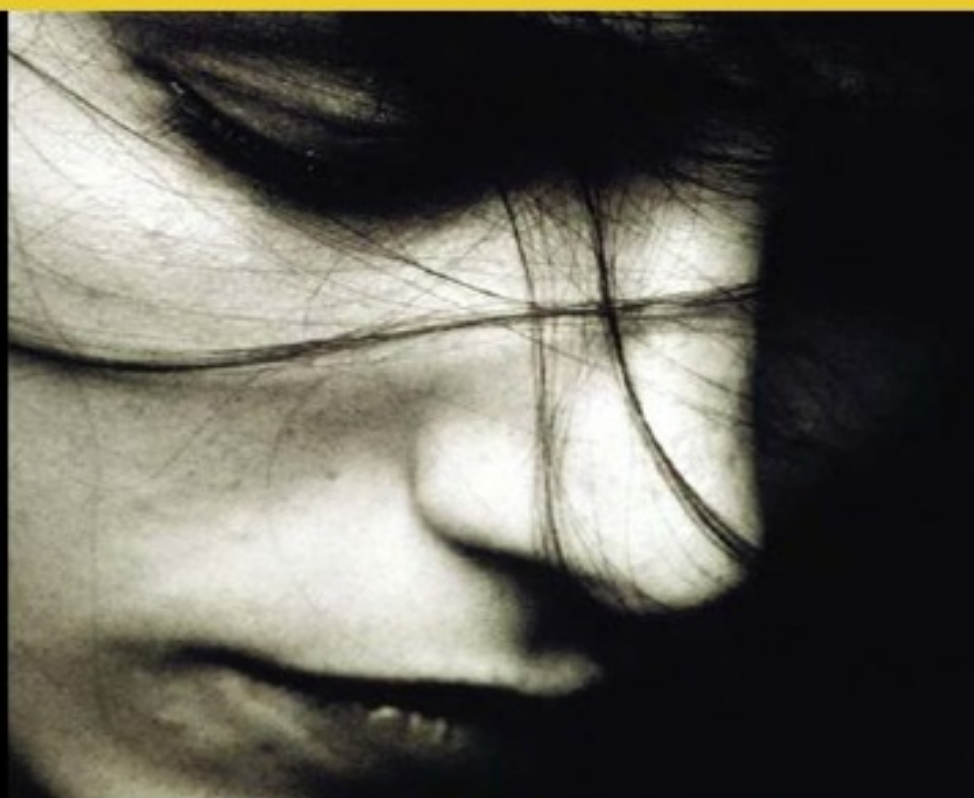
—JEAN KILBOURNE, AUTHOR OF *CAN'T BUY MY LOVE: HOW ADVERTISING CHANGES THE WAY WE THINK AND FEEL*

The MACHO Paradox

WHY SOME MEN HURT WOMEN
AND HOW ALL MEN CAN HELP

"Men need to read this book. Not only because it will make the world safer for women, but because it will free men to be their true selves."

—EVE ENSLER, AUTHOR OF
THE VAGINA MONOLOGUES



JACKSON KATZ

The Macho Paradox

Why Some Men Hurt Women and How All Men Can Help

Jackson Katz



Dedicated to Shelley and Judah

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“After hundreds of years of anti-racist struggle, more than ever before nonwhite people are currently calling attention to the primary role white people must play in anti-racist struggle. The same is true of the struggle to eradicate sexism—men have a primary role to play...in particular, men have a tremendous contribution to make...in the area of exposing, confronting, opposing, and transforming the sexism of their male peers.”

—*bell hooks*

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Americans like to boast that we're "the freest country on earth," and yet half the population doesn't even feel free enough to go for a walk at night. Unlike the status of women in Afghanistan under the ghastly Taliban, women in the United States are *allowed* to go out. Fanatic men in government don't issue edicts to prevent them from exercising their basic freedom of movement. Instead, the widespread fear of men's violence does the trick.

Women in the United States have made incredible and unprecedented gains over the past thirty years in education, business, sports, politics, and other professions. The multicultural women's movement has utterly transformed the cultural landscape. But at the same time, restrictions on women's ability to move about freely are so pervasive—such a normal part of life in the post-sixties generations—that many women don't even question them. They simply order their daily lives around the threat of men's violence.

And men? A substantial number of them simply have no idea how profoundly some men's violence affects the lives of all the women we care about: our mothers, daughters, sisters, wives, and girlfriends. I had no idea, either, until the lightbulb first went on when I was a nineteen-year-old college student.

Today, a quarter century later, I've lectured about men's violence against women on hundreds of college campuses. I start my talks with a deliberately provocative statement. "The subject we're here to address," I say, "touches every single person in this room—whether you're aware of it or not. Gender violence—rape, battering, sexual abuse, sexual harassment—dramatically impacts millions of individuals and families in contemporary American society. In fact, it is one of the great, ongoing tragedies of our time."

Is this alarmist hyperbole? I don't think so. An abundance of credible statistics—some from *conservative* sources—bears it out. Study after study shows that between one in four and one in six American women will be the victim of a rape or attempted rape in her lifetime. An American Medical Association report in 2001 found that 20 percent of adolescent girls have been physically or sexually assaulted by a date. A major public opinion poll in 2000 found that two-thirds of American men said that domestic violence is very or fairly common in the U.S., and in a 2005 national survey conducted for *Family Circle* magazine and Lifetime Television, 92 percent of respondents said that family violence is a much bigger problem than people think.

But statistics on men's violence against women, while shocking, only tell part of the story. Another part of the story unfolds in women's daily lives. To demonstrate this concretely, I request the students' participation in an interactive exercise.

I draw a line down the middle of a chalkboard, sketching a male symbol on one side and a female symbol on the other. Then I ask just the men: "What steps do you guys take, on a daily basis, to prevent yourselves from being sexually assaulted?" At first there is a kind of awkward silence as the

men try to figure out if they've been asked a trick question. The silence gives way to a smattering nervous laughter. Occasionally a young guy will raise his hand and say, "I stay out of prison." This typically followed by another moment of laughter, before someone finally raises his hand and soberly states, "Nothing. I don't think about it."

Then I ask the women the same question. "What steps do you take on a daily basis to prevent yourselves from being sexually assaulted?"

Women throughout the audience immediately start raising their hands. As the men sit in stunned silence, the women recount safety precautions they take as part of their daily routine. Here are some of their answers:

Hold my keys as a potential weapon. Look in the back seat of the car before getting in. Carry a cell phone. Don't go jogging at night. Lock all the windows when I go to sleep, even on hot summer nights. Be careful not to drink too much. Don't put my drink down and come back to it; make sure I see it being poured. Own a big dog. Carry Mace or pepper spray. Have an unlisted phone number. Have a man's voice on my answering machine. Park in well-lit areas. Don't use parking garages. Don't get on elevators with only one man, or with a group of men. Vary my route home from work. Watch what I wear. Don't use highway rest areas. Use a home alarm system. Don't wear headphones when jogging. Avoid forests or wooded areas, even in the daytime. Don't take a first-floor apartment. Go out in groups. Own a firearm. Meet men on first dates in public places. Make sure to have a car. Pay cab fare. Don't make eye contact with men on the street. Make assertive eye contact with men on the street.

The exercise can go on for almost half an hour. Invariably the board fills up on the women's side. This is true, with slight variations, in urban, suburban, and rural areas. Many women say the list is like an unconscious mental checklist. Despite three decades of Take Back the Night rallies and feminist organizing raising consciousness about the politics of women's safety, few women in audiences where I've presented think about their daily routine in terms of larger cultural issues or political questions. "It's just the way it is," they say. "It's what we have to do to feel safe." (At the end of the exercise, I always hasten to point out that most sexual assaults are perpetrated not by strangers lurking in the bushes, but by men who know their victims—often in the victim's home.) Some women do get angry when they see the radical contrast between the women's side of the chalkboard, which is always full, and the men's, which is almost always blank.

Some men react emotionally when they contemplate the full chalkboard on the women's side. They're shocked, saddened, angered. Many report its effects as life changing. Many of them had never before taken the time to think about this subject. They knew violence against women was a problem in our culture, but not this big a problem. They didn't realize how far-reaching it was. They didn't think it affected them. They were unaware of—or in denial about—the fact that it has become the *norm* in the U.S. for women and girls to remain hypervigilant—sometimes 24/7—about the possibility of being raped.

How could so many men be oblivious to such a basic aspect of life for the women and girls around them? One of the most plausible explanations is that violence against women has historically been seen as a "women's issue." We focus on the *against women* part of the phrase and not on the fact that the men are the ones doing it. But the long-running American tragedy of men's violence against women is really more about men and *our* problems than it is about women. We're the ones committing the vast majority of the violence! We're the ones whom women have been conditioned to fear. In the twenty

first century, it is long past time that more men—of all races, religions, ethnicities, and nationalities—faced up to this sad situation, educated ourselves and others about the hows and whys, and then went out and did something about it.

That's why the intended audience for the chalkboard exercise about the steps women take to protect themselves is actually *men*.

That's why this book is about men.

AUTHOR'S NOTE ON THE TITLE *THE MACHO PARADOX*

Because there is no explicit discussion of the phrase “the macho paradox” in the body of this book, I would like to offer readers a brief explanation about the term from two different perspectives: 1) the contested cultural meanings of the word “macho”; and 2) the way that I have used the term to describe some of the contradictory aspects of traditional notions of masculinity, as related to men’s potential for leadership in the ongoing struggle to end men’s violence against women.

1) The term “macho” carries multiple meanings, with both positive and negative connotations. For some Latinos, the positive characteristics of the Spanish word “macho” have been lost in mainstream English usage, where “macho” is used almost exclusively to refer to hypermasculine aggression. Traditionally, the word “macho” carried many positive associations. To be “macho” was to be well-respected, embodying traits such as courage, valor, honor, sincerity, pride, humility, and responsibility.

Since language usage has a political context, it is unfair to discuss the definition of “macho” in contemporary U.S. society without acknowledging the colonial exploitation and cultural domination of Latin America by early European and later U.S. imperial powers that characterize an important part of the past five hundred years in the history of the Western hemisphere. Thus, when English-speaking Americans use the term “macho,” they should be aware that some see the negative connotation as further evidence of the ongoing effects of the Anglo conquest of Latino cultures in the southern part of the hemisphere. While some would argue that the “true” meaning of the word macho has been lost, it is important to remember that there is no such thing as the “true” meaning of words—only ways that they evolve in particular cultural-historical contexts.

In any case, the term “paradox” in the book’s title was intended to address any concerns that use of the word “macho” might contribute to the perpetuation of a negative cultural stereotype of Latinos. My key definition of “paradox” is “exhibiting inexplicable or contradictory aspects.”

By using the term “paradox,” I mean to coin a phrase that expresses both the negative and positive definitions of the word “macho” and appropriately conveys the word’s contradictory meanings and rich history.

2) Many people have rightly asked, “What is the macho paradox?” Here are suggestions which form the basis for our thinking:

a. If you are a man, it is a lot easier to be sexist and abusive toward women—or remain silent in the face of other men’s abuse—than it is to speak out against sexism. It is ironic that men who speak out against men’s violence against women are often called wimps, when they actually have to be more self-confident and secure than men who remain silent in order to fit in and be “one of the guys.” (Thus, a “macho” man, with its original Spanish meaning, would have the courage to take responsibility for controlling sexist or violent behavior in his community.)

b. The same qualities that some people ascribe to macho or hypermasculine men (see discussion above), such as “toughness” or a willingness to use violence to get one’s way, can be read as expressions of weakness and cowardice. In other words, a man who beats his wife or girlfriend proves not that he’s a “real man” who is “in control” and thus worthy of others’ respect, but rather that he has serious problems and needs immediate help.

—Jackson Ka

Violence Against Women Is a Men's Issue



Most people think violence against women is a women's issue. And why wouldn't they? Just about every woman in this society thinks about it every day. If they are not getting harassed on the street, living in an abusive relationship, recovering from a rape, or in therapy to deal with the sexual abuse they suffered as children, they are ordering their daily lives around the *threat* of men's violence.

But it is a mistake to call *men's* violence a *women's* issue. Take the subject of rape. Many people reflexively consider rape to be a women's issue. But let's take a closer look. What percentage of rape is committed by women? Is it 10 percent, 5 percent? No. *Less than 1 percent of rape is committed by women.* Let's state this another way: over 99 percent of rape is perpetrated by men. Whether the victims are female or male, men are overwhelmingly the perpetrators. But we call it a women's issue. Shouldn't that tell us something?

A major premise of this book is that the long-running American tragedy of sexual and domestic violence—including rape, battering, sexual harassment, and the sexual exploitation of women and girls—is arguably more revealing about *men* than it is about women. Men, after all, are the ones committing the vast majority of the violence. Men are the ones doing most of the battering and almost all of the raping. Men are the ones paying the prostitutes (and killing them in video games), going to strip clubs, renting sexually degrading pornography, writing and performing misogynistic music.

When men's role in gender violence is discussed—in newspaper articles, sensational TV news coverage, or everyday conversation—the focus is typically on men as perpetrators or potential perpetrators. These days, you don't have to look far to see evidence of the pain and suffering the men cause. But it is rare to find any in-depth discussion about the culture that's producing these violent men. It's almost like the perpetrators are strange aliens who landed here from another planet. It is rarer still to hear thoughtful discussions about the ways that our culture defines "manhood," and how that definition might be linked to the endless string of stories about husbands killing wives, groups of young men raping girls (and sometimes videotaping the rape) that we hear about on a regular basis.

Why isn't there more conversation about the underlying social factors that contribute to this pandemic of violence against women? Why aren't men's attitudes and behaviors toward women the focus of more critical scrutiny and coordinated action? These days, the 24/7 news cycle brings us a steady stream of gender-violence tragedies: serial killers on the loose, men abducting young girls, domestic-violence homicides, periodic sexual abuse scandals in powerful institutions like the Catholic Church and the Air Force Academy. You can barely turn on the news these days without coming across another gruesome sex crime—whether it's a group of boys gang-raping a girl in a middle school bathroom or a young pregnant woman who turns up missing, and whose husband emerges a few

days later as the primary suspect.

Isn't it about time we had a national conversation about the male causes of this violence, instead endlessly lingering on its consequences in the lives of women? Thanks to the battered women's and rape crisis movements in the U.S., it is no longer taboo to discuss women's experiences of sexual and domestic violence. This is a significant achievement. To an unprecedented extent, American women today expect to be supported—not condemned—when they disclose what men have done to them (unless the man is popular, wealthy, or well-connected, in which case all bets are off.)

This is all for the good. Victims of violence and abuse—whether they're women or men—should be heard and respected. Their needs come first. But let's not mistake concern for victims with the political will to change the conditions that led to their victimization in the first place. On talk shows, in brutally honest memoirs, at Take Back the Night rallies, and even in celebrity interviews, our society now grants many women the platform to discuss the sexual abuse and mistreatment that have sadly been a part of women's lives here and around the world for millennia. But when was the last time you heard someone, in public or private, talk about violence against women in a way that went beyond the standard victim fixation and put a sustained spotlight on men—either as perpetrators or bystanders? It is one thing to focus on the “against women” part of the phrase; but someone responsible for doing it, and (almost) everyone knows that it's overwhelmingly men. Why aren't more people talking about this? Is it realistic to talk about preventing violence against women if no one even wants to say out loud who's responsible for it?

For the past two decades, I've been part of a growing movement of men, in North America and around the world, whose aim is to reduce violence against women by focusing on those aspects of male culture—especially male-peer culture—that provide active or tacit support for some men's abusive behavior. This movement is racially and ethnically diverse, and it brings together men from both privileged and poor communities, and everyone in between. This is challenging work on many levels, and no one should expect rapid results. For example, there is no way to gloss over some of the race, class, and sexual orientation divisions between and among us men. It is also true that it takes time to change social norms that are so deeply rooted in structures of gender and power. Even so, there is room for optimism. We've had our successes: there are arguably more men today who are actively confronting violence against women than at any time in human history.

Make no mistake. Women blazed the trail that we are riding down. Men are in the position to do this work precisely because of the great leadership of women. The battered women's and rape crisis movements and their allies in local, state, and federal government have accomplished a phenomenal amount over the past generation. Public awareness about violence against women is at an all-time high. The level of services available today for female victims and survivors of men's violence is—while not yet adequate—nonetheless historically unprecedented.

There was some good news in 2005. A Department of Justice report showed that family violence declined by about half from 1993 to 2002, similar to the overall drop in violent crime during the past decade. But encouraging as it was, the study had its limitations. For example, crime between current or former boyfriends and girlfriends was not considered “family” violence. And the study did not include sexual violence. Still, we can cheer the success of our ongoing efforts but remain clear that our society still has a very long way to go in preventing perpetration. In the United States, we continue to produce hundreds of thousands of physically and emotionally abusive—and sexually dangerous—boys and men each year. Millions more men participate in sexist behaviors on a continuum that ranges

from mildly objectifying women to literally enslaving them in human trafficking syndicates. We can provide services to the female victims of these men until the cows come home. We can toughen enforcement of rape, domestic-violence, and stalking laws, and arrest and incarcerate even more men than we do currently; but this is all reactive and after the fact. It is essentially an admission of failure.

What I am proposing in this book is that we adopt a much more ambitious approach. If we are going to bring down dramatically the rates of violence against women—not just at the margins—we will need a far-reaching cultural revolution. At its heart, this revolution must be about changing the sexist social norms in male culture, from the elementary school playground to the common room in retirement communities—and every locker room, pool hall, and boardroom in between. For us to have any hope of achieving historic reductions in incidents of violence against women, at a minimum we will need to dream big and act boldly. It almost goes without saying that we will need the help of a lot more men—at all levels of power and influence—than are currently involved. Obviously we have a lot of work cut out for us. As a measure of just how far we have to go, consider that in spite of the misogyny and sexist brutality all around us, millions of non-violent men today fail to see gender violence as their issue. “I’m a good guy,” they will say. “This isn’t my problem.”



For years, women of every conceivable ethnic, racial, and religious background have been trying to get men around them—and men in power—to do more about violence against women. They have asked nicely and they have demanded angrily. Some women have done this on a one-to-one basis with boyfriends and husbands, fathers and sons. They have patiently explained to the men they care about how much they—and all women—have been harmed by men’s violence. Others have gone public with their grievances. They have committed, in Gloria Steinem’s memorable phrase, “outrageous acts and everyday rebellions.” They have written songs and slam poetry. They have produced brilliant academic research. They have made connections between racism and sexism. They have organized speak-outs on college campuses, and in communities large and small. They have marched. They have advocated for legal and political reform at the state and national level. On both a micro and a macro level, women in this era have successfully broken through the historical silence about violence against women and found their voice—here in the U.S. and around the world.

Yet even with all of these achievements, women continue to face an uphill struggle in trying to make meaningful inroads into male culture. Their goal has not been simply to get men to listen to women’s stories and truly hear them—although that is a critical first step. The truly vexing challenge has been getting men to actually go out and *do* something about the problem, in the form of educating and organizing *other men* in numbers great enough to prompt a real cultural shift. Some activist women—even those who have had great faith in men as allies—have been beating their heads against the wall for a long time, and are frankly burned out on the effort. I know this because I have been working with many of these women for a long time. They are my colleagues and friends.

My work is dedicated to getting more men to take on the issue of violence against women, and then to build on what women have achieved. The area that I focus on is not law enforcement or offender treatment, but the *prevention* of sexual and domestic violence and all their related social pathologies—including violence against children. To do this, I and other men here and around the world have been trying to get our fellow men to see that this problem is not just personal for a small number of men who happen to have been touched by the issue. We try to show them that it is personal for them, too. *For all of us.* We talk about men not only as perpetrators but as victims. We try to show them that

violence by men against each other—from simple assaults to gay-bashing—is linked to the same structures of gender and power that produce so much men’s violence against women.

We also make it clear that these issues are not just personal, to be dealt with as private family matters. They are political as well, with repercussions that reverberate throughout our lives and communities in all sorts of meaningful and disturbing ways. For example, according to a 2003 report by the U.S. Conference of Mayors, domestic violence was a primary cause of homelessness in almost half of the twenty-five cities surveyed. And worldwide, sexual coercion and other abusive behavior by men plays an important role in the transmission of HIV/AIDS.

Nonetheless, convincing other men to make gender violence issues a priority is not an easy sell. Sometimes when men engage with other men in this area, we need to begin by reassuring them that men of character and conscience need not flee in terror when they hear the words “sexism,” “rape,” “domestic violence.” However cynical it sounds, sometimes we need to convince them that they actually have a self-interest in taking on these topics; or at the very least, that men have something very valuable to learn not only about women but also about themselves.

There is no point in being naïve about why women have had such a difficult time convincing men to make violence against women a men’s issue. In spite of significant social change in recent decades, men continue to grow up with, and are socialized into, a deeply misogynistic, male-dominated culture where violence against women—from the subtle to the homicidal—is disturbingly common. It’s *normal*. And precisely because the mistreatment of women is such a pervasive characteristic of our patriarchal culture, most men, to a greater or lesser extent, have played a role in its perpetuation. That gives us a strong incentive to avert our eyes.

Women, of course, have also been socialized into this misogynistic culture. Some of them resist and fight back. In fact, women’s ongoing resistance to their subordinate status is one of the most momentous developments in human civilization over the past two centuries. Just the same, plenty of women show little appetite for delving deeply into the cultural roots of sexist violence. It’s much less daunting simply to blame “sick” individuals for the problem. You hear women explaining away men’s bad behavior as the result of individual pathology all the time: “Oh, he just had a bad childhood,” “He’s an angry drunk. The booze gets to him. He’s never been able to handle it.”

But regardless of how difficult it can be to show some women that violence against women is a social problem that runs deeper than the abusive behavior of individual men, it is still much easier to convince women that dramatic change is in their best interest than it is to convince men. In fact, many people would argue that, since men are the dominant sex and violence serves to reinforce their dominance, that it is not in men’s best interests to reduce violence against women, and that the very attempt to enlist a critical mass of men in this effort amounts to a fool’s errand.

For those of us who reject this line of reasoning, the big question then is how do we reach men? We know we’re not going to transform, overnight or over many decades, certain structures of male power and privilege that have developed over thousands of years. Nevertheless, how are we going to bring more men—many more men—into a conversation about sexism and violence against women? And how are we going to do this without turning them off, without berating them, without blaming them for centuries of sexist oppression? Moreover, how are we going to move beyond talk and get substantial numbers of men to partner *with* women in reducing men’s violence, instead of working *against* them in some sort of fruitless and counterproductive gender struggle?

That is the \$64,000 question in the growing field of gender-violence prevention in the first decade

of the twenty-first century: how to get more men to stand up and be counted. Esta Soler, the executive director of the Family Violence Prevention Fund and an influential leader in the domestic-violence movement, says that activating men is “the next frontier” in the women-led movement. “In the end,” she says, “we cannot change society unless we put more men at the table, amplify men’s voices in the debate, enlist men to help change social norms on the issue, and convince men to teach their children that violence against women is always wrong.”

Call me a starry-eyed optimist, but I have long been convinced that there are millions of men in our society who are ready to respond well to a positive message about this subject. If you go to a group of men with your finger pointed (“Stop treating women so badly!”) you’ll often get a defensive response. But if you approach the same group of men by appealing, in Abraham Lincoln’s famous words, to “the better angels of their nature,” surprising numbers of them will rise to the occasion.

For me, this is not just an article of faith. Our society has made real progress in confronting the long-standing problem of men’s violence against women *just in my lifetime*. Take the 1994 Violence Against Women Act (VAWA). It is the most far-reaching piece of legislation ever on the subject. Federal funds have enabled all sorts of new initiatives, including prevention efforts that target men and boys. There have been many other encouraging developments on both the institutional and the individual levels. Not the least of these positive developments is the fact that so many young men today “get” the concept of gender equality—and are actively working against men’s violence.

I understand the skepticism of women who for years have been frustrated by men’s complacency about something as basic as a woman’s right to live free from the threat of violence. But I am convinced that men who are active in gender-violence prevention today speak for a much larger number of men. I would not go so far as to say that a silent majority of men supports everything the gender-violence prevention activists stand for, but an awful lot of men privately cheer us on. I have long felt this way, but now there is a growing body of research—in social norms theory—that confirms it empirically.

Social norms theory begins with the premise that people often misperceive the extent to which their peers hold certain attitudes or participate in certain behaviors. In the absence of accurate knowledge, they are more likely to be influenced by what they *think* people think and do, rather than what they *actually* think and do. Some of the early work in social norms theory, in the early 1990s, had to do with how the drinking habits of college students were influenced by how much they thought their peers drank. Researchers found that when students realized that their fellow students didn’t drink as much as their school’s “party school” label suggested, they were less likely to binge drink in order to measure up.

Social norms theory has also been applied to men’s attitudes about sexism, sex, and men’s violence against women. There have been a number of studies in the past several years that demonstrate that significant numbers of men are uncomfortable with the way some of their male peers talk about and treat women. But since few men in our society have dared to talk publicly about such matters, many men think they are the only ones who feel uncomfortable. Because they feel isolated and alone in their discomfort, they do not say anything. Their silence, in turn, simply reinforces the false perception that few men are uncomfortable with sexist attitudes and behaviors. It is a vicious cycle that keeps a lot of caring men silent.

I meet men all the time who thank me—or my fellow activists and colleagues—for publicly taking on the subject of men’s violence. I frequently meet men who are receptive to the paradigm-shifting

idea that men's violence against women has to be understood as a men's issue, as their issue. They men come from every demographic and geographic category. They include thousands of men who would not fit neatly into simplistic stereotypes about the kind of man who would be involved in "the touchy-feely stuff."

Still, it is an uphill fight. Truly lasting change is only going to happen as new generations of women come of age and demand equal treatment with men in every realm, and new generations of men work with them to reject the sexist attitudes and behaviors of their predecessors. This will take decades, and the outcome is hardly predetermined. But along with tens of thousands of activist women and men who continue to fight the good fight, I believe that it is possible to achieve something much closer to gender equality, and a dramatic reduction in the level of men's violence against women, both here and around the world. And there is a lot at stake. If sexism and violence against women do not subside considerably in the twenty-first century, it will not just be bad news for women. It will also say something truly ugly and tragic about the future of our species.

WOMEN'S ISSUES/MEN'S ISSUES

If you are a woman and you are reading this, you know that violence against women is one of the critical "women's issues" of our time. A major national poll released in 2003 by the New York-based Center for the Advancement of Women found that 92 percent of women named "reducing domestic violence and sexual assault" as a top priority for women's movements—outpolling all other issues.

If you are a man and you are reading this, you probably agree that violence against women is a significant problem—for women. Few men tell pollsters that "reducing domestic and sexual violence" is a priority for men. Barring a recent family tragedy, it is unlikely that men would even register these issues as ones we should be concerned with. This hardly ennoble us, but is it fair to expect otherwise? Most men—and women—see these as "women's issues."

As I have stated, calling violence against women a "women's issue" is misleading at best, and even at some level dishonest. In fact, I think the very act of calling it a "women's issue" is itself part of the problem. Here are four reasons why:

1. It gives men an excuse not to pay attention.

The way we talk about a subject is the way we think about it. When people call rape, battering, and sexual harassment "women's issues"—and many people do this without a second thought—they contribute to a broad shifting of responsibility from the male perpetrators of violence to its female victims. This is likely not intentional, but words nonetheless convey subtle but powerful messages. The message to women is that it is their job to prevent—or avoid—sexual and domestic violence, and they should not expect a lot of help from men. The message to men is even more insidious: they need not tune this in. It is women's burden. As long as you do not assault women yourself, you can pretty much ignore the whole thing.

The simple phrase "women's issues" eloquently reinforces this point. Guys hear "women's issues" and not surprisingly think: *Hey, that's stuff's for girls, for women. I'm not a girl or a woman. It's not my concern.* Generations of men and boys have been conditioned to think about sexism—including gender violence—as something they need only concern themselves with when forced to do so, usually by a woman in their life.

When did you last hear a man say he was concerned about violence against women not *in spite*

the fact that he is a man but *because* of it? Implicit in the notion that violence against women is a “women’s issue” is the assumption that all women should be concerned *because they’re women* because all women have an interest in preventing violence against their sex, even if they haven’t been assaulted themselves. It is equally true that men should be concerned, not necessarily because they have perpetrated or prosecuted these crimes, but simply *because they are men*.

This conclusion does not flow naturally from the way the subject is currently understood. But there are numerous reasons why violence against women is a men’s issue. I am going to address some of the personal ones in a subsequent chapter. Still, most of the personal and professional reasons why men are, and should be, concerned are not part of the public discourse. Few people even mention them.

A lot of men (and women) are not even conscious of *how* they think about violence against women. But it’s a safe bet that some men consciously use the “women’s issues” label as an excuse not to pay attention. It’s not that they feel somehow unfairly excluded; more realistically they have no desire to probe any deeper. When some men hear the word “gender” in the same sentence as “violence,” they automatically shut down. *Not that unpleasant subject again*. Still others respond to the term “women’s issues” like they do TV commercials for feminine hygiene products. They would rather not go there. Better just to turn up the music and tune it out.

Unfortunately, few men pay any discernible price for this averting of our eyes. In part, this is because we’re not expected to do much or even care much about these issues—unless something happens to a woman or girl close to us. Most guys will say, “I’m a good guy. These aren’t my problems.” The trouble is, for a culture with as much gender violence as ours, the bar for being considered a “good guy” is set awfully low.

In fact, a lot of women actually feel grateful when men they know emerge as strong allies. When a man—in a group of friends, in a classroom, in the media—voices an objection to sexist portrayals of women in pornography, pop music, or other forms of media, or if he speaks out in support of the victims of domestic violence or sexual assault, women will often praise his sensitivity and thank him for caring. This speaks volumes about how low women’s expectations are of the average guy! In this country—perhaps in all of Western culture—in the early twenty-first century, a guy can become an instant hero merely for doing what any decent person should be doing. I know that many of my friends and colleagues who do anti-sexist “men’s work,” myself included, are often embarrassed by this, and by the way some women shower us with gratitude for any minimal effort we put forth.

Of course, not all women are so easily impressed; some women do have higher expectations of men. Consider the case of a woman lawyer who is an acquaintance of mine. When she was in law school she came home one day, excited to share with her boyfriend some things she’d learned about sexual assault prevention in a workshop on gender violence. He was completely silent and uninterested. So she called him on it. “You don’t seem to care,” she said.

“I’m not really into that stuff; sort of like how you aren’t interested in economics,” he explained matter-of-factly. She was taken aback. She wondered, if the guy she’s seeing is not “interested” in what her daily life is like as a woman, how could he possibly be interested in her? She said that the moment he uttered those words she knew they were through.

2. “Women’s issues” are personal for men, too.

If you are a man, I have a question for you: Is there a woman in your life that you love dearly? Mother, daughter, sister, wife, girlfriend, or close woman friend? Are there many women and girls that

you care about very deeply? Okay, then isn't it true that every issue which affects the women and girls that you care about affects you—by definition? Now think about all of the men who are the fathers, brothers, sons, and lovers of women and girls who have been assaulted by men. Men whose wives were raped when they were younger, but who still feel the aftershocks. Men who have daughters who are raped in college. Men who—as little boys—experienced the trauma of watching their fathers or other men assault their mothers. Millions of men fall into one or another of these categories.

Nonetheless, it is a struggle to get men to confront each other about violence toward women because so many of us have been conditioned—in our language and otherwise—either to avoid the subject altogether or to look at it through a dichotomous and competitive lens: *Men vs. women. Battle between the sexes. Us and them.* And this is definitely one of those issues that is about *them*. Isn't that why they call it a “women's issue”? But it is more than that. There are some issues that primarily affect women as a sex class, and others where men as a sex class are more concerned. You do not need a PhD in evolutionary biology to make that observation. But it is just as true that we live in the world together. Our lives are lived *in relation* to others. Women and men have familial, platonic, and sexual relationships with each other. How can something that affects women not affect men—and vice versa?

3. Men are the primary perpetrators.

Contrary to the disinformation promulgated in recent years by the so-called “men's rights” movement, the most important statistics about violence against women do not lie. The vast majority of credible researchers in sociology, criminology, and public health confirm that men commit the most serious intimate-partner violence and the overwhelming amount of sexual violence, including the sexual abuse of children. Some women in heterosexual relationships do assault their male partners, and a small number of researchers, most notably the sociologist Murray Straus, maintain that women's violence against men is a more significant social problem than many people in the field recognize or acknowledge. But while women's violence is wrong—if used for purposes other than self-defense—is rarely part of a systematic pattern of power and control through force or the threat of force. On a wide range of issues, from domestic violence and rape to stalking and sexual harassment, there is no symmetry between men's and women's violence against each other, no equivalence. If the tables were turned, and the primary problem were women assaulting men, would we be as likely to blame the victim as we are now? Would the general public be endlessly focused on men's experience of victimization at the hands of women? Would people constantly be asking: why do men stay with the women who beat them? Somehow I don't think so. I think most of us—especially men—would be honing in on the source of the problem—women's behavior. We would ask, rightly, “What the hell is going on with women? How are we going to get them to stop assaulting us?”

But with the situation reversed, we focus not on the perpetrator class but on the victims. There is some history behind this, and some language. Ever since women succeeded at breaking silence around the historic reality of their experience of violence at the hands of men, Western and other world cultures have framed gender violence as a “women's issue.” This act of framing/naming has had a profound impact on our collective consciousness, both positive and negative. On the one hand, thinking about gender violence as a women's issue has contributed to a foregrounding of the needs of female victims and survivors. The dramatic growth over the past three decades in public understanding about how violence against women harms women—how it is a violation of their basic human rights—is one of the great achievements of modern multicultural feminism.

On the other hand, focusing on what happens *to women* has helped obscure the role played *by men*—

and male culture—in the ongoing violence. After all, men are not only the primary perpetrators of gender violence. We are also the not-so-innocent bystanders. As we will discuss in this book, men hold a disproportionate amount of economic, social, and political power. This means we're more responsible for those aspects of our culture that promote and encourage violence against women. It also means we're more responsible for what we do or do not prioritize in terms of prevention—including the prevention of gender violence.

On a personal level, men who are not abusive toward women nonetheless play important roles in the lives of men who are. Men who physically and sexually abuse women are not monsters who live apart from the civilized world. They are in our families and friendship circles. They are our fathers, our sons, our brothers, and our best friends. They are our fishing partners, drinking buddies, teammates, fraternity brothers, and colleagues. We too easily let them and ourselves off the hook when we call their violence a “women’s issue.” Do we do it intentionally? I don’t know. But whether conscious or unconscious, it’s an effective strategy to avoid accountability.

4. Until more men join the fight, there is no chance that the violence will be dramatically reduced.

Men already play important roles in almost every aspect of these issues, from the personal to the professional to the political. For example, men are friends and family members of women who have been victims past or present. We’re also the friends and family members of violent boys and men. In a professional context, we’re rape-prevention educators and batterer-intervention counselors. We’re sex crimes prosecutors. We’re doctors who treat women and girls who have been assaulted. We’re lawyers who represent battered women in custody battles. We’re judges who hear domestic violence cases. We’re therapists who treat rape-trauma survivors. We’re cops who show up at the door when someone calls 911. In political terms, we’re policy makers who write legislation to fund women’s programs. We’re activists who call attention to unmet needs. We’re politicians who support changes in the law to strengthen protections for rape, battering, and stalking victims.

Until now the gynocentric nature of the “women’s issues” label has distorted the role that men are already playing in these issues—both good and bad. But I wouldn’t be pressing this point if it were simply about appreciating men’s positive contributions. We have far more serious things to worry about than the hurt feelings of some men who might feel unacknowledged. The fact is that the current practice of calling rape, battering, and sexual harassment women’s issues actually hampers prevention efforts. To cut right to it, how many more woman-as-survivor stories do we need to hear (however inspiring they might be) before we figure out that violence against women isn’t caused by women, and that it won’t be stopped by focusing on what women can do to change their lives?

Women, of course, have been and will continue to be the leaders of the fight against all forms of sexism. But because anti-sexism has for so long been identified with women, one of the first steps in motivating more men and boys is to talk about rape, sexual assault, battering, and sexual harassment as *our* issues. Of course it could be argued that men should *already* be concerned about women’s issues because *we should* be concerned about women. But regardless of whether we should be concerned, the fact remains that very few men have historically committed time, energy, and resources to the fight against gender violence. It has not been a priority for most men. That is why we need the paradigm shift. In order to occasion a true cultural transformation, we simply must convince a sizable group of men to—in the words of the famous Apple Computer campaign—“Think Different.”

Different.” Only with this new thinking will they be willing to invest the personal, professional, and political time and effort necessary to get the job done.

What are the stakes? Without more active male support and involvement, there is every reason to believe that the outrageously high rates of men’s violence against women that we’ve grown accustomed to will persist indefinitely. The only meaningful debates will be about appropriate levels of funding for victim services, along with ongoing debates about criminal justice versus community-based ways to hold offenders accountable. In other words, organized response to gender violence will continue indefinitely in clean-up-after-the-fact mode, quite possibly for decades.

True and lasting change will require—at a minimum—a critical and multicultural mass of men emerging to partner with women in confronting men’s violence on both a personal and an institutional level. There are signs that this is beginning to happen. Both nationally and internationally, the number of men and men’s organizations that are willing to grapple with men’s roles in ending violence is growing. But this is a movement that is still in its infancy.



In my mixed-gender speeches and trainings, I try to introduce this subject matter gently, in a non-threatening way, by starting with an interactive exercise. I ask the men—just the men—to participate in a little demonstration. “By a show of hands,” I ask, “how many of you have either a mother, daughter, sister, wife, girlfriend, close female friend, or another woman or girl that you care deeply about?” This usually prompts laughter and some grumbling, but eventually most guys put up their hands. (I can tell that I am in for a long night when more than a smattering of men choose to sign their unhappiness at having to attend a talk about women’s issues by refusing to raise their hands.)

At a talk I once gave on a college campus, there was a middle-aged white man and woman seated in the front row, looking out of place. I assumed they were married. When I asked the men to raise their hands if they had a woman close to them, the guy didn’t budge. He sat there ten feet away from me with his arms folded and the hint of a scowl on his face. His posture distracted me the entire night. I kept glancing down at them and wondering: What is going on in their relationship? How did she get him to come out and hear my talk? What will they be talking about in the car ride home?

Okay, so the guy might not have liked the slightly manipulative quality of the exercise. Regardless, its message was clear: every issue which affects the women and girls that we care about affects us. Our lives are inextricably interwoven. We live in the world together, share the same beds, and eat at the same breakfast tables. We make babies together, have *daughters* together. Everything that happens to women happens to men, too.

Facing Facts

“If a man is offered a fact which goes against his instincts, he will scrutinize it closely, and unless the evidence is overwhelming, he will refuse to believe it. If, on the other hand, he is offered something which affords a reason for acting in accordance to his instincts, he will accept it even on the slightest evidence.”

—Bertrand Russell, *Proposed Roads to Freedom*

One of the most memorable movie lines of the 1990s is from *A Few Good Men*, when Jack Nicholson’s Colonel Jessup bellows, “You can’t handle the truth!” at the young prosecutor played by Tom Cruise. Its power derives from Nicholson’s volcanic portrayal of the career Marine Corps officer who is indignant at having to answer, under oath, pointed questions put to him by a much younger and less war-tested junior officer. The “truth” in this case is a metaphor for the danger and ugliness in the world. Thus the colonel’s admonition is really an attack on the younger man’s masculinity, because a “real man” should be able to face the truth unflinchingly. At least in theory.

In reality, “real men” can be very selective about what truths they are willing to confront. Until recently, men as a group have been largely AWOL from the fight against gender violence. In one sense, it is easy to see why. Men’s violence against women is a pervasive social phenomenon with deep roots in existing personal, social, and institutional arrangements. In order for people to understand and ultimately work together to prevent it, it is first necessary for them to engage in a great deal of personal and collective introspection. This introspection can be especially threatening to men, because as perpetrators and bystanders, they are responsible for the bulk of the problem.

Introspection can also be unsettling for women. Gender violence is a painful subject they would rather not think about. Some are pessimistic about the possibility for meaningful change in men’s behavior. Others don’t want to draw larger conclusions from what happens to individual women because, deep down, they do not want to think it could happen to them. In addition, many women worry that a close examination of men’s attitudes and behaviors toward women might shine an unfavorable light on men they love and care about.

But my purpose in this book is to look at gender violence as a problem and a challenge for men. In order to do this, right up front I need to explore some of the dynamics in men’s lives—and psyches—that prevent them from coming to terms with the “truth” of men’s violence. There are clearly some reasons why men have not faced up to the reality of the ongoing pandemic of rape, battering, and sexual abuse.

In some cases, old-fashioned guilt keeps men from delving in too deeply. They are ashamed of their own behavior and would rather not be reminded of it. Some men avert their eyes because they are

afraid of what they might learn, not only about themselves, but about men around them: their brothers and friends. Finally, many men participate—in peer cultures and as consumers—in what feminists have described as a “rape and battering culture.” They laugh at sexist jokes, go out with the guys at strip clubs, and consume misogynistic pornography. So even though most men are not perpetrators, they nonetheless contribute to—and derive pleasure from—a sexist cultural climate where women are put down and sexually degraded. Thus they have little motivation to examine it critically, and a lot of incentive to look away.

I READ THE NEWS TODAY, OH BOY

Long before the 9/11 attacks prompted unusually honest national dialogue about the effects of terrorism and violence on the American psyche, our culture’s pandemic of men’s violence against women was one of the defining characteristics of our historical era. Decades before anyone had heard of Al Qaeda, one-half of the U.S. population had learned to live in near-constant fear of the other half. Gender violence has occurred with such frequency for so long in this country that many people are no longer alarmed by how common it is. It is the status quo, an unremarkable feature of the social landscape.

What is perhaps even more disturbing is that in this culture, many people see gender violence as a problem of sick or damaged *individuals*, and not as a social phenomenon that’s causes—and solutions—lie in much larger social forces. So let me be clear. There is no such thing as an isolated incident of rape, battering, sexual abuse, or sexual harassment. These are not merely individual pathologies. It is not enough for us to ask in each case: “What went wrong in his life?” “Why would he do something like that?” These problems are much too widespread for us to think about them in such narrow terms.

Men’s violence against women is a major contemporary social problem that is deeply rooted in our cultural traditions. This does not in any way absolve individuals of responsibility for their actions. But just as it is unfair to punish low-level soldiers and not hold their superiors accountable for the abuse and debacle at the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq, it is disingenuous to attribute the widespread problem of gender violence to an isolated collection of social deviants and let the rest of us off the hook.

The historical dimensions of the problem of men’s violence become clear when you consider the awesome scope:

- *JAMA: The Journal of the American Medical Association* published one study in 2001 which found that 20 percent of adolescent girls were physically or sexually abused by a date.
- Nearly one-third of American women report being physically or sexually abused by a husband or boyfriend at some point in their lives.
- An estimated 17.7 million women in the United States, nearly 18 percent, have been raped or have been the victim of attempted rape.
- Studies show that 15 to 38 percent of women and 5 to 16 percent of men experienced some form of sexual abuse as children.
- The average age at which a child is first abused sexually is ten years old.
- As many as 324,000 women each year experience intimate-partner violence during the pregnancy.
- Women are much more likely than men to be killed by an intimate partner. In 2000, intimate-partner homicides accounted for 33.5 percent of murders of women and less than 4 percent

murders of men.

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- One national survey found that 83 percent of girls reported being sexually harassed at school.
 - Between one in four and one in five college women experience completed or attempted rape during their college years.
 - Ten thousand porn videos are released *each year* in the U.S. alone.
 - The average age of entry into prostitution is thirteen or fourteen.
 - Forty percent of girls aged fourteen to seventeen report knowing someone their age who has been hit or beaten by a boyfriend.
 - There are twenty-five hundred strip clubs in the U.S.
 - One study found that 70 percent of women with developmental disabilities had been sexually assaulted, and that nearly 50 percent of women with mental retardation had been sexually assaulted ten or more times.
 - One study showed that 37.5 percent of American Indian and Alaska Native women were victimized by their male partners, with 15.9 percent raped, 30.7 percent physically assaulted, and 10.2 percent stalked.
 - Eight percent of women and 2 percent of men in the U.S. have been stalked at some time in their life; an estimated 1,006,970 women and 370,990 men are stalked annually. Eighty-seven percent of stalking perpetrators are male.
 - In one study, lifetime risk for violent victimization was so high for homeless women with severe mental illness (97 percent) as to amount to normative experiences for this population.
 - A study of prisons in four Midwestern states found that approximately one in five male inmates reported a pressured or forced sex incident while incarcerated. About one in ten male inmates reported that they had been raped. Sexual abuse rates for women in prison vary widely among institutions. In one facility, 27 percent of women had been sexually abused. (Women in prison are most often abused by male staff members.)
 - The estimated annual health-related costs, lost productivity costs, and lost earnings due to intimate partner violence in the U.S. is \$5.9 billion.
 - Studies suggest that between 3.3 and 10 million children witness some form of domestic violence annually.
 - Between 50–70 percent of men who abuse their female partners also abuse their children.

These numbers tell a dramatic tale, but you do not need statistical proof to see glaring evidence of the problem. Just look around. Stories about men stalking, attacking, and murdering women and children make the local, regional, and national news virtually every day; especially when they have a good news hook like a famous perpetrator or a young, attractive victim. A random scan of the headlines in the metro section of the newspaper on most days in moderately populated U.S. cities will turn up stories about husbands murdering their wives, members of the clergy arrested for sex offenses, male coaches fired for sexually abusing their young athletes, corporations sued by female employees for pervasive patterns of sexual harassment by male employees, and college athletes charged with gang rape. Sometimes the metro news pages read like a morbid catalogue of violent masculinity run

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