

# Why Men Batter

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*In this chapter, I will be using gender-specific terms when referring to victims and perpetrators, identifying the man as the abuser and the woman as the victim. This language reflects the vast majority of domestic-violence-related cases where there is an ongoing dynamic of power and control. The examples of men who batter, that I use in this chapter below, are also only in the context of heterosexual relationships.*

*In cases where women use violence in heterosexual relationships, “the context of that violence tends to differ from men. Many women who do use violence against their male partners are being battered. Their violence is primarily used to respond to and resist the controlling violence being used against them”.<sup>1</sup>*

*While men can also be the victims of battering, that victimization is most common in same-sex relationships.<sup>2</sup> Likewise, in violent relationships where the woman is the batterer, those also occur most commonly in same-sex relationships.<sup>3</sup> Many of the references in this chapter related to men’s tactics to control women also correspond with the tactics and intents of those who batter within same-sex relationships.*

### The Power and Control System

Before we dive into who batters and why, it is essential to understand what battering is. I use the term “battering” because it puts the physical violence aspect of abuse into a broader context of power and control. Intimate partner violence is not just one person hitting another. It is one partner, usually the man who is bigger and stronger, using violence to control “his” woman. Once the act of physical and/or sexual violence has occurred, the woman now knows that he is willing to hurt her to get his way. This experience and the ongoing threat of violence becomes the foundation, the “rubber on the wheel,” so to speak, of a system of power and control that the offender establishes.



Power and Control Wheel, used with permission of DAIP

The Power and Control Wheel identifies the system of battering as a sophisticated strategy where the batterer utilizes multiple methods to abuse: intimidation; emotional and psychological abuse; isolation from family, friends, and colleagues; minimizing and denying of violence or blaming the victim for his behavior; using and/or abusing the children to control them, and their mother; exercising cultural norms of male privilege to assert his power and dominance in the family and relationships; controlling money and all family assets; verbal and nonverbal coercion and threats; and often presents himself in public as a very nice, respectful, and caring man to hide his abuse. This all makes it very difficult for her and her children to live safely inside or outside of the relationship.

### **Who Are These Guys? And How Do They Get Away With it?**

Men who batter rely on their abusive and controlling tactics to maintain their power and control in the relationship and the family. They also rely on their ability to manipulate friends, extended family, and professionals to keep the abuse invisible. If he can't keep the abuse invisible, then he will work to convince others that he is the victim within the relationship, or he was unable to control himself ("understandably" when she does or does not do certain things). Or he was drunk. Claiming to be drunk is another very useful tool for men who batter. Alcohol does not make a person violent. Even while drunk, men are making decisions. I have heard this from alcoholic men in my groups routinely. They are aware that they are still making decisions even when drunk. For example, a man chooses not to take a swing at the six-foot-five-inch, two-hundred-and-fifty-pound bouncer at the bar who is "escorting" him out the door. Instead, he waits till he gets home and takes a swing at his five-foot-four-inch, one-hundred-and-forty-pound wife. He then blames her for making him so upset that he went to the bar and got drunk. And then he blames the alcohol for him coming home and beating her. This all works out very well for *him*. Together with the coercive control he uses in the home, this public manipulation is a key aspect of his ability to maintain his power and control.

Men who batter are often not who we expect. I remember the first time I was scheduled to co-facilitate a batterers group of men in 1983. These men had been mandated by criminal or civil court to participate in a twenty-four-week program which would assist them in changing their abusive behaviors. As I was preparing for my first group session, I thought to myself, "This will be really interesting. I wonder how these guys

will be different from me?”—since I had never been abusive to women. But that is not what was interesting. What was interesting was how much I was like the men who batter and sexually assault their wives and girlfriends, not how I was different from them. For example, in one of the first sessions I co-facilitated, a group member told a very sexist joke and we all laughed, including me. Then the female co-facilitator said “Hey, let’s put the brakes on this and back up a little. What was that joke really about?” And I thought to myself, “Oh damn, I just laughed at this nasty joke.” And I got called out on it, along with the other men in the room. This was just the tip of the iceberg. As time went on, the similarities between us were notable and quite pervasive.

After facilitating and coordinating the batterers intervention program for over ten years and working with over two thousand men, I can count on both hands the number of men I actually disliked. The vast majority of the men were very likeable—to such a degree that I had to go back and look at their files to remind myself what they were like in private, at home. So again, men who batter do not often fit the stereotype we have in our heads. And that, of course, is to their advantage. If he can convince you that he is a good man, he can also convince you that it is his wife or the relationship that is the problem, not him. This is a key strategy of men who batter: divert attention from their behaviors, and when that does not work, present themselves as the victim of those they are actually victimizing.

I have had multiple conversations with men who identified the various tactics they used with law enforcement officers and other helping professionals, including counselors, to shift the focus to the woman and escape any responsibility and subsequent accountability for their behavior. This was all effectively done at the expense of their wife/partner and children, who live with constant fear of retribution and abuse.

In the 1980s, the court systems and other professionals were suggesting or mandating marriage counseling when violence was involved in a relationship. At that time, they believed the violence was a symptom of a bad relationship, rather than understanding that the bad relationship was a symptom of the violence. I heard multiple stories from women who had been forced or coerced into these marital counseling sessions or were motivated to go by a desperate hope for change. They reported how they did not even get out of the parking lot after their first session without being back handed across the face in the car, and hearing their husband/partner say something like, “See, even the therapist says it’s your fault. I’ve been telling you that for years, but would you listen to

me? No way. Well now you know. So, don't try to put this all on me!" This was simply due to the therapist or counselor treating this as a relationship problem, where both parties bear responsibility for the issues that come forward.

Not in this case! When men batter their partners, it is about the individual conscious decision to hurt someone in an attempt to get what they want. That may include wanting their partner to shut up, wanting their partner to admit to things they did not do, wanting to spend the money as they please, wanting to win an argument, or wanting to make the process of maintaining power and control easier and easier as time goes on. Once his use and threat of violence is made clear, even a simple look can produce the results he wants.

Men in batterers groups routinely talked about their "look." Often it only took a "look" to get his wife to start or stop doing something. One man told a story of being at an event in a large community center. He was talking to someone on one side of the hall and his wife was talking to someone on the other side of the hall. He did not want her talking to that person, so he caught her eye and gave her his "look". Within forty-five seconds she was standing right next to him. No one around them realized what had happened. The person he was talking to had no idea this was happening, and the person she was talking to had no idea this was happening. But, he said, she knew by his look that "if she did not get her butt over here right now, there was going to be trouble." She knew she was going to get hurt. This control, intimidation and isolation becomes so sophisticated that it simply takes one look in a crowded room to let her know she must submit to his wishes now.

Understanding the consciousness of this behavior becomes key in providing effective responses to assist both the adult and child victims, and to hold the perpetrator accountable for his abuse. Understanding that this is a *choice*, not a mental health problem, or a psychological issue, or some type of "anger problem," guides helping professionals in providing the necessary response to heal the wounds and provide the needed safety for victims, and perhaps impact the decision-making process of the man who batters.

When you begin to understand this is a conscious decision, you begin to wonder how you can make it stop. How do you impact his behavior? His decisions?

## **The Benefits of Violence**

When I started facilitating mandated groups for men who batter in the early to mid-80s, we were concentrating on building skills for having healthy relationships, emotional

identification and self-control, anger management, etc. Then battered women in Duluth, Minnesota got together to discuss the impact of the violence on their lives and created the Power and Control Wheel. What emerged from their discussions was a more complex picture of battering. The men who beat women, not only beat them, but controlled where they went, who they talked to, what they wore, if and where they worked, how the money was spent, when, with whom, and how they had sex, how the children were raised, how the domestic labor was done in the household, and on and on. Basically, the men controlled the women to get what they wanted; the threat and use of violence was the tool that made that happen. Violence is powerful.

At that time, I was training men in weekly groups to use assertiveness skills when in conflict with their wives or girlfriends, teaching them how to access and express their feelings appropriately. Then I would send them home to practice. The next week they would come back and report that their new assertiveness “skills” weren’t working. I asked them why and they would say “Because she still did A, B, C, and D and would not do E, F, and G”—which is what *he* wanted. I then began to slowly understand that I was teaching men multiple personal life skills and they were simply using those skills in attempts to control their partner even more effectively. I was actually helping to develop more sophisticated batterers. When I began to listen, believe, and understand women’s experiences, I began to understand that men who batter could not be this effective in their abusive and controlling behaviors unless they were fully aware of what they were doing, and the subsequent impacts it would have on those they abused. It was just too sophisticated!

So, what was the point? Why was he so invested in this controlling and abusive behavior? Finally, I asked the men in the group.

One night I started the group by asking the men what they thought the *benefits* were of their violence. At first, they all looked at each other (notably) and said, “There are no benefits.” This did not surprise me, as men who batter routinely deny their actions *and* deny their intentions as well. So I said, “Well, there must be some benefits from the violence. Otherwise, why would you do it?” They looked at each other again, and one guy started admitting to the benefits. Then they all chimed in until the four by eight-foot blackboard I was writing their responses on was full, and we ran out of space.

(Please take a moment to consider the implications of each of these benefits.)

- **Get your way**

- Respect
- She won't argue
- Feeling superior
- She's accountable to me about being on time
- **I decide**
- Keeps the relationship going—she's too scared to leave
- Get the money
- Get sex
- **Total control** in decision making
- Use money for drugs
- Don't have to change for her
- Power Decide where we go
- Decide who she can see
- Decide what she can wear
- If she's late, she won't be again
- Intimidation
- She's scared and can't confront me
- Control the children
- Can convince her she's screwing up
- She feels less worthy, so she defers to my needs and wants
- She will look up to me and accept my decisions without an argument
- So she won't get help against me for past beatings because she has no friends to support her and she is confused by my lies
- Convince her she's nuts
- Convince her she's unattractive
- Convince her she's to blame
- Convince her she's the problem
- I can dump on her

- Can use kids to "spy" on mom
- Kids won't tell mom what I did
- Kids won't disagree with me
- Don't have to talk to her
- **I'm king of the castle**
- Have someone to unload on
- Have someone to bitch at
- She won't call police
- Tell kids they don't have to listen to mom
- Get her to drop charges
- Get her to support me to her family, my family, cops, prosecutors, other authorities, etc.
- Get her to admit it's her fault
- Win all the arguments
- She's to blame for the battering
- She's an object
- **I get a robot babysitter, maid, sex, food**
- She tells me I'm great
- Bragging rights
- If she works, I get her money
- Get her to quit job so she can take care of house
- Isolate her so friends can't confront me
- Decide how money is spent
- "I'm the breadwinner"
- Buy the toys I want
- Take time for myself
- She has to depend on me if I break her stuff
- **I get to know everything**
- She's a nursemaid
- She comforts me
- Supper on the table
- Invite friends over without her knowing equals more work for her
- No compromise equals more freedom. Don't have to listen

to her complaints for not letting her know stuff

- She works for me
- I don't have to help out
- I don't have to hang out with her or kids
- Determine what values kids have—who they play with, what school they go to, or getting to ignore the process—dictating what they "need" in terms of food, clothes, recreation, etc.
- **Dictate reality, etc.**
- Kids on my side against her
- Kids do what I say
- Mold kids/her so that they will help do what I should do
- Keeps kids quiet about abuse
- Don't have to get up, take out garbage, watch kids, do dishes, get up at night with kids, do laundry, change diapers, clean house, bring kids to appointments or activities, mop floors, clean refrigerator, etc.
- **Answer to nobody**
- She's scared and won't go out and spend money
- **Do what you want, when you want to**
- Get to ignore/deny your history of violence and other irresponsible behavior
- Choose battles and what it will cost her
- **Don't have to listen to her wishes, complaints, anger, fears, etc.**
- Proves your superiority
- Make the rules, then break them when you want

The first time I did this exercise I looked at the blackboard and I thought to myself, “Oh my God, why give it up?” I then decided to ask the men. Why give it up? They filled a two-by-two-foot space on the black board with things like, “getting arrested,” “divorce,” “civil protection orders against you,” “not being invited to adult kids’ weddings,” “having to go to groups like this,” and that was about it. These men clearly understood the benefits of violence and how much they gained from this abuse, and that is why they did not want to stop. Violence is functional!

This was the first time I fully comprehended the necessity of a consistent, coordinated community response through the criminal, civil, and family court systems to levy safe and effective interventions that hold men who batter accountable, while preserving the safety of the women and children they abuse. It was on that day that I realized if I had to choose between providing batterers groups for men who batter *or* a consistently effective and accountable criminal, civil, and family court response to domestic violence, I would choose the latter every time. There are just too many benefits gained from this behavior.

Once I considered the “cost-benefit analysis” of their use of violence, I began to be much more effective in my work. It was astounding how dramatically the groups changed once I acknowledged and remembered that the violence was *functional* and that is why they used it.

## **Making Change**

The “cost-benefit analysis” is evident in research which indicates that the more intrusive the interventions are by the courts for abusive behavior, the more likely the individual will change.<sup>4</sup> The following is an example of how we implemented the research into our batterer’s groups in conjunction with the courts to provide consistent and meaningful parameters to those in batterer programs.

If a man in my program continued to blame his wife or partner or children for his abuse, or continued to deny his behavior into week sixteen of a twenty-four-week program, he would be terminated from the program and sent back to court for a violation of his probation. We recommended that he serve three to ten days in jail, and then return to the same group to start the program over. We were able to terminate men from the group under these circumstances because we were part of a broader

Coordinated Community Response (CCR) which focused criminal justice and other provider policies and procedures on victim safety and offender accountability. We knew the court had our backs.

We always suggested consequences such as partial jail time served and/or further restrictions on his criminal or civil court order. We also requested he return to the same group, so he did not have the opportunity to manipulate a new facilitator. He had to come back to the group where the facilitator knew of his manipulations, minimizing, denial, and blame, and he knew now that that behavior would not be tolerated.

Often, I would notice after men had returned to the group, usually about three months after being terminated, that they had changed. At week four or five, I would mention to him that I was noticing he was taking more responsibility for his abuse and not blaming his partner like he had before. Then I would ask him why. And man after man, through the years, would say the same thing, "Because I don't want to go to jail. I know I can't get away with it anymore." That was the primary motivator for change. The group sessions simply provided the challenge, a critical analysis of his actions, intents, and beliefs, support for change, and occasionally, a significantly new perspective. This new perspective, along with the consistent consequences, resulted in a change in his behavior.

It is critical to place parameters around an abusive man's behaviors and then stick to those parameters. This cannot be done by the victim herself, because she will be harmed. It can be done, however, when she has the support of the court system, other helping professionals, advocacy programs, family, friends, faith communities, and other social structures. Understanding that she bears no responsibility for his behavior begins the process of change and assistance.

Faith communities can be a foundation for safety, support, and care for women and children who are abused. They can also be used by the man who batters to manipulate their partner, their children, the courts, child protection services, and others in the community. I have worked with many Christian men who present themselves as God-fearing, moral, biblically-faithful individuals. Several times men brought their Bibles to group and actually waved the Bible saying it was God's will that men be in charge and have the right to punish their wives if she does not obey his wishes. Religion can be a very powerful social tool used by men to harm those they profess to love.

Men who batter will try to slip past the parameters and expectations required of them, irrespective of whether the parameters come from the criminal, civil, and family court system, from organizational practices in the workplace, other professional interventions, or congregational expectations. They will do so in very sophisticated ways. Once the intervention boundaries are set, it is critical that the batterer adheres to them consistently. As we maintain those boundaries and expectations, it lets men know they “can’t get away with it anymore.”

Faith communities have the power to assist victims and hold batterers accountable. Whether or not a church, synagogue, temple, or mosque becomes a tool of manipulation by the batterer is determined by that faith community. It is critical that comprehensive protocols be developed and implemented, and local advocacy programs assist in this development. Safe Havens Interfaith Partnership Against Domestic Violence is a national resource to assist communities in providing the support and assistance necessary in these dangerous and complicated circumstances. You can find their resources at [www.interfaithpartners.org](http://www.interfaithpartners.org).

When developing protocols, in addition to providing support and safety, other factors should be considered. For instance, if the pastor, minister, or faith counselor is engaged in marital counseling with a couple and it becomes clear that domestic violence is occurring, how will the counselor attend to that reality? Under these circumstances, marriage and relationship counseling is dangerous for women and children.

As faith communities provide the needed support by understanding and articulating that the victim is not at fault for the abuse in any way, other factors come into play. For instance, what if they are separated and she has obtained a civil protection order that denies him access to her and restricts him from being within the same building, a park, or on a country road within one mile of her home? What does the faith community do about the couple’s involvement in services, especially in communities where there is only one congregation of their faith? Who leaves that congregation, him or her?

In most cases where there are no protocols, there seems to be a default position. He simply continues going to services and she stops going because his presence there makes it too dangerous for her to attend. Or she must now drive thirty miles to the next town to go to services where it is safe. Either way, she loses her faith community. This can add a substantial burden to all the other complications she is currently juggling. Now she is a stranger in a new congregation while going through a separation or divorce

(which is one of the most dangerous times for a woman), seeking housing and a new job, navigating legal obstacles, and attempting to keep herself and her children safe. What does the congregation do?

And what does a congregation do if she has *not* separated from him? Some women choose to stay with their partner because it may be the safer option. How can effective assistance be provided for her and appropriate responses to his behavior be expressed to him? Is there a way to utilize the power of the community to influence him and stop his abuse?

*Victim safety* and *offender accountability* is the foundation of response protocols. Accountability begins with acknowledging that the man who was abusive is responsible for the harms he has created, and consequently responsible for mitigating those harms to the extent that he can. Accepting responsibility for creating harm and responsibility to mitigate that harm is not a common reaction from men who batter. Rather, when their violence and abuse is publicly recognized, often their response is to further isolate and blame their partner for their behavior and seek community support as they do so. So, he will turn to his congregation for “help,” as he portrays himself as a victim going through this traumatic separation and false allegations his wife has made “in her effort to get the kids.” So how might his congregation truly help him?

The best response is to clarify that you believe the woman, and encourage him to accept full responsibility for his violence and coercive control. Often, when his behavior is made public, especially through an arrest or civil protection order, a man will say, “Okay, I may be 99 percent responsible, but she needs to be responsible for her behavior too. She’s not perfect.” Which is another very successful tactic men attempt to use, because we all know none of us is perfect. But the point is that it doesn’t matter what she does, because he does not have the right to beat, rape, and abuse her in a sophisticated system of coercive control (which he is attempting to facilitate at that very moment with the congregation, by shifting the focus away from himself and on to her). So, as you clarify again that you believe the woman who has shared these painful and traumatic experiences she (and her children) have been living through, and you believe he is 100 percent responsible for the decisions *he* makes, you begin to dismantle his system of power and control. This steadfast understanding and articulation then leads to action by the congregation. In this case, understanding that he is 100 percent responsible for his actions and subsequently 100 percent responsible for mitigating

the harm he has created over the years, the congregation should ask him to leave at this time. This provides a safe and supportive space for her. In the event he accepts full responsibility for his actions and attends to appropriate accountability measures to mend the harm he has created, then he may return. This is totally dependent on his future decision making and subsequent behaviors. It's up to him!

### **What Does Accountability Look Like?**

Accountability is the key indicator of change. To be accountable, a man must fully acknowledge his harmful behavior. He must dismantle the system of coercive power and control he has established and make amends for the harm he has created. What does this look like? First, he will listen to, accept, and abide by the wishes of the woman he abused. If they are still together, he will accept her independent opinions and her behaviors that he previously attempted to control. He will listen authentically to her anger, pain, and fear—without refuting or interrupting her. He will simply listen. And if he says anything, he should say, “Tell me more about that.” He will support her parenting. He will share access to all bank accounts, assets, and financial resources. He will support her relationships with friends and colleagues, releasing her from his entrapment. He will honor her in stories to family and friends. He will fully acknowledge his abuse and replace that behavior with dignity and respect.

If they are separated or divorced, accountability may mean no contact with her in any way. If that is her wish, this may mean not being in the same building or space as her. For example, if he comes into a grocery store and notices his ex-wife/partner in the store, then he will leave. If he is at the park in town and his ex-wife and their children arrive not knowing he is there, he will be the one that leaves the park, since he is the one that is the cause of the pain and fear they will experience if they see him.

An accountable man will accept the consequences of his behavior, even if that means jail time, loss of a job, removal from a congregation, or less time with his children. He will abide by court orders and stop his abusive behavior, including all aspects of the Power and Control Wheel. He will then continue to make amends for the harm he has created. If those he has victimized require medical or mental health care due to his behavior, then he will accept the responsibility of paying for that care if the people he abused are willing to let him do so. This activity can also be dangerous. Men can

present themselves as mending harm but instead are motivated to entrap those they have victimized in new ways. Those who have experienced his abuse are best able to assess their safety. When they have the support and expertise of effective advocacy programs and others in their life, those determinations are more easily made and that safety is more likely to expand.

If he has kept her from working or going to school in the past, then he should assist her by providing the economic support necessary for her to regain her life. This may occur either directly or through a third party, if she wishes no direct contact. This assistance could be as simple as providing the damage deposit for a new apartment if they have separated. Again, this would need to be something the victims of his abuse would feel comfortable accepting. In many cases, if separated, they do not want any connection with the man who abused them because of his history of manipulation, false promises, false apologies, and more. In another example, suppose he is in the middle of a custody battle and his attorney is telling him to utilize the fact that she has been in therapy in the past or has mental health issues, in an attempt to win custody of the children? An accountable man will refuse that strategy! Instead, he will accept a custody arrangement that works best for her and their children, and he will respect the boundaries that have been established. While this may be an incredibly difficult thing to do, it is also a clear indicator that he is willing to bear the brunt of his past choices and heal the wounds he has created as much as possible. He will do so by supporting his children's mother, expressing his respect for her to his children, and providing them the consistency, structure, and loving care necessary for them to heal.

Lastly, he will approach all those in his family, those at work, those in his faith community, helping professionals, and all others that he has manipulated by providing false information about his wife/partner, and will acknowledge and take full responsibility for his behavior. He will then apologize for his manipulations and the impact those manipulations have had on their lives. He will fully accept the consequences of these revelations. Those consequences may include the end of professional or private relationships, and a change in his public reputation.

These are just a few examples of accountability. These behaviors would need to occur consistently, over months and years, to be proven genuine. To determine real change in the individual, you will need to speak to the woman he has abused in the

past, and the woman he is currently in relationship with, if it is safe to do so. This is where truly reliable information can be found.

This is a significant challenge. These are not small requests to ask of these men. However, compared to the trauma and lifelong impact he has had on his wife/partner and the children, it is still minimal.

Not all men will make this change. Many will simply move away and find another relationship, another job, another faith community, and simply bring the abusive behaviors with them. But I have seen some men make remarkable progress toward healing. I have seen them take the steps honestly and authentically, which takes inner strength, determination, and refined principles and beliefs. Consequently, I have seen many of these men years later, walking down the street with their wife and children, together again, because his change was determined to be real, as he sought a different kind of benefit from his behavior than the ones he sought while abusing his family.

### **Primary Prevention: “Stop it Before it Starts”**

The Culture Wheel is a representation of how cultural norms and values influence institutions and a society’s use of power and control. By examining the ways society reinforces the use of power and control, those using the wheel can identify actions that might be taken on a personal, cultural, and institutional level to end the tolerance of abuse.

One in three women are physically assaulted in their lifetime by a man they have an intimate relationship with. That is not just a statistic, that is one in three women you know: sisters, mothers, aunts, nieces, daughters, wives, girlfriends, friends, colleagues, etc. As you walk down the street, or through the mall, or look around you at work, or look to those in your congregation, count the women. One, two, three (abused). One, two, three (abused). One, two, three (abused). Every third woman you pass or encounter has experienced domestic violence. To add to this, one in three women will be sexually assaulted in her lifetime.

How is this possible? This many men and boys could not be beating and raping this many women and girls (and boys) without widespread cultural support! So where is that support coming from, and how do we change it?

It is all around us. When I was a small boy, the worst thing I could be is the kind of person at least half of the people reading this chapter are—a girl! “Don’t run like



Culture Wheel, used with permission of DAIP

a girl.” “Don’t throw a ball like a girl.” “Don’t cry like a girl.” Don’t do anything like a girl—that’s how I knew I was the right kind of boy. And, if the worst thing I could be is a girl, then obviously boys are better than girls! As I looked around in my world, men were in charge everywhere, especially white men. Now, this dynamic is changing, but even today if you look at the highest levels of power in our local, state, and national governments, private corporations, and faith communities, you will still see that the majority of those in control are men. And women are still marginalized, with limited status, and making anywhere from 60 to 80 cents on the dollar compared to men, depending on their race or ethnicity. So, these social norms we take for granted contribute to this sense of male superiority and subsequently a perceived “right” to control women and others we consider inferior.

The power men hold in society is routinely highlighted, respected, and acknowledged. Women’s accomplishments, opinions, and expertise are routinely ignored. Some of this

is changing due to the astounding courage, strength, brilliance, and resiliency women have brought to the public and private sectors of our society, while challenging sexist notions of male domination and privilege.

Some men are beginning to listen and acknowledge their own participation in a sexist culture of male privilege, both directly or indirectly through their silence. But more men who recognize this patriarchy are needed to reshape our culture.

Historically we know that any time one group of people believes they are better than another group of people, attendant hostility becomes a cultural norm. We have seen this with racism, anti-Semitism, heterosexism, classism, etc. This is so “normal” that it becomes invisible right before our eyes. So “woman hating” became a part of a sexist male culture. Sexist comments and jokes, and the sexual objectification of women has become so common that we hardly notice it anymore. The simplest example of this cultural misogynistic norm is the language men routinely use when speaking with each other about women. Men use offensive, demeaning, coarse, and objectifying language to refer to and describe women all the time. And it seems that men don’t make the connection between this common language and the fact that one in three women is being abused. This is the same language men use as they are beating and raping women. And we use this language routinely in our everyday lives to make jokes, express disgust, or just talking in general about women and girls. It is, in fact, a way that men bond with each other.

If you are a man reading this and have never noticed this, start paying attention to how often anti-woman or sexually-objectifying comments occur when you are in the company of other men. Comments such as “I’d like to hit that” as the waitress walks away from the table after delivering the drinks. This is a regular part of male culture. So how do we change this? And how do we answer the question, “Do we care about women’s lives?”

Men’s silence supports men’s violence! This many men could not be assaulting this many women if the men who were not abusive stood up and said “No! No more!” So how do we do this? How do we stop it before it starts? Because if sexual and domestic violence is going stop, men are going to have to stop it. Men need to play a key role, in partnership with women, in reshaping these social norms and holding men who batter, sexually assault, and abuse women accountable. This is another chapter to be written, but there are solutions. Here are a few examples of what men can do to help.

LEVEL OF SPECTRUM	DEFINITION OF LEVEL
<b>6. Influencing Policy and Legislation</b>	Developing strategies to change laws and policies to influence outcomes
<b>5. Changing Organizational Practices</b>	Adopting regulations and shaping norms to improve health and safety
<b>4. Fostering Coalitions and Networks</b>	Convening groups and individuals for broader goals and greater impact
<b>3. Educating Providers</b>	Informing providers who will transmit skills and knowledge to others
<b>2. Promoting Community Education</b>	Reaching groups of people with information and resources to promote health and safety
<b>1. Strengthening Individual Knowledge and Skills</b>	Enhancing an individual's capability of preventing injury or illness and promoting safety

Spectrum of Prevention, used with permission of Prevention Institute

This graphic is based on public health initiatives used to address social norms which harm individuals and those around them. Often people think that to prevent societal problems we just need to raise awareness. But we know from experience that raising awareness or providing education about an issue alone does not change social norms. As the Spectrum of Prevention demonstrates, the most effective method of prevention is through organizational practice and public policy change. So, we use education and community awareness to build the social capital and political will to change organizational practice and public policy. That is what reshapes social norms.

A good example of this is smoking. We knew for years that smoking was harmful to our health, but it wasn't until we made changes to workplace policies and legislation that the level of tobacco use started to decrease. Remember when we could smoke in

a movie theater, the waiting room at the hospital, at work, at school, anywhere? It was the norm, “just the way it is.” If you had told someone in Minnesota in 1997 that in ten years it would be illegal to smoke in a bar, they would have laughed and said “No way. Are you kidding? That would never happen!” Ten years later it did. People think changing social norms is impossible. But it is possible and essential!

So, how do we as men join women in partnership, to identify and reshape these social norms leading to sexual and domestic violence?

How do we use our influence at work, at home, at school, with friends and family, in our congregations, to support women’s equality, honor their historical and contemporary achievements, and produce organizational practices and public policies that provide the gender equity and respect due to every individual? In my work and in my faith community, do I highlight and acknowledge women’s successes? Are they a key part of my workplace’s or congregation’s leadership? Are women honored at events? How are women portrayed in your faith community or workplace: as a subordinate or equal to men? These are questions that begin the work of engaging, evaluating, and reshaping social norms within organizations and society.

## **Conclusion**

As we begin to make these institutional changes in policy and practice, we will see the changes that we want. It will no longer be a wish, but a reality! The end to endemic levels of physical and sexual abuse, the end to the sexual exploitation and the objectification of women and girls. Equal pay, social support, leadership, and ultimately, gender justice will happen.

In making this change, we will contribute to making the world we envision a place where all people are respected and provided the equal rights and privileges due every human being—the opportunity to live in peace, joy, and safety, fulfilling our dreams and those of our children.

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