

Taking off the Blindfold

By: Burton Patterson

“It happens to women, not men, so why should men even be concerned with a ‘women’s issue’?”

What role do men play in ending sexual violence? Although the narrative of sexual violence being a “women’s issue” is slowly changing, there are still men who believe because they are not directly affected by sexual violence that it’s not their problem. It is true that there is a very large disparity in the percentages. CDC research shows that most survivors of rape are women (nearly 1 in 5 or 18.3%) but there are also many men affected by it as well (1 in 71 or 1.4%).* This is not a “women’s issue”, it is a pervasive issue that affects everyone regardless of their gender identity.

In response to the many years of research declaring that inequitable, harmful ideas about masculinity are often the driving force behind sexual violence, intimate partner violence, mental health concerns, substance abuse, and many other challenges as well; I created a program called Speak Up Speak Out Project (SUSOP) in 2017. SUSOP is an effort to engage young men in helping to see the importance of their role in redefining masculinity and eradicating rape culture and sexual violence. It takes a comprehensive and theory-driven approach to working with young men for gender justice

Sexual violence prevention requires a change from social norms which make violence normal and acceptable. From a very young age, boys are told by society that they need to fit inside a box made up of societal constructs, a “Man Box”, that encourages domination and control of others rather than intellectualism and empathy. This limits the choices and expressions of men to rigid traditional masculine roles and doesn’t allow space for them to explore gender constructs. The basis of SUSOP is to be aware and conscious of how we, as men, are raised within the confines of restrictive ideas about gender. Challenging these ideals is not only necessary, it is also liberating.

Over the past 2 years, SUSOP has been delivered to over 150 young men on several college campuses across the state of Indiana. Together we have been able to begin shifting the cultural norms surrounding sexual violence.

This is what change making men look like.

Resources

* (<https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/sexualviolence/datasources.html>)