Blackburn Center
AGAINST DOMESTIC & SEXUAL VIOLENCE

POSITION STATEMENT
SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION: ENDING GENDER VIOLENCE

What is gender violence? Gender violence targets a specific group of people with the victim's gender as a primary motive. The most pervasive form of gender violence is abuse of a woman by intimate male partners, but is not limited solely to abuse of women by men. The power imbalance between men and women creates a culture in which whoever has power has permission to victimize someone less powerful. This most often is violence perpetrated by men against women, but is not exclusively so.

Violence against women is a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women and is one of the crucial social mechanisms by which women are forced into a subordinate position compared with men. Gender violence occurs in both the "public" and "private" spheres. Such violence not only occurs in the family and in the general community, but is sometimes also perpetuated through government policies or the actions of agents of the government such as the police, military or immigration authorities. Gender-based violence happens in all societies, across all social classes, with women particularly at risk from men they know.

Gender-based violence includes: battering, intimate partner violence (including marital rape, sexual violence, and dowry/bride price-related violence), feticide, sexual abuse of children and adolescents, honor crimes, early marriage, forced marriage, female genital mutilation (FGM)/cutting and other traditional practices harmful to women, sexual harassment and intimidation at work, in school and elsewhere, commercial sexual exploitation, and trafficking of girls and women.

The oppression and rejection of the feminine in both women and men contributes to gender violence. Femininity is associated with weakness, gentleness, tolerance, passivity and emotion. Masculinity, on the other hand, is traditionally associated with power, dominance, financial responsibility, sexual need and passion, as well as leadership. When men experience a challenge to their masculinity, they may resort to the use of physical, psychological, or emotional abuse to retain their power.

Guiding Beliefs:

1. Equality in relationships with a respect for human dignity is essential if gender violence is to be eliminated. This cannot occur without societal commitment to gender equity.

2. In order to achieve gender equity, a change in attitudes, beliefs, and actions through individual, group and community education must occur. To stimulate this change, the community must engage in open discourse about gender equity and gender violence.

3. Gender violence is intrinsically connected to societal oppression of women. Our society remains out of balance when comparing the status of women to that of men, considering the difference in access for each gender to power, privilege and the pursuit of higher standards of living.

4. Failing to recognize the societal oppression of women as a significant factor in gender violence reinforces the notion that victims are responsible for ending gender violence by changing their decisions and behaviors (e.g., focusing on the way they dress or where they leave a beverage in a public place). This perpetuates the violence by protecting the powerful and blaming those who are least powerful and most marginalized. Focusing only on risk reduction behaviors in women will not eliminate the culture of violence.

5. In order to effectively address the oppression of women, one must address other forms of oppression (for example, those based on race, ethnicity, creed, gender, sexual orientation/ expression, gender orientation/or expression, gender identity, immigration status, country of origin, religion, mental health status, age, size, perceived economic status and ability). Oppression contributes to a culture that marginalizes or exploits individuals.

6. The pervasiveness of rape culture – a culture in which dominant cultural ideologies, media images, social practices, and societal institutions support and condone sexual abuse by normalizing, trivializing and eroticizing male violence against women and blaming victims for their own abuse – is at the root of gender violence in society.

7. The following gender constructs contribute to this rape culture: the oppression and rejection – in both women and men – of qualities associated with the feminine, the rigidity of gender norms, and the discouragement of people mixing or crossing gender roles. In addition, women possessing qualities socially defined as masculine creates conflict because it challenges the way in which power is currently defined in society.

8. The culture accepts rape and battering as inevitable. As a result, strategies most often developed for addressing gender violence are focused on intermediate, not primary interventions (e.g., focusing on binge drinking and a culture of sexual permissiveness on a college campus rather than addressing the rape culture).

9. The objectification of women in all forms of media creates a pervasive sense of inequality in the culture. It often leads to women's belief that their social power is essentially linked to sexual appeal. This belief reinforces internalized misogyny, the conscious or unconscious sexist attitudes from women towards other women.

10. Victims of violence must be heard without judgment.

11. Perpetrators of violence must be held accountable for their behavior.

Adopted by Blackburn Center's Board of Directors, January 26, 2015

Citations:

2003 Minnesota Advocates for Human Rights; available from http://www.stopvaw.org.

http://definitions.uslegal.com/g/gender-based-violence/

Wikipedia (gender violence)

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Commitment to Action

To address the changes needed to end gender violence, Blackburn Center will:

- Examine internal agency structure and address policies and practices that perpetuate gender inequality.

- Incorporate social transformation strategies in all aspects of the agency's work and services.

- Commit to addressing the short-sighted or damaging messages that are pervasive and embedded in our culture. This not only supports forward motion, it also prevents us from losing ground. For example: a consistent victim focus on risk reduction not only misses the opportunity to call out the behaviors and beliefs that perpetuate this violence: it reinforces the notion that is so strongly embedded in our culture that women/victims are ultimately responsible for this violence.

- Provide clarity in definitions for the agency's work and the community in general. For example, blurring the definition of domestic violence to include situational violence creates confusion about the dynamics of gender violence.

- Create an agency culture that challenges staff, board and volunteers to consistently and persistently push past resistance to the guiding beliefs in this document.

- Develop a continuum – from public awareness to risk reduction to primary prevention – that articulates the danger in each lower level in undermining a clear primary prevention message.

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