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**POSITION STATEMENT**

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SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION: ENDING GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE**

What is gender-based violence? Gender-based violence targets a specific group of people with the victim's gender as a primary motive. Due to the nature of our patriarchal society, the power imbalance between men and women creates a culture in which men have more power than women, and therefore have personal and societal permission to victimize women, and feminine-presenting people, who, in general have less access to power.

Gender-based violence is a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women. This includes what has been described as violence against women, though society's understanding of this violence has evolved to encompass all types of violence that are motivated by gender. Gender-based violence must also be seen in the context of multiple intersectional identities including race, class, sexual orientation, gender identity, ability/disability, age and other factors. Women from many diverse communities, via these crucial social mechanisms, are forced into subordinate positions compared with men. Intersectional gender-based violence occurs in both the "public" and "private" spheres. Such violence not only occurs in the family and in the general community, but is also perpetuated through government policies or the actions of agents of the government such as the police, military or immigration authorities. This also includes schools, health care, the legal system and the criminal justice system. Women are particularly at risk from men they know which includes family members, partners, employers, co-workers, husbands and boyfriends.

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 vulnerable people.

The oppression and rejection of the feminine in women, men and people of all genders, contributes to gender-based violence. When men experience a challenge to their masculinity, they can resort to the use of physical, psychological, or emotional abuse to retain their power. The values of patriarchal society consider this normal and acceptable.

***Guiding Beliefs:***

1. Equality in relationships with a respect for human dignity is essential if gender-based 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 intersectional gender equity and gender-based violence.
3. Gender-based violence is intrinsically connected to societal oppression of all diverse 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 all diverse women as a significant factor in gender-based violence reinforces the notion that victims are individually responsible for ending gender-based 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 diverse women will not eliminate the culture of violence.
5. In order to effectively address the oppression of women from all communities, one must address other forms of oppression 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 and actual 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-based violence in society.
7. Gender is constructed in such a way that all qualities associated with the feminine, the rigidity of gender norms, and the discouragement of people mixing or crossing gender roles is internalized by everyone in our society: women, men, trans people, non-binary and other gender identities .
8. Our culture accepts rape and battering as inevitable. Such violence, overwhelmingly perpetuated by men, is seen as being unstoppable. As a result, strategies most often developed for addressing gender-based violence are focused on a potential victim's responsibility to avoid or stop the assault rather than addressing the root causes of this violence.
9. The objectification of women from all communities in all forms of media creates a pervasive sense of inequality and inequity in our culture. This often leads to women internalizing that their social power is essentially linked to their sexual appeal and interest to men. This belief reinforces internalized misogyny, the conscious or unconscious sexist attitudes from women towards other women.

10. Victims of gender-based violence must be heard without judgment.
11. Perpetrators of gender-based violence must be held accountable for their behavior.

**For more information on terminology included in this position statement, check Blackburn Center's glossary at <https://www.blackburncenter.org/glossary>.**

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***Citations:***

2003 Minnesota Advocates for Human Rights; available from <http://www.stopvaw.org>.  
<http://definitions.uslegal.com/g/gender-based-violence/>  
Wikipedia (gender violence)  
<http://gbvguide.org/intro/about-this-guide/defining-gender-based-violence#sthash.PdEyEfB7.dpuf>

# Blackburn Center

## **SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION: ENDING GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE Commitment to Action**

To address the changes needed to end gender-based 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-based 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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