

**Keynote Address**  
**Kalei Valli Kanuha**  
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**at the Annual Conference of the**  
**Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence**

**Caution: Men Working**



I want to use the theme of this year's conference "Caution: Men Working" and the signage associated with it to reflect upon our work in the anti-violence movement in the United States. I will start with a few caveats to contextualize how I've come to understand where we've evolved in our work with, on behalf of, and beside men.

First, I am blessed to have grown up for the past 32 years in the American battered women's movement, beginning in March 1975 at a community meeting on "the problem of battered wives" in Minneapolis, Minnesota. I was then, and have since been, very

influenced by analyses and practices first developed in Minnesota, in a very U.S.-based, White, feminist-activist, midwestern context. And I suggest the perspectives and how we name, intervene with, and legislate policies regarding domestic violence still 30+ years later are based on those initial and privileged voices of feminist activists who understood violence in that very specific socio-historical-economic context of the United States.

Second, from the very first meeting I attended in Minneapolis in 1975, sponsored by The Walk In Counseling Center, men were involved. In Minnesota, the director of WICC in 1975 was a man, the artist who helped design the graphics of our first resource directory (5 pages) in 1979 was a man, the public defender I worked with on the first battered women's self-defense case in the 1980s was a man, child care workers at our first MN statewide conference were men, and throughout my 30+ years of this work, I've been surrounded with a few good men.

In 1986, my supervisor who became a dear friend who initiated me into AIDS work and some of the most inspiring years of my life had been the first man – very out and gay – to be hired at a rape crisis program in Texas in the late 1970s. So, while we gather over these days to figure out how we are to work with, on behalf of, or beside men it's important for us to remember that over the past three decades men have always been involved in the work to end violence against women. This is neither an old or new problem, but one about which we've stopped critically thinking and acting.

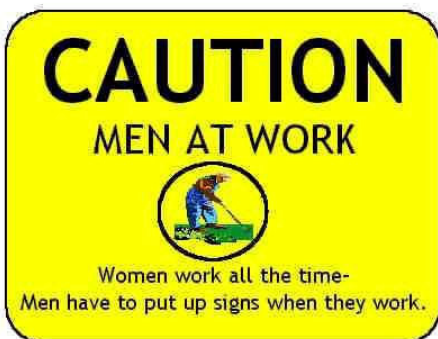
Finally, my observations are based on my very particular lived experience: that is, I am a Hawaiian-Japanese American who grew up in 1950s Hawaii when our islands were still a U.S. territory; I am a lesbian; I grew up in a small rural town; I come from a family where, based solely on the luck of the draw, domestic and family violence were absent; and I have had many privileges of health, well-being, and love.

Last night Nan<sup>i</sup> and I were talking about depression and she said in her quintessential Nan way, “Well, who isn’t depressed?” And I had to say, not me. For the most part I’ve had the benefit of abounding optimism, which I attribute to the upbringing of my parents and grandmother, and their collective gene pool. So my comments are underscored with an unending belief that most all things are possible, and for the few others, we just haven’t yet figured out a strategy.

It is through these life experiences I reflect upon how we got here and where we might go specifically with regard to the place of boys and men in our work to end violence against women.

So let’s create analysis using the transportation themes and signage already established by the conference planners.

When we began our work to end rape and sexual assault back in the early 1960s and 70s, our main understanding of this form of gender violence was through theorists such as Susan Brownmiller, Shulamith Firestone and other Jewish feminists from the East Coast. These activists believed that whether or not they actually employed it, all men could rape, all men benefited from rape, and rape was used as a tool of patriarchy to keep women in a constant state of fear.



It was suggested that all men – again, regardless of whether or not they actually carried out assaults – were at work using rape, sexual assault and sexual terrorism to oppress girls and women. And underlying the propensity to rape was a belief that women were the property of men and therefore men had the right to control their women using sexual violence.

So our main organizing clarion was, “Stop Rape Now!” The specific strategies we employed centered on building the skills of girls and women to protect themselves. Through assertiveness and self-defense training, taking safety precautions such as Mace and escorts in parking structures, and “No Means No” we understood that stopping rape did not involve men stopping their behavior but women learning to protect themselves. Note that most of these strategies were based on the assumption that rapists were strangers or acquaintances. So we can see why organizing to change men’s behavior was not relevant since we didn’t exactly know who rapists were.



This was also a time of feminist separatism where women were told not only to separate from males in the social institutions of families, marriage and coupling, but to organize themselves and work to end rape separate from boys and men – the enemies. We were not to sleep with men, we were not to trust men, we were not to allow men access to our organizing, and we were unsure what to do with our male children in all of this. We basically were never sure when a rapist might emerge – in a dark alley or a loud bar. It was in the sexual assault movement that the rhetoric about men as incidental to anti-violence organizing was first intoned.



What was also important throughout this time, however, is that most of these feminist separatists were indeed heterosexual or bisexual (temporarily bisexual). And I suggest their ability to call for separate space and lives from boys and men was due to their class and race privilege. That is, due to their own status as scholars and writers, interacting in primarily white urban enclaves they were able to suggest these radical notions of separatism because they could literally afford to do so. When feminists of the modern day women's movement first suggested that women should leave their homes and go to work or college, they definitely were not referring to working class and poor women who were already doing that.

So when "true" feminism was argued to be best achieved separate from men, they didn't exactly have working class, non-white, disabled, old women in mind. And of course nowhere in that analysis were lesbians who were thought to not need men anyway. The call to separate from men as a method of liberation was truly an option for only a few women, and those were women of privilege.

In the mid-1970s, we began to expand our understanding of gender violence as women started coming forward with stories that included more than sexual assault but an intimate relationship context with many different kinds of assault - verbal, physical, emotional, psychological. The battered women's movement as with the rape and sexual assault movement grew out of analyses of male power, patriarchy, and misogyny that were fundamentally raced, classed, gendered and sexualized.

That is, while we said every woman could be battered, what we really constructed was a battered woman who was White, passive, and blameless. And at some level, the villainous counterpart to that ideal victim would have to be a monstrous, crazy, impulsive, violent, controlling man. That image for many White women also was working class, uneducated, alcoholic, and perhaps brown skinned. He was an extension of Angela Davis's depiction of the Black rapist to White plantation daughters and wives.

And because the first and still primary strategy to protect women and children was shelters, it was easy and understandable to preclude boys and men from that space. We were removing women from their homes filled with male violence to a women-only safe space which meant no boys or men. That is why we struggled so hard to decide if boys could be allowed in shelters, and if so up to what age? Men could work in shelters but only in certain positions, but definitely not anywhere they might prompt fear in women residents.

So in the first decade of battered women's organizing from 1970 – 1980, even with a few men volunteering or working in shelters we continued the mantra that men were the enemy, that every man could be a batterer, and that every woman could be battered. This was regardless of the fact that most of the leaders in our movement were either heterosexual women sleeping with the "enemy" or lesbian non-separatists with enemies in their midst – their sons, male co-workers and neighbors.

**Caution!**  
**Men Finally Working**

In the 1980s we began batterer intervention programs as a switch from focusing solely on victim safety and support, to addressing male batterers as the cause of violence. This period also marked the rise of criminal-legal remedies such as protective orders, probable cause arrest, changes in laws to account for domestic violence as a separate

offense from assault and other bodily harm, increased sanctions against violators of these crimes, and specialized training for judges, prosecutors, and law enforcement. In this decade and since,

we've seen the largest involvement of men in the anti-violence movement – as workers and as recipients of service. However, during this early phase of men's increased involvement in this work once again we were allowing in only certain kinds of men: primarily White, educated, mentored by feminist activists, gay or bisexual. Unless of course they were security guards or janitors, then they were working class men of color.

The enhanced criminalization of domestic violence in America was accompanied by a major unintended consequence that I believe would perhaps have been minimized had more women of color, immigrant women, lesbian and queer activists, and those from Paul Kivel's less powerful groups<sup>ii</sup> been allowed to be centralized in our analysis. That is, while we thought the best strategy to end domestic violence was to take it out of the privacy of the home and make it a criminal rather than social problem, we did not consider that when we encourage state or government intervention into people's private lives, there are certain sub-groups in our country who will be more vulnerable to surveillance, arrest, conviction and incarceration.

And those groups over the past 20 years have increasingly been immigrant battered women and their male partners who face deportation; battered women and men of color – both arrested in alarming numbers and filling our jails; queer survivors and perpetrators of partner violence who get mutual restraining orders granted against them by homophobic judges; and more and more battered women charged with abusing their husbands, having their children removed for failure to protect them from abuse, and arrested for violating their own protective orders by allowing their partners back in the home.



So what do we see at this point in the road? For me, I'm not sure there's any turning back from our focus on criminalization of battering and violence. However, if you look at who's been targeted by what many of us thought were the best options we had for making our society take battering seriously, you will see that it is not only the most vulnerable battered women who have been swept up in the criminal-legal system, but vulnerable men as well.

And it is from these communities – people of color, immigrants, human rights activists, anti-prison advocates, queer advocates, and children and youth organizers – that I believe lay the best promises for our path ahead. Because it is in these communities that we could never separate survivors from batterers – we lived and worked closely together before, during and after episodes of violence. In my many years of doing same-sex violence work, I could never figure out how to implement the many conventional strategies for heterosexual couples with lesbian couples. Going to shelter was always a crapshoot for battered lesbians, and forget putting trans male or gay male batterers in batterer treatment groups with heterosexual men.

But these were the same tensions and challenges that women of color, immigrant and other marginalized communities have faced in trying to do what the mainstream DV movement has claimed were best practices. What we've all accepted as the best or only way to deal with men as batterers was based on what to do with certain kinds of batterers, even though we falsely insisted that all batterers were motivated and rooted in the same belief systems, experiences, and conduct associated with battering and violence.

It is from these experiences that these communities have forced us to stop and ask: Where have we been going? Where have we come from? Who have we left behind? Who has suffered from what

we thought were the best strategies to keep women and children safe, to hold men accountable, and to change the norms of society to zero tolerance for violence.

Would we answer that what we've learned is that only some women and children would be kept safe, that some men would be held harshly accountable, and others not at all. Could we conclude from this that the goal of our work should not be zero tolerance for domestic violence, but social justice for all.

## Caution! Working Men

What then is our work to be with men? I have 6 ideas I'd like to share with you today.

1) Beware of the backlash of men's rights or father's rights groups. These groups range from formalized mentoring within fundamentalist Christian churches, to informal organizations that gather evidence to support parental alienation syndrome, to blogs filled with critiques of man hating, family busting, lesbian-loving, DV advocates. Now this is what I recommend as a strategy for these groups: ignore them, do not engage them, keep your feet on the gas pedal and just keep moving straight ahead. However, we should keep an eye on them in our rear view mirror just in case. I caution you, except in specific and rare cases, anything we do to respond to their claims CAN and WILL be used against us. I guarantee you that.

2) There have always been and still are good men in our midst. They are like Hanson, Nan's son – they're the good guys<sup>iii</sup>. Unfortunately, because we have not done much to include, mentor, train, and bring along men as we've grown up ourselves over the past 30+ years there really aren't enough of them. But some are here in this room today, and many are back home coaching Little League teams and soccer, attending Rotary meetings, organizing for disability and immigrant rights, walking for breast cancer, and teaching elementary or Sunday School.

Are there unsavory men in these sites? Of course, since we know that many batterers are the most upstanding citizens in our communities. But we are also smart, we understand so much more about the dynamics of power and control, and we definitely have lots of strategies to address those who might slip through the cracks of our efforts to work with men. But that doesn't mean we shouldn't try finding those few gems out there.

So I suggest you all go home and think together about places where good men might congregate and whom you might approach for collaborative projects to end violence against women. And while they are good men, they are easily distracted by the patriarchy. So even good men must be mentored and worked with, and should not be left alone to do this work.

3) If there were any possibility that you could locally or statewide be more involved in monitoring and influencing how batterer programs are designed, I would encourage some efforts in that area. Again, I think many of us don't realize that our foremothers who started batterer programs over 25 years ago always intended that they be closely linked to shelters or women's advocates. Why have we given that up to the state? We started those programs in part because we understood that we could not keep sheltering and patching up survivors, and that we had to do something about those who harmed them. But we have given to the state our commitment to the safety of battered women by allowing them alone to check if these programs are holding batterers accountable. There is no one better than us to keep watch on these programs.

4) Youth organizing that is occurring particularly in communities of color is very exciting. And even in those towns that do not have vibrant ethnic community, there is still some work in schools and after-school programs with teen violence prevention programs. Unfortunately, many youth violence

programs are focused on peer-to-peer violence and not intimate partner or dating violence. Most youth violence prevention programs have young boys involved in peer counseling, mentoring and outreach. The same way we look for enclaves of good men, we have these youth organizing projects where there are good young boys we can help grow into good men. And these are also sites where young men and women may be working together. Again, these efforts need stronger gender violence components and monitoring by domestic violence advocates.

5) The area of restorative justice has been controversial in the domestic violence field. Many activists refer to it as “soft justice” in part because it seems not to take a strong position on offender accountability. Particularly with domestic violence, we rightfully fear the slippery slope of coercing survivors to participate in face-to-face interventions with batterers without proper precautions. In my opinion there is much to offer with RJ but there has been such a lock-down from longtime feminist advocates against this strategy that we have had no good opportunities to study its pros and cons.

I suggest RJ here as one way to engage men as interveners, community supporters, advocates, facilitators, sponsors, and of course as those who have caused harm against their partners. But to me it is another example of the ways our conventional approaches to domestic violence and men do not allow us to see possibilities, much less test them out. And if we don't engage batterers in the change process beyond their court-mandated batterer treatment, how can we expect them or all of us who live in community with them to expect long-lasting commitments to non-violence? We must expect men who batter to do more than just stop abusing their partners; we must expect them to be good, productive men in our community. And RJ might offer that.

6) I believe that it is women of color and queer activists who are at the cutting edge of work to end violence in intimate relationships in the U.S. And it is because we have lived firsthand the terrible consequences of a regressive and punitive government that continues to criminalize many legal and human right every person – “official” citizen or not – deserves in this country. And with regard particularly to domestic violence, we have only ourselves to blame for this predicament. We actively pursued a criminal justice agenda, we situated our best success for legitimacy and stable funding in the U.S. Department of Justice, and we keep training judges and the police in the dynamics we first proposed 30 years ago that we all know has evolved into much more complexity.

I hope we understand more today about the fact that not all battering is alike and not all victims are heterosexual White females. And it is in communities of color and queer communities that these complexities can and should be raised. When I did AIDS work in the 1990s, I told gay men that because gay identity so threatens the hypermasculinity of straight men the best hope to end homophobia against gay men was for them to fight for women's rights. And now I say, our best hope to end intimate violence is to support our LGBT queer communities, and particularly queer communities of color where trans men can be mobilized as allies.

In closing, we live in a highly entrenched sexist, racist, gendered, classist, agist and in so many ways oppressive society. However I do this work, and hopefully so do each and every one of you because you have hope. You have to believe that a world without violence and hate must be built by men and women, in the rich diversity of what it means to be male and female today.

We first posed our belief in the liberation of women because we thought conventional sex and gender roles were inherently oppressive. But in so many ways we keep replicating those very roles we have supposedly worked to reject. Not all men are born to be violent, and not all will be violent. And even those who are, are still whole men with aspects that are still kind, generous, and sometimes even able to care about someone or something other than themselves.

We cannot expect more for women than we do for men. Women's freedom will come when we can hold men accountable for their behavior, and that can only happen if we engage men in that project with the very best teachers, thinkers, organizers and advocates they can have – and that's us.



So we are at a fork in the road. Which direction will you take?

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Among her many awards, Kalei is the recipient of the University of Hawai'i Board of Regents Excellence in Teaching Award, National Association of Social Workers, Hawai'i Chapter, Social Worker of the Year in Training and Education, W.E.B. Du Bois Research Fellowship from the National Institute of Justice, and H. F. Guggenheim Research Fellowship. Her current research includes design and evaluation of Native Hawaiian cultural interventions to address domestic violence with Native Hawaiian batterers and battered women, women of color perspectives on the American violence against women movement, and community-based alternatives to the criminal-legal system that address violence against women and children.

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<sup>i</sup> Nan Stoop, Executive Director of the Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence

<sup>ii</sup> A reference to concepts covered by Paul Kivel during his conference plenary session.

## THE POWER CHART

| More Powerful      | Less Powerful                                 |
|--------------------|---|
| adults             | young people/seniors                          |
| men                | women   |
| rich               | working and middle class                      |
| white people       | people of color                               |
| heterosexuals      | lesbians, gays, bisexuals<br>and transgenders |
| bosses             | workers                                       |
| Christians         | Muslims, Jews, Buddhists                      |
| able-bodied people | people with disabilities                      |
| formally educated  | non-formally educated                         |
| citizens           | immigrants                                    |
| people in U.S.A.   | the rest of the world                         |

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<sup>iii</sup> A reference to the opening remarks to the conference by Nan Stoops.