

FORUM

Men can cut down violence by showing women respect

AN insidious disrespect toward women — evident in the Don Imus episode, often in sports and our culture more broadly — threatens lives.

Men can take responsibility, individually and collectively. Certain trends are positive: more men sharing in child-rearing; greater workplace equality; rising educational attainment of women. Yet crosscurrents — popular media, strip clubs and stereotypes — persist.



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Many men still define masculinity through objectification of and power over women. Sports can incubate this, from the ridicule of men who, in the words of Bill Parcells, play like a "she," to homophobic taunting.

There are exceptions, such as former football players Joe Ehrmann and Byron Hurt encouraging young men to respect women. But as USA Today's Ian O'Connor says, "Male athletes are taught early that women are playthings, trophies."

Philadelphia pitcher Brett Myers publicly attacked his wife. This baseball season has already seen Arizona, Seattle, and Tampa players arrested on similar charges. Jeff Benedict has written of what he calls "the NBA's culture of rape, violence, and crime" and "criminals who play in the NFL."

It would be unfair to impugn entire professions due to bad actors. Yet bad behavior is typically overlooked if athletes produce.

Respecting women should be a prominent cause that "manly" celebrities and sports media embrace, where good guys confront offending colleagues. Instead, there's often silence, or worse. The Rutgers women Imus insulted were athletes. Implied was that successful women must be impure and unfeminine. Women in business and politics are familiar with this double standard.

Domestic violence is one consequence of corrosive disrespect toward women. Like sexual assault, domestic abuse involves a warped desire for control.

There are some 20,000 cases in Connecticut each year that result in arrest. Countless others go undetected. In the New Haven area, several



appalling incidents recently made headlines. A Hamden woman was brutally killed by her ex-boyfriend. In West Haven, a man stabbed his girlfriend and another his pregnant wife. A Cheshire man murdered his ex-wife and stepdaughter, in front of their two other children.

Domestic violence, as well as a tendency to overlook it, is disturbingly common and includes male victims.

Nationally, over 2 million women are assaulted yearly by partners; one of three women eventually suffers such violence. Family members, co-workers and taxpayers are indirectly affected. Beyond painful human costs, consider policing and fos-

ter-care expenses and lost work hours. Many children learn and repeat painful behaviors.

The great majority of physical abusers are men. Emotional abuse, verbal threats, isolation from friends or family and monopolizing family finances are all harmful. Physical violence most gravely endangers a partner or child. Victims can develop a safety plan in a confidential setting, assured freedom to choose a course, including shelter services.

Jackie Robinson's heroic legacy makes sports a force for progress. The Rutgers women are in that tradition. More athletes and broadcasters can contribute. Coaches Versus Cancer and professional leagues' promotion of causes like reading offer models. Joe Torre's Safe at Home Foundation raises awareness. But, a broader effort is needed. Many more can be examples, showing that real men treat women and children with respect.

Men are recognizing their role in preventing domestic violence. Male judges, police and parole officers can help offenders understand that it is always wrong. Teachers, coaches and clergy can educate young men to defuse anger and mediate controlling impulses. Campuses and Web sites such as www.menstoppingviolence.org and www.acalltomen.com offer resources. Men Can Stop Rape's "strength campaign" challenges attitudes that support gender-based violence.

My wife would say I'm a pretty conventional guy who prefers watching a game to helping with housework. I'm no saint. But as a husband and as the father of a daughter, I'm getting more attuned to the hazards of inequality between the sexes.

This is not a women's issue. Like racism, it's societal. We should be concerned about a cultural atmosphere that seeds abuse. Let's voice that concern. Our brothers and sisters, and our sons and daughters, are listening.

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