



### #EngagingMenAndBoys

***Men won't sit back and be silent in the movement to end gender-based violence, domestic violence and abuse. Maitri is engaging men and boys through this social media campaign so that together we can raise awareness and work toward prevention.***

Thank you, Ron Bialkowski, for joining this Maitri campaign. Here is a message from Ron:

I think that the problem of domestic violence can be looked at through the prism of honor to promote understanding and change. In patriarchal societies, honor connotes reputation and reflects patriarchal power structures; a woman's honor is judged by her fidelity and a man's honor is defined by reputation. This notion has often been used to excuse domestic violence in ways ranging from codes of silence to physical abuse and honor killings. In all these cases, honor is a cloak for violence and power. In my own cultural tradition, Europeans sought to overlook these practices within the flowery rhetoric of chivalry. How we talk about domestic violence has to be more than just about ideology, society, and state policies (but we should always start here); it should also be about the individual story that we tell ourselves.

We need to begin disassembling our notion of honor. I think that such an exercise can apply to anyone anywhere on the gender spectrum, but I will think as someone raised in terms of masculinity. The first story that men tell themselves about their honor reflects their social position. We associate honor with reputation in the community and perceive those more successful to be more honorable even if they act just as we do. Now, if public honor promotes good behavior, then it does immense good. However, such an understanding of honor applies to only public behavior and would not necessarily deter violence in the privacy of the home. In fact, a sense of self-importance and power associated with public honor could easily act as a permissive effect for cruel action in the home. A powerful man can rationalize violence and the abuse as keeping "the house in order" to defend his honor. We cannot count on public perception to end domestic violence. Although it can deter such behaviors and public shaming can have even a greater effect, the tendency of people to "mind their own business" means that intervention is likely to be more effective.

The other notion of honor that bears on violence is a code of conduct. In Western tradition, this notion dictates a public code of behavior between individuals and sexes. Some examples of this idea of honor would be "my word is my bond" or keeping another person's secrets. The strongest and most unambiguous expression of such honor would be the wedding vow or a religious oath; in both cases, an individual commits to another person or an institution. However, these promises are not always easy to keep; oaths are taken in the passion of love and don't account for how inconsistent human beings are. The history of domestic violence in Western culture clearly demonstrates that men who profess to cherish and love either don't give much thought to how they are to cherish and love or were speaking disingenuously. It tells us that the truth of an oath hinges on character.

So what form honor is left? Self-honor — a personal code for ourselves by which we ascertain our moral failings. It's what we would ask of ourselves in any situation irrespective of the person. For example, if you are a husband— how should you love or speak to your spouse? Most importantly, what does it mean to love someone as an ethical act before you are in love? These questions sound abstract, but they are

important ones to ask men and young boys. If you don't have a standard for behavior and love before you are with someone, then any oath is ultimately worthless. A reflected and developed notion of personal responsibility can act as an extra conscience—the voice that tells one to “pause and reflect” or “stay angry.” Since masculinity is already horribly bound up in images of strength, then we should tap into that inclination and redefine strength. Men must learn to associate self-control with strength. If they can believe that, then they can begin to learn that listening, empathy, and self-sacrifice are also acts of strength.

Domestic violence is most often an act by men to exercise power, establish dominance, and salvage their own sense of powerlessness or poor self-worth. Helping men realize that their power is reflected in their private actions rather than in their public actions could halt the cognitive leaps that ultimately help them rationalize spousal abuse. The final message should be clear; to lose control of oneself is moral failure. Domestic violence is the loss of control, the loss of the self, and the failure of society. We must do everything as a society to fight domestic violence, but we must teach young men that the failure to control and confront our emotions is a failure as well. An honorable man is one who tends to his emotions so that he may open his heart to others.

About the participant: Dr. Ron Bialkowski teaches Psychology and US History at the Quarry Lane School in Dublin, CA. Besides history, his interests include politics, psychology, behavioral economics, graphic novels, jokes that make you stand-up and walk away, and running (from his cat):