



Institute for International Women's Rights- Manitoba
Conversation Café 1: "Sexual Violence: Power and Silence"

December 9, 2014

Fort Rouge Leisure Centre

IIWR-MB organized and hosted their first in a series of conversation cafés entitled "Sexual Violence: Power and Silence" on Tuesday, December 9th at Fort Rouge Leisure Centre. There was a great response to this event, with approximately 20 people in attendance, from a diverse range of ages, cultures and professional backgrounds. The event followed the conversation café format:

1. Welcome and introduction to conversation café format
2. Participant introductions
3. Ground rules
4. Introduction of 3 questions and paired listening (10 minutes)
5. Group conversation
6. Close

3 questions:

1. **Why is having a conversation around this issue important to you?**
2. **What are the underlying issues that need to be addressed regarding sexual harassment/ violence against women and the pressure NOT to speak up?**
3. **Where do we go from here? What steps can we take to move towards positive change?**

Summary of group conversation:

- Need for a safe place to talk about these issues and having mature conversation
- What is the role of religion and is it used for dominance over women?
- The "vision" for women is that they must be "pretty", playing into gender stereotypes
- Being consistent in our messaging to youth, incorporating these issues into our conversations with them, i.e. how to be proud of yourself.
- Role of social media and boundaries: Increased sexuality in music and T.V.
- How do we use the lack of boundaries to our advantage?
- Not so much about men's need to feel "power" over women that leads to rape or sexual harassment, but their sense of "entitlement". Believing that they deserve it- relation to power.

- There is still victim blaming/ shaming
- Children are still left out of the conversation about sex. We must empower our youth with knowledge, especially girls
- Importance of understanding and defining boundaries
- Give people the skills to speak up
- We must have specific conversations around these issues with youth, women and ESPECIALLY among men
- Education/ awareness needs to start young
- Increased pairing of sex and violence, esp. in TV shows and movies
- Need to teach compassion
- Fear of police and people in charge of taking reports
- Can't let the conversation/ momentum die or fizzle out.

Responses to 3 questions from paired conversation:

1. Why is having a conversation around this issue important to you?

- Study of women's rights
- Dialogue between men and women
- I was assaulted last night
- Understand how to approach the issue with people around work with daughter—in-law (indigenous), to show support without threatening
- How to protect my granddaughters
- Situation isn't getting better
- Marginalisation
- Factors that affect someone, build up and become insurmountable
- Pervasiveness
- Community work- women need to talk about safety
- Have personally known too many women that have experienced sexual violence
- Personally assaulted 20 years ago but still seeing the issues- lack of reporting, not feeling the need to report, and the fear of judgement
- Education, power, identify it as sexual violence
- Include men, different perspective, collaborative solutions

- Experiencing rape culture on campus, started living away from home, being out at night, exposure to more media and awareness
- Sharing common experiences. Start with a topic that affects all of us. How are we raising our children? Power imbalances comes out in physical ways. This is the place to start, voices need to be heard. Evolve into more conversation.
- As a female entering the workforce, the possibility of being sexually harassed, need to know how to deal with it. Also broader, make sure that others do not suffer.
- Whichever society, all pervasive in all ages. Speak about it. Impact of globalization and how media is talking about it. Movement is happening.
- So that the silence doesn't continue. Safety in numbers. Share experiences is a start.
- There are young girls who aren't understanding what it is. Generations of not conversing about it.
- We have to start getting comfortable with talking about it with boys and girls. We have to break the barriers and make teenage boys and girls aware about it.

2. What are the underlying issues that need to be addressed regarding sexual harassment/ violence against women and the pressure NOT to speak up?

- Fear
- Denial
- Women not understanding that it was assault/ the severity of the situation
- Power
- Media: Increased sexualisation
- Normalisation
- Violence is so pervasive that we're desensitized
- Education: school and university
- Impact of social media
- Police process, need shift in culture (ensuring adequate representation, diversity)
- Needs to echo through counseling, social work, judicial system
- Systemic inequality- politics (need representation)
- Power is the wrong word, it's "entitlement" to the physical use of your body. The patriarchal culture increases the entitlement. And this increases with racial and economic differences.

It's more external than internal. The external pressures are less now, but we haven't forgotten them.

- Education, systematic institutions, other cultures don't want to come forward, poverty
- Not having the conversation, generations of silence, men always in power, men seen to have the power, learned behavior, roles are hierarchical.
- Normalised- "what's the big deal?"
- Consent- earlier. Imagine power imbalance. Judicial process. Potentially re-traumatized. Feeling shame.
- Gender roles are ingrained, women take the blame and suppress anger.
- Victim blaming to be left out. Education of more boys and empowerment of women.
- Socialisation from birth. Women second to men. Women don't and "shouldn't" speak up. Educated to be good wives, not good leaders.
- Need to speak to families, not just academics, part of conversations with social culture. Literacy and education.
- Fear- many forms, not believed, shame, consequences, no consequences
- Socialisation. Ingrained sexual harassment everyday, in music and media. It exists everywhere, video games.
- Women experience violence, they want to protect themselves from society. Men need to start this conversation with men. Men need to challenge abusive men.

3. Where do we go from here? What steps can we take to move towards positive change?

- Need conversation- get men involved
- It is a PERSON's issue.
- Need training for police
- Education of men and boys: break down of masculine stereotypes that empower entitlement
- Deconstruction of masculinity and femininity
- Policy changes, increased courage
- Conversation with everyone involved.
- Address the systems

- Breakdown of the family experience, Residential school system is the lost generation, nearly caused a genocide, need support of regaining culture.
- Acknowledge how society failed the people. Created the problems and dismantled the families. We have to put them back together again and admit that it was genocide.
- Change happens slowly, start with youth
- Keep talking, grow the conversation. Do not be afraid to speak up. By being a bystander, you're agreeing with it.
- Have the conversation with the people around us. Create safer spaces. Aim for the end of rape culture.
- Coming together.
- Don't know the answer. But need dramatic change. Seem unsuccessful at changing situations around sexual violence.
- Conversation and calling it out. When you see it, point it out and impact. "Rapist" often closest person to you.
- Community development/ community education, try to change attitudes. Socialisation process needs to change. Gender issues, speak up and stand by victim as community and individuals. Open issues up.
- Conversation cafes, everyone gathering, not parenting, girls self defense
- We need to start getting out of our comfort zone. Challenging systems and our values. It's happening but it needs to be stronger, more open.