

Jackson Katz: Sexist comments, sexist jokes, you know, dismissive comments about girls and women in groups of men, where there are no women present. If you're a man or a young man, and you don't say something or make it clear to the men in your group, that that's not okay with you, that you don't accept that, the, even the attitudes that lead to potentially, lead to abusive behaviors, then in a sense, again, your silence is complicity.

Sam Fuqua: That's Jackson Katz, and this is Well, That Went Sideways! A podcast that serves as a resource to help people have healthy, respectful communication. We present ideas, tools, and techniques to help you transform conflict in relationships of all kinds. On this episode, a conversation with Jackson Katz. He's an educator, an author, and a filmmaker. Much of his work focuses on the role of men in preventing gender violence.

I'm Sam Fuqua, co-host of the program with Alexis Miles. Hi Alexis.

Alexis Miles: Hi Sam.

Sam Fuqua: And we're so pleased to be spending some time on this episode with Jackson Katz. Hi.

Jackson Katz: Hi. It's nice to be with you both.

Sam Fuqua: Tell us briefly Jackson, to start, about your own background and how you came to do this work.

Jackson Katz: I've been an activist on issues of, uh, gender equality and gender violence prevention since I was a university student a long time ago, um, at, at the University of Massachusetts. And I often say my hair is a lot shorter, um, and my clothes are better and I have more books, um, than I did when I was a young guy. But, the start, the stuff that I started doing as a, you know, an 18-, 19-, 20-year-old, in terms of standing up and speaking out about men's violence against women and, and the need for men to be engaged in that conversation, as well as white people to challenge racism, and heterosexual people to challenge heterosexism, all that stuff started, for me, when I was a university student back in the day. And I've continued on as a, as an activist at, you know, as a writer and as a, you know, I've, I've, I've done a whole bunch of things, but it's the same essential, uh, life course started really, uh, in that, in that period.

And by the way, people often ask, and I'm not saying you're asking this, but people often ask, men who do work against, men's violence against women, you know, what happened in your life or, or is there some sort of subtext or backstory? Why would a man be so passionate about this subject? And, and often there's a, an implication, um, embedded in the question that is, there must be a person in his life, a woman in his life. He must have grown up in a home where there was domestic violence or had a woman close to him who had sexual assault, you know, who experienced some kind of sexual assault or something. Why else would a man be passionate? And my response to that, again, this goes back years in my work, 'cause I've been doing this work for, you know, 35 plus years. My response to that is often, think about it like this, if all it took for men to get involved in speaking out about men's violence against women was having a woman close to them who had been affected by this issue, then we would have not just millions, but billions of men speaking out because, literally billions of men, if we're talking about globally and in this society, hundreds of millions of men or tens of millions, if you wanna be conservative in your estimate.

Just so many men have women in their lives who have experienced sexual violence, domestic violence, sexual harassment, who, who can't even walk outside or walk to the subway without getting cat called on the streets. I mean, so many men have women in their lives who've had that experience, and yet there have been very few men, relatively speaking, I have to say, there have been some, but relatively few men who have distinguished themselves in any significant way as leaders and as, as sort of pub, you know, in, in any public way. I mean, there's plenty of men who have supported women privately, who support women in their lives, in their, in their families, in their friendship circles. And I, and I appreciate that. But in terms of men who have actually been part of the, the, the sort of public struggle, and they're speaking out and organizing, and, and in whatever ways, personally and institutionally, there have been very few men who have been willing to do that. And a big part of my life's work is about trying to counteract that.

Sam Fuqua: In my own experience, men, or at least the men I hang out with, and myself, don't talk about this issue other than perhaps in the abstract, as it relates to public policy or current events. And I think sometimes for me, uh, it may be a tendency to avoid uncomfortable topics. But is there something more specific to this issue that prevents men from talking about it?

Jackson Katz: That's a great question. Um, there's a, there's a lot of things. I think one of them is that a lot of men are uncomfortable with the subject. I think it's very personal. It gets close to home because we can no longer pretend if, if a man is conscious and really willing to be introspective and willing to look critically at these issues, he has to look inward as well and think about the ways in which he's participated in perpetuating a culture that produces enormous amounts of sexual violence, domestic violence, and men's acting out because individual men, while they themselves might not have committed acts of abuse towards girls or women, although some of them have, but those who haven't, they, many of us participate in perpetuating the attitudes and beliefs that contribute to some men's perpetration.

And I think the introspection that's required is threatening to a lot of men, whether they're conscious of it or unconscious of it, it's much easier to just not think about it or blame the victim or say, it's those men, those guys have a problem. I'm a good guy. I don't rape women. I don't assault women. It's not my issue. And a lot of men kind of individualize it in that way and pathologize the perpetrators in a way that, uh, deflects introspection, which is again, um, often awkward and uncomfortable. And by the way, I, I have to say this is true of, of men, of every ethnicity, race, uh, socioeconomic class, it's across the board. Men have a tendency to not want to go there in terms of thinking through and, um, and, and addressing these issues in an upfront way.

Alexis Miles: So I'm, I'm interested in what you just said, because I, I've heard you talk about dominant groups not seeing themselves as groups, and so not being able to do that kind of analysis, that kind of power dynamic that comes with being part of the group. So, can you say more about, uh, power dynamics and violence against girls and women?

Jackson Katz: Sure. I mean, one of the, one of the characteristics, one of the key characteristics of power and privilege is the ability to go unexamined or lacking critical introspection. That's just one of the ways power functions. You, you be, I mean, for example, you come to think if you're a member of a dominant group, you come to think that the way that you, you know, move through the world is just normal, "normal". And, um, and so for example, when it comes to, um, race, a lot of white people don't even think that they have a race. I mean, some of this is changing because some of the, the movements for racial justice and such are pushing white people and have been for decades now. But I mean, it's accelerated, um, recently, but have been pushing white people to think about, wait a second, there is such a thing as whiteness, and there is such a thing as a privilege that you occupy.

If, if you just call yourself a person and, and claim that you just have some universal, you know, human subjectivity and people of color are the ones who have a race and who have, you know, or race means people of color, or if you're a man and you think, you know, I'm just a person I'm not, I'm not a man or a woman. I'm just a person. Um, that's the, one of the ways that power then insulates itself from introspection. And so part of the challenge, I think in this work, Alexis, and for me, and for a lot of other people and people who occupy, assist, uh, uh, positions of, of, of, of advantage or social privilege, what have you, not just men, is, is to make visible what has been rendered invisible. And, and I, I mean, I talk a lot in my work and I've written a lot about language and how language itself, the very way that we think, write, and talk about, for example, gender violence is itself part of the problem. And I'll, I'll give you some examples and this, because this shows you literally at the level of, you know, linguistic, um, practice and sentence structure, how we don't talk about what's really, uh, you know, what's really going on and how power is not, um, made visible. So we often use passive language when we talk about, um, gender violence.

So you'll hear people ask questions like, how many women were raped on college campuses last year, rather than how many men raped women. Or you'll hear people say things like how many, you know, girls in that school district were sexually harassed, rather than how many boys sexually harassed girls, or how many girls sexually harassed girls. Or you'll hear people say things like how many teenage girls in the state of Colorado got pregnant last year, rather than how many men and boys impregnated girls. Um, even the term violence against women is problematic and, and I don't use it without critically examining it because violence against women is a passive phrase. There's no active agent in the sentence. Violence against women is a bad thing that happens to women, but nobody's doing it to them. They're just experiencing it, kind of like the weather. But if you insert the active agent, men, you have a new phrase, men's violence against women. It doesn't roll off the tongue as easily, but it's more accurate. It's more honest. And, and I have to say how, however accurate the phrase men's violence against women it might be, and it is, and by the way, I know that there's women's violence against women. There's mother to daughter child abuse, there's, you know, lesbian battering, there's female to female, peer to peer harassment, abuse and violence, and none of is okay.

But the vast majority of violence in the world is done, against women is done by men, and the overwhelming majority of sexual violence against women in the world is done by men, but you wouldn't know that from the phrase, violence against women. Anyhow, the problem with the phrase with, with, with saying men's violence against women is that some men get extraordinarily defensive and sometimes hostile in the face of that level of honest language. And so a lot of women, including in the sexual assault and domestic violence field over the past, you know, couple of generations have learned, maybe it's not useful to use that level of accountable direct language because we need to work with men, we need men as allies, we need to work with law enforcement, we need to work with, you know, people in our intimate lives, as well as in our workplaces - men. And we don't wanna be always the one who's calling out men. Who's always making it about gender. Who's always, you know, pushing those buttons. And as a result, there's a lot of dancing around the, the, you know, the, the edges of the issue and not coming right at it.

And by the way, I'm not criticizing. Certainly as a man, I am not gonna criticize women, especially women in the domestic and sexual violence movements, for their accommodation to this reality. But I do think one of the roles that men can play, and I know that men can and should be playing this role much more than we are, is that if we have men saying this, more men, and normalizing men saying the kind of things that I'm

saying, it'll take the pressure off of those women that somehow what they're saying is anti-male, which is I think the most ridiculous thing, because, you know...

By the way, there's all kinds of violence in our society. Most of it is connected to each other. And in other words, sexual assault and domestic violence are also connected in both direct and indirect ways to virtually every other form of violence, whether it's mass shootings, gang violence, um, domestic terrorism, they're all connected. And sophisticated people make those connections. And by the way, men are the primary victims of most forms of violence outside of sexual and domestic violence. Men are the primary victims of murder, attempted murder, assault, aggravated assault, gay bashing, bullying. But men are also the primary perpetrators of all those crimes. And so, men have a direct self-interest in addition to concern and care about women, men have a direct self-interest if they care about themselves, if they care about other men in thinking critically about why is all this happening, and how is it all connected, and what role can men play in a constructive sense in preventing it or changing the cultural norms that are producing these predictable outcomes. And instead of being defensive, when you hear women in particular, women speaking out about this, we should join with these women because especially the women in the domestic and sexual violence movements have been for decades pointing us in a direction, those of us who are men, and not everybody, including beyond the binary, are pointing us in a direction of healthier relationships, healthier social structures and healthier democracy. And, and, and everybody benefits from that.

Alexis Miles: Jackson, you talked about changing norms. So, what are some concrete ways we can go about changing norms?

Jackson Katz: I think the reason why we have so much violence in this society is because so many boys and men from the earliest ages are socialized into thinking about manhood in certain ways, and it's rewarded if they engage in those behaviors and it's punished if they don't. I mean, I know that it's not just about individual behavior, there's also social and economic and political structures and hierarchies that are reinforced by the current social, uh, uh, socialization practices. So I don't want to separate socialization of boys and young men from the larger systemic, you know, political and economic institutional hierarchies that also have to be broken down. If we, if we truly believe in democracy and fairness, we have to break, break down illegitimate hierarchy. But when we take, we say changing cultural norms and social norms, I mean, I, I, I, a specific example around these matters would be men who speak up on these issues. Men who work towards gender equality in the workplace, on the streets, in the, you know, in the, in the community and certainly around violence. That's a leadership act. It's an act of strength. It's an act of integrity rather than, oh, he's soft or he's being politically correct, or he's a virtue signaler, a white Knight, or he doesn't really believe this. He's just doing it to get some kind of, you know, favor with the ladies or all the kind of cliches you'll hear that, that some men, and sometimes women and others, will use to try to, you know, negate men's efforts and, and sort of ridicule in some ways, men's efforts towards this.

If it was understood that the men who are standing with women are actually fulfilling the, the, the, the highest goals of our society and our democracy and basic questions of human rights and justice and fairness, and respected for that, that would be enormous. And it, the change would happen very quickly that we, we'd see radical diminution of violence, radical diminution of violence, because, because most men, by the way, are not violent. Although most men participate in perpetuating the systems that, that reproduce violence. Um, so if, if more men would, would just have the courage and the strength and get support for doing what I'm saying, I think we would very quickly see radical, uh, diminution of violence. By the way, most men who commit violence are not pathological individuals. Some are, but most are otherwise normal, otherwise average guys, um, who in, are in their communities, in their workplaces.

I mean, look at, look at the scandal after scandal that we see in, for example, high profile men who are being called out for and now held accountable for, in some cases, behave, abusive behavior men, like, you know, the governor of New York who's under, in deep, is in deep trouble, politically, and every other way for behavior, he was elected three times by the people of the state of New York. This isn't some, you know, sort of marginal figure living, living in a, you know, in a hut, you know, in the, out in the woods. This is true over and over again. The point is the typical perpetrator is not of, of any kind of sexual harassment, sexual violence, domestic violence, is not a sick, twisted individual. He's in, in some ways you could say he's hyper normal, he's actually, he's taken some of the, the fundamental tenets of masculinity, "masculinity," or you know, traditional ideas about masculinity and exaggerated them in his behavior. And, and again, that makes a lot of people uncomfortable, because I think a lot of people would be much more comforted with the idea that the perpetrators of these abuses and these crimes is somehow a monster, because if he's a monster, then it doesn't require introspection on, on our part.

Sam Fuqua: Yeah, on that point about leadership, uh, one of the ways you have worked to address violent masculinity is through a model, uh, you call Mentors in Violence Prevention or MVP, and that acronym of course, is commonly associated with sports. The MVP is the most valuable player. It's my understanding that you originally targeted this program, Mentors in Violence Prevention, at male student athletes. Why that population?

Jackson Katz: Well back in the early nineties, when I started the MVP, Mentors in Violence Prevention program at the Center for the Study of Sport and Society at Northeastern University in Boston, my thinking was we need to figure out how to get more men doing what I've been saying, which is speaking out about sexual harassment, sexual assault, domestic violence. We need more heterosexual people, especially men, speaking out about heterosexism. Um, how are we gonna do that? And one way I thought was, okay, let's leverage the status of athletes, and male athletes initially, um, at the, at the, at the college level. 'Cause my thinking was, if we get guys who already have status within their own peer culture, but also in the broader peer culture on campus and, and beyond, if we get men who already have status to speak out, it'll make it easier for other men and young men who are incredibly self-conscious about speaking up and doing something that make, might make their friends think that they're "less than a real man" of some sort. And so, athletics became for me the obvious, you know, angle and I, I was myself, a, a really good football player and, and multi-sport athlete as a young guy, and I, I knew that I had doors open to me around this subject matter because of my personal experience in athletics and in football in particular. And I knew that people wanted to hear what I had to say because of that.

And so I thought, why not create a program that makes this more systematic and, and, and get men in the athletic subculture, speaking out. And by the way, this is, there's a long history of the 20th century, now in the 21st century, of athletes using their platform, men, women, people of color, gay, straight, to use their platform of influence. Look at, look at, look at, look at the, the renaissance of activism on the part of, uh, athletes around racial justice, just in the past, you know, several years. Um, and I, I was aware of this, like this whole history. This is back in the early nineties. I was aware of this history way, decades before Black Lives Matter or Me Too, or anything like that. But there, there was a history. Muhammad Ali, I mean, Billy Jean King, you can just name all these great athletes who were iconic figures, who used their platform in a positive way that changed the conversation. And I knew all of this. Anyways, I wanted to do that around sexual assault and domestic violence with men, not by the way, because there was a problem in athletics of male athletes assaulting women, although there was such a problem back in the nineties and before, and there is today, it was because of the positive influence that athletes, and male student athletes in particular

in this case, could play in this larger struggle. So it was always, it was always a, an intentional strategy for larger sort of cultural change using athletics as a stepping off point.

And, and by the way, in the second year of the MVP program, we included women and, and, and, you know, we started integrating, I mean, it was always racially integrated. My trainings and, and the populations that we worked with were always racially integrated. Um, but then we became gender integrated as well, um, in the mid nineties, and, and to this day. Although I think it's still important to distinguish every, like for example, everybody has a role to play in ending sexual violence and domestic violence, but men have a special role to play way more so than women. It's like saying, you know, with race, racism, everybody has a role to play. People of color have been at the forefront of, of, you know, pushing for anti-racist sort of policy changes and cultural changes. But white people have an incredibly important role to play, to say the least, because white people are the ones who are, uh, you know, still in control of most cultural, political, and economic institutions that help to perpetuate racism. So white people have an incredibly important role to play in challenging racism, just as men do in challenging sexism. And I don't wanna equate the two. Men and women, I don't think men and women have the same responsibility. I think men have a greater responsibility to prevent men's violence against women.

But back to your original point, the sports culture was an, I think an important launching pad for a broader cultural conversation and change that had to happen. Um, and we moved from the sports culture into the military. You know, my program became the first system-wide program in the United States military. It started out in the Marine Corps and then we moved to all the other services. And that was also intentional from my point of view, um, because the sports culture and the military both play an incredibly important role in shaping gender norms. And, um, and I thought if we get men who have established credentials in the sort of gender culture as men, if you will, however you wanna define that, um, to, to be able to be strong enough and confident enough to, to speak out on these matters and to make the changes that they have to make, it would have much bigger impact than just in the insular military subculture or athletic subculture. And last thing, I don't think that, I mean, I'm not naive about this, this we're talking about enormous shifts that have to happen over decades and it's not without its, um, complications, both ideologically and practically, and I, I understand that. And anybody who's involved in, you know, serious systemic social change work has to know that we're talking about, you know, a lifelong and many lifetimes of, of work because, because the, the, the systems that we're trying to, you know, make better, if you will, have deep, deep cultural, political, and economic roots.

Sam Fuqua: One of the things we like to do on this program is give listeners some insight into the practical workings of some of these approaches. Can you give folks some insight into what happens during, uh, Mentors in Violence Prevention training or workshop?

Jackson Katz: Well, one thing that, um, MVP introduced to the domestic and sexual violence fields, um, was the, uh, the bystander approach. Now, some people hear it and think about the term bystander intervention, which I don't, I don't particularly like the term bystander intervention, but we, we, we inaugurated the bystander approach in the field. And the bystander approach is a way to think about peer cultures and, and the role that peer cultures play in either perpetuating abusive behavior or challenging or interrupting it. And what, what it does is it, it moves beyond the perpetrator-victim binary. Instead, in other words, instead of focusing on the person doing the abusive behavior, whether it's sexual violence or assault or harassment or domestic, um, and the person experiencing it, the target or the victim of that abuse, um, we focus on everybody around the person doing the abusive behavior and everybody around the person experiencing it.

And the goal of the, of bystander, you know, approach or training, especially with men and young men, is to make it clear to men and young men that if they don't challenge and interrupt other men and young men around them who are acting out in sexist and you know, and ways towards women and girls, if they just either look ahead, look, look, put their head down or they pretend they didn't hear what they just heard, or they say it's none of my business, I'm not gonna get involved, in a sense, their silence in the face of other men's abusive behavior is a form of consent and complicity in that behavior. And that does not just mean when they see an act of rape or sexual assault or domestic violence happening in front of them, because that doesn't happen very often, right in front of them. It, it often takes place in private. But, it's also sexist comments, sexist jokes, you know, dismissive comments about girls and women in groups of men where there are no women present. If you're a man or a young man, and you don't say something or make it clear to the men in your group that that's not okay with you, that you don't accept that, even the attitudes that lead to, potentially lead to abusive behaviors, then in a sense, again, your silence is complicity again, directly analogous to racism.

If you're a white person, for example, hanging out with a group of white people, no people of color present, but one or two of those white people start making, uh, racist comments about people of color. If you don't make it clear that that's not okay with you as a white person, then, in a sense, your failure to say something or to make it clear that you're not okay with that helps to perpetuate, uh, the normalization of racism. And, and how can we say that, um, you know, attitudes don't influence actions that, that somehow what happens in pure cultures, even when it comes to the attitudes, not just the behaviors, that somehow that has no connection to real acts of racism in the real world or institutional practices that are racist. That's so, it's silly. It's so, it's so naive as to be almost silly. Well, I think that's true with sexism, and I know it's true.

And so in MVP sessions, in training sessions, whether it's with student athletes or regular students and, uh, men, women, uh, in high schools or in, in, uh, military units in, um, workplaces, we, we, we get really granular with what are the dynamics in various scenarios of peer cultures when you hear various things, when you see various things, what are the reasons why people do intervene and don't? What are some of the, you know, cost benefit analyses that men, for example, will use consciously or unconsciously to justify doing nothing or doing something? And as I, as we said at the beginning of this conversation, a lot of men remain silent and a lot of men figure out ways not to say something. And I think one of the reasons why is because saying something comes potentially with a cost, and sometimes that cost is awkward relationships or awkward moments, um, sometimes guys worry that their status in the peer culture will be affected.

If, if a man in a fraternity, for example, sees that another man in the fraternity who is more, has more status is acting in ways that this other guy thinks is, you know, wrong towards for, for example, towards young women, but if he knows that the other guy has more status and that if he challenges him in any way, if he says something, if he, if he makes clear that he's not okay with that behavior, then maybe his status in the, in the fraternity is gonna be affected. Maybe his, you know, aspirations for his own, you know, success in that peer culture is gonna be affected. I think a lot of men then say, you know what, it's not worth it. And they tell themselves stories. Well, it's not gonna matter anyway. He's not gonna listen to me. Um, maybe I'm over exaggerating what I've just seen. Maybe, maybe it's not that big a deal. He's really a good guy. Anyways, I mean, there's all kinds of stories that guys tell each other. That's true.

White people too, that allow themselves to absolve themselves of responsibility for acting. And by the way, I, I also wanna say in, in MVP trainings, in, in the work that I do, in the, in the teaching that I, you know, engage in, we don't tell people what to do. We don't say you need to do this in this situation, because it's

too contextual. Life is complicated and, and there's all kinds of relational complexities that we can't have any idea of. What we help people do is think through their ethical obligations to each other and to themselves. And, and, and, um, I'll, if you want, I can give you an example. Um, like a concrete example. I, I'll give you a workplace. This is a workplace scenario that we use a lot in, um, in professional workplaces. So, and, and this is for men. Again, women can also be bystanders. They could be friends and teammates and classmates and colleagues and members of peer cultures. People who aren't men or women are also themselves embedded in peer cultures. So I'm not suggesting that it's not everybody, doesn't have some role to play as a, an empowered or active bystander, but in this case, men.

So you're a guy and you go out for a couple drinks or a couple beers with a couple guys that you work with. After work you're at a bar and one of the guys makes a comment, an inappropriate sexual or sexualizing comment about a woman who's recently been hired in the office. And you're sitting there and he just made this comment, what do you do? And, and now what we do in the MVP training is very interactive. It's not a lecturer, you know, it's a dialogue, but we'll say, we'll say the trainers, the facilitators will say things like, so let's, let's, who do you think you have a, do you have, do you think you have a responsibility to the various parties in this situation? And let's go one by one. So for example, do you have responsibility to the woman? Uh, you may not even know her. She just started working. Do you have responsibility to her? And, and, and if so, why? And if not, why not? And we, we'll talk about, briefly about the potential negative impact on a woman of men in her workplace talking about her as a sexualized, you know, object rather than a, a, a person who's trying to be a professional and taken seriously in the workplace. We'll talk about that briefly as well. But anyways, do you have responsibility to her? And if not, why not?

And then, second question. Do you have responsibility to the guy who just made the comment? He's your friend. And maybe, maybe, you know that what he's saying is really inappropriate, and in fact it could get him in trouble if he, if he continues to talk like that, because you know that in the 21st century workplace is not okay. And it could be, you could be crossing lines already. And certainly it suggests that he might have some boundary issues and maybe this guy, you know, is gonna harm his own career. And he's your friend. Do you have responsibility to him to say something to him? To make it clear that wait a second guy, that's not you. You're my friend, but that's not, you can't be talking like that.

Third question. Do you have a responsibility to yourself? And what does it mean to have a responsibility to oneself? Cause I mean, and, and the way that we discuss this one is, a lot of men and people think of themselves as a person of integrity who speaks up when they see injustice or wrong or unfairness or harm. Well, good. That's a good aspiration. But now you're in a position where it's right in front of you. It's something, you know, something harmful is, you know, playing out, maybe not an assault, but it's certainly related to some injustice. What are you gonna do about it? And if you don't do something, in a sense, aren't you out of alignment with your own aspirations for who you are or want to be in the world, and how do you bring those in alignment? What do you need to do to, so that you can feel good about you, you know, walking the talk about who you are and want to be.

And then the final question that we ask, just, again, this is an ethical decision making framework to get people to think about this. Is, is, um, do you have responsibility to the group, to the, to the, to the, to the, to the workplace, to the, to the school, uh, you know, to the team, to the, to some larger entity? And, and, and one way of thinking about that is that when, when, when you're in, when you're part of a group and one person in that group treats another with disrespect, it's not the, the, the harm is not just done to the individual who's being treated with disrespect. Although that's the first harm and the most important, but also the group is being harmed because you're, you're hurting morale, you're hurting the, you know, this is contrary to the group's values, you know, that we treat each other with respect and dignity. And so when

you speak up, if you speak up or do something before, during or after the fact, you are actually acting on the best values of the group. You're not just in, an individual, you're now authorized, in a sense, to speak for the best values of the group. So when you're saying something to that person, hey, that's not how we talk about people in this group, that's not okay or that's not cool, you're actually, um, speaking for others and not just yourself.

And by the way, that is an act of leadership. That's why the bystander who speaks up is actually a leader. That's why all of this is about leadership, and leadership training to me is what bystander training really is about. Um, it's, it's and, and people can be leaders that formally and informally, they, they can have positions of high power, or they can be just in, a member of a peer culture and, you know, kids who don't see themselves in any way as leaders. But if you, if you're a 15-year-old boy, and you turn to your friend who just told a rape joke and say, hey dude, that's not funny, that's an act of leadership. And it has to be understood as such. And if we can frame it that way, especially for men and young men, that the guys who speak up and challenge other guys, sexism, are actually strong self-confident and acting as leaders rather than they're, you know, they're soft or they're, or they're politically correct virtue signalers, which is some of the discourse that happens among, um, some parts of the male culture. If we can flip that script and say, wait a second, that, that's BS. What, what, what really you're seeing here is men who have guts and strength and leadership qualities. Again, I think a lot of men can rise to that.

Alexis Miles: It sounds like what you're talking about is consciousness raising. You produced a movie called *The Bystander Moment: Transforming Rape Culture at its Roots*. Can you tell us more about rape culture and about the movie, and whether you think the movie is having an impact on consciousness raising?

Jackson Katz: The term rape culture, which in some parts of our society is, is a controversial term to me. It's so, it's just like statement of fact, it's like such an obvious point. What it means is the rates of rape and sexual violence are so high and have been for so long, that to think about them as individual pathology like there's individuals who are acting out in, you know, in these twisted ways, that they're not being produced by a society that has certain kinds of values that are embedded, um, but whether it's in entertainment culture in, in political culture, and in social life more generally, I just think it's naive. It's like saying, for example, racism is an individual problem. Racism is, you're a bad person because you are a racist. But racism is not a systemic force. It's just about individuals who are acting out in bad ways, 'cause they had a, bad parents or they, they, they have some issues in their life. I mean, it's so ridiculous to think about racism like that.

Well, it's, it's also ridiculous to think about sexual violence and sexism more generally as an individual problem. It's a systemic problem. It's historic. It's in every society. It's been around for thousands of years. It's been completely normalized. I mean, what we're doing in the last half century, especially in this, in the west and other parts of the world is, is trying to undo some of the damage and, and, and reframe some of the, you know, rights, both in a, in legal, in a legal sense of, of, of, of victims and survivors. Changing practices that enshrine, uh, rape, uh, uh, in marriage, for example, I mean, rape was legal in marriage in the United States, I mean, as, as late as the 1980s, something like six states still had statutes that, uh, that made rape legal within marriage in the United States. I mean much less some of these other countries in the world, which today, still many countries, billions of people live in societies to this day where rape is still legal within marriage. So the idea that somehow rape is an individual problem is counteracted by this concept of rape culture. So then that question becomes what are, what aspects of the culture are helping to perpetuate rape and sexual violence and sexual harassment, and that means everything needs to be under critical scrutiny.

Porn culture. Porn is an incredibly influential force in shaping sexual norms. And, and by the way, one of the things that has really affected, I think, a lot of progressive people and certainly men's beliefs about say porn, is the idea that somehow porn represents sexual liberation or sexual freedom. And so if you critique it, you're somehow a prude, which is so ridiculous on so many levels because what porn is doing, the mainstream of heterosexual porn, is just reproducing the most brutal forms of sexism and racism under the name of sexual freedom. And yet, because the word sex is in there, a lot of people get, oh, you know, I don't wanna talk about that because I don't wanna see, be seen as a prude. And some of the most brutal sexual violence is normalized and racist violence and racialized sexual violence is normalized in porn culture. That's an example. Hollywood films, you know, music culture, I mean, all of this has to be under the, under critical, um, uh, scrutiny, unless we believe, by the way, that men or males are just born with, you know, sort of, a bad chip in our brain and we're just genetically deficient. And we can't treat girls and women with respect and dignity that we're just somehow overcome by these hormonal urges that we can't control, which is total BS.

I mean, I often say this whole concept of boys will be boys, you'll hear it often, right, in defense of bad behavior by boys or young men or men. What do you expect? Boys will be boys. It's often said by people, um, who are politically, um, conservative or traditional and, and they'll say it in defense of, of behavior by men and boys, and then they'll attack often or criticize feminists for being anti-male. And yet saying, boys will be boys is anti-male because it suggests that boys and men aren't ethical beings who can make more complex choices because we're just overcome by our hormones. Whereas you, you won't hear feminists saying, boys will be boys. Why? Because feminists have too much respect for boys and men than to think that we're just beasts and, and, and feminists know that we can do better. And yet the feminists are called anti-male? It's completely topsy turvy. And so part of, I think part of what we have to be having in our society is honest conversations just like this. And I know that I'm speaking a lot, and so it's, so it's, it's, you know, it's believe me, I appreciate that there's all kinds of other viewpoints and including your own, that, that aren't getting the airtime. But, but I do think that we need to open up space in all parts of our society to have these kind of conversations because, uh, the status quo is just not, it's just not acceptable.

Alexis Miles: And so do you think that that movie is opening up that conversation that we need to have?

Jackson Katz: Yeah. I mean, among other things, yes. I mean, that's the whole point of a movie like that because the movie just like, uh, other documentaries, it can't solve all the problems. You can't even go into great detail in a, in a, in a documentary film, but you can raise the issues and you can put it, you know, and you can illustrate, you know, show examples. We, in the, in, by the bystander moment, we show examples from popular media, from, um, you know, uh, you know, music videos and, you know, Hollywood films and, you know, and, uh, political culture. I mean, how can we not talk about political culture with, you know, Donald Trump was the president for four years, even he was elected even after in 2016, even after the Access Hollywood tape came out. And this is before, well, even during, uh, the, the campaign, there were numerous allegations of sexual misconduct, alleged sexual misconduct, um, by him, in addition to his whole public career, making misogynist statements about girls and women. Well before he ran for president, he was elected nonetheless.

I mean, and again, the governor of New York is now under deep, in deep political trouble for sexual harassment allegations. So we, we bring it all into the conversation. Like how can we have a conversation about rape and sexual violence, whether it's on college campuses, in the military, and communities, and not talk about this larger cultural context. And then we, you put it under scrutiny by talking about it, by showing examples from, you know, films and the Me Too movement and Harvey Weinstein and all this. And the hope is that, you know, people, young people and old, everybody, can then, you know, in whether it's in

a, a formal educational setting or an informal educational setting can, can use that as a, as a basis for, you know, for dialogue around some of this. And by the way, one of the things that I, I often say to, to, to men, uh, Alexis and, and Sam, is I'll say, have you ever talked to the women around you about their experiences on a daily basis of sexual harassment or sexual objectification, the kind of things that you hear, they hear on the streets when they're driving their car and a car pulls up next to 'em with a guy in it.

I mean, the kind of comments that guys make, have you, have you talked to them, because one suggestion to men, especially young men who have never really thought through this is as a, as a, as an act of, you know, of integrity and, and, you know, relational, um, care, just ask some women around you. How, what, what's your been your experience of sexism in the world or sexual harassment or objectification? I mean, not asking women to reveal personal matters that they don't feel comfortable revealing. I don't mean that 'cause you know, there's lots of stuff that a lot of women have experienced that they wouldn't share with men that they know casually, but, but just like on a daily basis. For example, if you're an athlete and you go running, you go jogging, have you ever had guys yell out things out a car window at you? Have you ever had guys when you're walking down the street, make sexual comments to you? 'Cause most women, certainly most young women, have had these experiences. Many of them have had them multiple times. Well, why don't you ask these women how they feel about that and how, how it changes or doesn't change their daily life patterns or how it makes them feel? Because I think a lot of men and young men could learn a lot from that, would learn a lot from that. And maybe they could see why so many women are angry and upset and, and not tolerating all of this. And when they see women's anger around some of this, they won't be so reactive because they'll understand, well, you know, they have a real reason to be angry and then they're not, it's not just in their heads or it's not just their individual experience. It's also, this is an experience of, you know, just millions and billions of women in the world.

And I, by the way, I think the same thing is good advice for white people who have people of color around them or, or, or in their, you know, personal lives or in school. I mean, again, you can't keep putting people on the spot in a way that makes them uncomfortable, but do it in a way that you can get some information from them and acknowledge their experience. You're gonna learn a lot. And I think a lot of, a lot of white people, and white men in particular, are very, very uncomfortable with all of this. And as a result, they go in their discomfort into their own shell and then they hunker down. And then when they hear people saying, well, white men are being picked on, oh, yeah, that's true. White men being picked on. And then we see the results of this in the, in the politics of the country at the moment, and how many white men are being drawn into this incredibly self-destructive and other destructive movements, you know, you know, racist movements, and movements to reclaim male authority in ways that are really damaging and dangerous. And I, and I think, I think those of us, especially those of us who are white men need to be able to give white men and young white men another way to deal with some of these complex identity issues and emotions around, around gender and race and, and sexual sort of privileged, you know, that are, that are being challenged in the, in the contemporary moment. This doesn't mean you're anti-male or anti-white, or, you know, anti-heterosexual. It means we have to help young men, especially in this case, young white men develop tools, both conceptually and practically, to deal with a diverse society. The society's changing, women aren't going backwards. You know, people of color aren't gonna just, you know, tolerate racism anymore. It's, it's not it's, this is adaptive behavior in the 21st century. And we need, we need more young white men and older white men to get on board, if you will, and, and, and it's, it's well past time.

Alexis Miles: Is there a relationship between your work and Brene's, Brown's work on vulnerability?

Jackson Katz: I think there's a relationship. Yeah. I mean, I mean, I think without going into great detail, I think the, the key is, vulnerability has been gendered feminine in the larger sort of gender binary discourse.

And so a lot of men are afraid of vulnerability because they realize that if they exhibit vulnerability, if they acknowledge that they're human beings who suffer, who, who, who worry, who are, um, you know, who are not fully confident at 24/7, that somehow they'll be undermined and their image will be undermined, especially from other men who will think less of them as men. So if, if vulnerability is, um, is coded feminine, which it is in the gender binary, a lot of men who are invested in maintaining a certain kind of "masculine" or traditionally masculine stance will back away from it. Now, Brene Brown talks about vulnerability as a human emotion. It's not just men, obviously it's women, but she does talk about people who are courageous to express their vulnerability. But I would say with men it's even more political, it's a more, even more political act because you're countering, you know, centuries of, of ideology that suggests that a real man just kind of sucks it up.

I mean, look again, I, I, I get back to Donald Trump. Donald Trump is an example of the absolute opposite of what those of us in the 21st century who understand some of these com, complex, emotional and historical forces. He, he, he'll, he'll be, he, he's somebody who has influenced the whole generation or more of, of, of men in particular, and white men more specifically, but not exclusively, to think that, for example, you never apologize, you never admit weakness, you never say you were wrong, as if that's a sign of strength when it's, in fact, literally the exact opposite. He's so insecure, Donald Trump is so insecure that the slightest challenge to his power and authority and being right is seen as a, as a threat, as an existential threat. That's, that's a sign of weakness, not strength. And, and I think it's, it's just shocking on some level, maybe it's not on other levels, but on some level it's shocking that millions and millions of Americans in the 21st century, don't see through that. And for example, if you're, if you're a strong man, you make a mistake, you know what you do? You say I made a mistake and, or you say, I'm sorry, that was a screw up. Maybe I'll try not to do that next time. That's not a sign of weakness. That's a sign of strength, and self-confidence.

Pretending that you're invulnerable, pretending that you're, I mean, this is mask-wearing, I mean, talk about mask-wearing, it's totally gendered. I mean, I, I'm writing a piece right now. I wrote a piece with my colleague, Jean Kilbourne, just in, uh, April of 2020 about mask-wearing as, you know, as a political act, it was, it was gonna become such we, this is right at the beginning of the pandemic, we, it was clear to me and, and some others that mask-wearing was gonna be seen as unmasculine by a certain segment of the population and that getting men to wear masks was countering the socialization that says that a man who wears a mask is somehow either soft or weak, or is a sheep because he's bowing down to, you know, state power and state authority rather than being an individual and standing up for himself. All this stuff was predictable by some of us well back in the day, and look at it, look at today, even today. It, you know, mask mandates and wearing a mask as a, you know, as an act of, uh, somehow, because you're concerned about public health and you're concerned about transmitting the virus to other people or being part of a community where you want to get the thing under control, somehow that's wimpy and soft and being a sheep. I mean, it's millions of Americans still buy that ignorant way of thinking because it's so embedded in their gender ideology. And if we don't talk about that in the, in the context of public health and, and such, I think we're missing like an incredibly central point, but it's all related to this notion of vulnerability and invulnerability.

And one last thing, look at all the men and women and others, but especially men, coming back over the past 20 years from the wars the United States engaged in, in Afghanistan and, and Iraq, huge numbers have trauma and, and, and all kinds of emotional problems related to their service. Many of them have injuries that are not visible. There was not broken arms, but they're traumatic injuries that are, really had profound impacts on them, on their own healthy, uh, functioning, but also in their relationships and everything else. Is that because they're wimps? No, it's because they're human beings who are exposed to intense trauma, and human beings respond to trauma in predictable ways. And, and those, it doesn't matter how tough you

are on the outside and how big your muscles are or how much you can hold a, an AR-15 and intimidate people. You're a human being. And acknowledging that is not an acknowledgement of your softness or your weakness, it's just acknowledging your humanity. But so many men are again invested in this idea that a real man toughs it out, a real man just sucks it up.

And, and, you know, again, feminists have been saying this for 50 years and maybe longer. And, and, and yet they get called anti-male for just saying that men have emotional and relational lives that are complex, that they're vulnerable human beings that need to be, you know, nurtured and, and, and, and, and, and, and acknowledged. So frustrating. And you can hear it, my voice, that even talking about this out loud gets people labeled, you know, negative names and gets, gets, you know, especially for men, gets ridiculed, when in fact, what we're talking about is really fundamental consciousness that meets the moment of the 21st century.

Alexis Miles: Thank you for that. Jackson, what gives you hope when you look out at society today, what gives you hope in terms of eliminating gender violence?

Jackson Katz: Great question. Um, well, one thing is I think that there's an awful lot of young women who are empowered across class, race, ethnicity in the United States and other societies around the world, who now have the technologies of social media and the digital universe to connect with each other, to organize, to speak up, to have a voice, to tell their stories. So I think the driving force for change over, both today and also going forward, for the next several decades will be women and young women who are not accepting the status quo. And I think that there, that's the driving force. What I keep saying in my work and, and, and such is that we need a critical mass of men to join them. I don't think that we're gonna have a mass movement of men. I don't think, I don't think that I'm hoping for that. I think I'm hoping for a critical mass of men to join the women who are propelling the sort of, the cultural changes, the workplace changes, the legal changes, the political changes, and then a critical mass of men joining them. Then we'll get to the tipping point where we'll have real dramatic transformation.

And I think that's happening. I mean, I think it's happening. Obviously there's lots of pushback. And one of the reasons why there's lots of pushback is because of the progress we're making and, and whether it's racial justice, gender justice, sexual justice, it's, it's a messy process. Of course, every time you push forward, every time humans push forward and create, and create new, you know, democratic freedoms and, and, and human rights advances, it's, that's gonna threaten certain established interests and power that's gonna push back against it. And so, it's not a smooth process. But if you look at the Long March, if you will, and again, this is one way of thinking about it, I, I, I, I think we have to be cautious in being, you know, sort of naively optimistic, but I think if you look at the, at the last several decades, that the changes that have happened even in my lifetime are pretty dramatic and profound. And, and while some people, especially young people, and I appreciate that, will say, well, change hasn't happened fast enough. We have so many problems. But if you take a long historical view, changes happened really quickly over the past half century. I mean, enormous changes have happened in my lifetime. Look at the gay, LGBT movements. I mean, it's just unbelievable. I graduated from high school. I'd never met an openly gay person when I graduated from high school. I mean, I had met many LGBT people, but not anybody openly, uh, such in, in high school.

Today, my son who's, you know, who's now, you know, in college, but he's, he, he had a completely different life experience, like in terms of fam, open, openly gay family members and peer relationships and friendships. And I mean, it's a totally different picture. And when I, I just finished reading *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape*, that classic by Susan Brownmiller, about rape, published in 1975, and I, you know,

in 1975, I was in high school and I wasn't reading *Against Our Will*, but she details how like for centuries, including right up to the time that she wrote the book in the sixties and seventies, how rape was just joked about and ridiculed and dismissed as an issue, even by progressive men in, you know, progressive movements against ra, uh, you know, for racial justice and anti-war movement and everything else. I mean, it's incredible how, when you look back at, at, even, even the seventies, how far we've come since then and how, you know, how generations, now women have grown up, and men and others, have grown up with feminist parents with, you know, with, with people with consciousness about these issues in a way that's so different from my generation, that there has to be hope. And so I think it's it, mostly it's generational. I think it's, you know, the changes that we're making both in, in legal changes and in, and in, uh, cultural beliefs, and attitudes and beliefs, these are generational changes that we'll see increasingly play out institutionally and politically in the coming decades. And so I think there's reason for hope in that regard.

Sam Fuqua: Jackson Katz, it's great to speak with you. Thank you.

Jackson Katz: Thank you, Sam. And thank you, Alexis for, uh, for inviting me to be part of your, uh, part of your show and part of your conversation.

Sam Fuqua: Jackson Katz is an educator, an author, and a filmmaker. You can find out more about his work at his website, jacksonkatz.com. Katz is spelled K-A-T-Z.

Our podcast is called *Well, That Went Sideways!* We produce new episodes twice a month. You can find them wherever you get your podcasts, and on our website, sidewayspod.org. We also have information on our guests and links to more conflict resolution resources at the website. That's sidewayspod.org. Our program is produced by Mary Zinn, Jes Rau, Norma Johnson, Alexis Miles, and me, Sam Fuqua. Our theme is by Mike Stewart. And this podcast is a partnership with The Conflict Center, a Denver-based nonprofit that provides practical skills and training for addressing everyday conflicts. Find out more at conflictcenter.org.