

Presentation at 'Grosse Freiheit?' Conference on prostitution and trafficking, May 7-8 2011, Tomas Wetterberg

If not a lot of men had such fantasies about their own sexuality and if there were fewer men who wanted to dominate women, we would not have sex slave trade and prostitution, or perhaps even men's violence against women, at all. If we in our societies had a different gender power structure gender was not an important part of power structure. I think that our society then would look completely different.

I chose to begin my speech this way, because this is usually what I say when I get in a dialogue with men, wherever I am in my everyday life, when the issue about men's violence against women is on the agenda. I don't say this just to provoke. I say this because I believe it's true. It is my understanding of the gender based power structure we live in, in our societies today.

My name is Tomas Wetterberg and I am the chairperson of an organization in Sweden, called Men for Gender Equality. We are a nationwide organization with local groups in many parts of the country and we are also a part of the new international organization MenEngage.

Well, we are not just a part of the organization; we are also responsible for developing MenEngage in Europe.

The fact that our organization exists is partly due to the Men, who in 1993 were a part of the board of Save the Children, Sweden. They reacted strongly over the violence that men used, and that newspapers throughout Scandinavia actually wrote a lot about back then. We could read about the violence against women which soldiers in the war in the former Yugoslavia, exercised against women. There we could read about how women became shields for the men in the war and how they were kidnapped from the enemy and placed in what came to be known as rape camps. This was, as I understand, something that was going on in all of the groups that fought in the former Yugoslavia.

During the same time the media also wrote about men who went to Thailand in order to pay for using poor women and children of both sexes, in order to satisfy their sexual desires. This phenomenon came to be called sex tourism. Isn't that some incredibly cynical concept? I have not heard anything like this in any other context, but it is still used as a concept to explain the men's trips to other countries just to buy sex. Holiday

trips which is about prostitution.

The men, who at this time were in the board of Save the Children, came to the idea that it was high time that men also started to talk about domestic violence. Male violence against women and children can not be a women's issue, was the message of an appeal they wrote and published in one of Sweden's largest newspaper.

I was at that time in a slightly smaller town than Stockholm, my hometown Örebro, not far from Stockholm. I was one of more than 2,000 men in our country to sign up.

But I was the only one in my hometown, who wanted to be a part of the trend where men take more responsibility for changing masculinity and, with this, also transform society into a more gender equal society.

I was also at this time the only man who was studying women science at the University of Örebro. I went to university as an adult after a lot of different work in fields with young people, and after a long time of political work. In this political engagement I had noticed that when we talked about equality in the left wing party's, we didn't really understood the meaning with gender equality, even if we often talked about it.

During my grown up time there was a lot of violence against women. But people didn't talk about it. It was, so to say, a common thing in families. Even my father was a man who used violence against me and my mother. At this time it was not a crime with violence in marriage, not even rape in marriage. This was not a crime until the year of 1965 in Sweden.

I grow up in a society where everybody around me talked about manhood as something that had to do with violence. Were your military service should make me a real man, and where pornography was something you had to know about if you liked to be a real man. But what happened to you, as a boy and a young man if you thought this was wrong? If you from your experience of violence in the family thought that violence is not a solution?

This is one of my experiences that I think is the reason that I am interested in anti-violence activities and studies about men's violence against women. Every beaten boy will not be a beater.

In my first grade of women since I got my first real chance to make a serious interview with my mother. We did a talk about her life since the year of 1914 when she was born. After implementing her story in my life I became a feminist. This was one amongst other kinds of learning about gender structures, of course.

But with this said, back to what happened when so many men gave an answer to the appeal.

The board of Save the Children thought that an informal network should be started with men who were active in discussions about men's violence amongst women. It was important to gather as many men as possible, to show that the appeal not only would end with the existence in a newspaper. From this moment I have been a part of the movement among men in Sweden who has come to be known as the male network. And from 1999 our name is Men for Gender Equality.

Our focus has always been men's violence against women. Our platform is also clear about that we are a part of the feminist movement, working for gender equality in society – a society free from violence. In the opening words in our statement of general policies we say that:

Men for Gender Equality are an organization for men who want to work for gender equality and against men's violence. We work with a particular focus on men and boys, and their approach to others and to themselves

We share, and will change, the view that people are valued differently depending on whether we are men or women, and depending on what sexual orientation we have. We are all grouped in a hierarchical order based on gender - the gender power structure.

Men and boys earn on the situation in many ways, but we believe that even men and boys, in fact, have the opportunity to better their lives without these destructive patterns and expectations, imposed by gender power structures governing notions of masculinity. But obviously this is not enough insight about the subordination of women and girls as motivation for even men to engage in change.

Gender equality is a process – ore a destination - which will include the following.

Awareness of the gender power order injustices and how ideas about gender affect both

men and women

Challenge the gender power structures and beliefs about sex

A change in the society for economic, social and political justice, equality, and where individuals of either sex or with different sexual orientation have the freedom to develop their personalities and enjoy their equal rights.

To be a member of the Men for Gender Equality is an expression of that you are participating in a process to become more aware of gender norms and to change the society.

The vision for Men for Gender Equality's is a society free from all forms of violence, oppression and injustice

It is with this as a background that I think we need to raise men's responsibility to combat prostitution and trafficking for sexual abuse. This is, as we see it in Sweden, a part of men's violence against women.

I will probably never be convinced that these phenomena don't have a connection.

There are those who say that if we legalize prostitution we would get rid of trafficking for sexual abuse. I do not believe in this. I think that as long as there are men who want to pay to subordinate women and children, will this market continue to exist.

Power and control are key ingredients in the buying of sex, as we have seen and heard from research and experience at this conference.

But when I'm talk about men's responsibility, it is also important for me to say that this is in collaboration with men and women's experience this work will be most effective.

Our organization is working together with the two largest women's organizations in Sweden. Both of them are working with women shelters. Together with Roks and SKR we have just produced a training material, with the name the macho factory.

The material consists of 17 short films and over a hundred-page compendium. In this compendium, there are questions and exercises where youth groups, boys and girls together, can begin discussions about stereotypical gender norms, especially in terms of masculinity.

I am absolutely convinced that if there was a norm that says it's not OK for men to exercise violence against women, in the form of buying sex, there would not exist either prostitution or trafficking. There is no market that works if there isn't a demand for the product. We need the work on changing the values that we men are carrying, values we are educated and trained to carry, to put an end to violence against women.

I think there are three things that are important in the Men for Gender Equality movement to work with, to increase equality in society and preventing men's violence. It is:

Advocacy Work – We have to make awareness of gender power order injustices and how the ideas about gender affect both women and men.

Direct work with adult men – In good conversation with individual man and men in group, we will come far

Projects and activities targeted at young men and women to create dialogue about the norms of masculinity, femininity and gender equality.

Men for gender equality in Sweden has not yet been working with any special project about men's responsibilities of prostitution in women and trafficking, but some of us have been a part of a campaign that our former government had about trafficking and prostitution. We are also a defender of the Swedish law about buying sex.

As a summarize to my speech I will say that I think it is important to have a law that says that our society don't agree that women's or men's bodies can be a product for sale.

At the same time it is important to have discussions amongst people about the values we have in our communities. Our organization and me, think it is important to have a dialogue about man and masculinity, and our gendered society to change the values among men which means that is right to by and with this prostitute children women and men.