The topic of this conference is “eradicating violence against women and girls”. I would like to focus on this topic by talking about men. By doing so, I do not want to detract from the horrors of violence that women and girls suffer, nor do I intend to undermine the ability of women to address and overcome violence. But I would like to talk about men because I believe that the word “men” is missing from the phrase “eradicating violence against women and girls”. In fact, I believe men are missing in two places, as part of the problem, yes, but also as part of the solution to overcoming violence.

When we look at the phrase “violence against women and girls” whose violence is it that we are talking about? It is men’s violence – men are the subject of the action “violence against women and girls”. And the connections among men, masculinity and violence will be the primary topic of my talk. My aim is to help us start thinking more about people – our day to day lives – what are we taught, what we experience and what goes on inside our heads. What is it about the ways in which we see ourselves as men and women that, at times, can led to violence, and for many to believe that violence is an acceptable means to solving problems.

Secondly, I want to think more about people because I believe that all of us – both men and women have roles to play in ending violence. Men are also necessary partners with clear responsibilities in the struggle to eradicate violence against women and girls.

So, if we add men back into the phrase – as both part of the problem and the solution - a revised version of “eradicating violence against women and girls” could be “Partnerships between women and men to eradicate men’s violence against women and girls”.

But let me start by looking at men and violence…
Men and Violence

Compared with women, men are overwhelmingly involved in all types of violence. It is mostly men who commit acts of personal violence - against women and girls, as well as towards other men and boys. Men are also most often implicated in other types of “organized” or institutional violence as victims and perpetrators of violence. Around the world, militaries consist of only men or mostly men. Men fight more than women – in wars, in the home, schoolyard, and on the street. Men own guns and weapons more than women, and are imprisoned and murdered more than women. It is also a fact that men control more resources and power than women.

Men and violence seem to go hand in hand. As does violence and power. But that is not to say violence is a natural condition for men, or a natural part of being a man. Nor is it to say that all men are in positions of power. Men are taught to use violence, and violence as a means of problem solving and control is culturally sanctioned, both implicitly and explicitly, in different ways throughout the world.

When we narrow the scope to men’s violence against women and girls we are speaking of gender-based violence. GBV is mostly men’s violence towards women and girls, but it can also be violence toward other men and boys (in the form of bullying, baiting, gay bashing, sexual abuse, etc.). Gender-based violence takes many forms - physical, sexual, psychological, restricted freedoms, coercion and/or threats. GBV occurs in both the public and private spheres and cuts across race, class, caste, region and religions.

One short definition of gender–based violence is any form of violence used to establish, enforce or perpetuate gender inequalities and keep in place gendered orders. In other words, gender based violence is a policing mechanism.

Two reasons I find the term “gender-based violence” useful with the above definition is that 1) it helps us ground violence firmly in gender which opens doors to more carefully explore the gender socialization processes surrounding men and women, and 2) it also helps one think more about the connections between gender-based violence and other types of violence used as a “policing mechanism” to keep social hierarchies in place and thus to perpetuate inequality – such as the violence of racism and the violence of poverty.
So to ground violence in gender... we need to talk about men’s gender...

**Masculinities**

Similar to how men are often missing from the phrase “violence against women and girls” - for far too long men have been conspicuously missing from many conversations around gender. This near “invisibility” of men’s gender is part of the privilege men gain as a dividend of patriarchy. As those who, in general as a group, benefit from gender inequalities, it is to men’s benefit to keep the means of their privilege hidden from critical examination.

One way to bring men’s gender more fully under the microscope is through the examination of masculinities. Over the past decades, much academic and programming work has been focused on men and masculinities, and this has clearly become much more widespread in the development discourse in recent years.

Masculinities are different definitions concerning what it means to be a man in different cultural contexts around the world. The plural form “masculinities” conveys that there are many definitions for being a man and that these can change over time and from place to place. This plural form also suggests that men are constantly negotiating differing positions within social hierarchies – and this multiple positioning affects men's relationship to injustice and violence.

First let me be clear - men and masculinity are not the same thing. Men are human beings – each individual uniquely different – whereas masculinities are stories or “discourses” about men and how they ideally should behave in a given setting. Men are human beings, and as such as are social and gendered beings. An exploration of masculinities does help us understand men as gendered beings, but it can also help us understand the varying ideals about manhood that inform men’s behaviours and how these are related to the use of violence.

Now let me make this more confusing – in addition to the plurality of masculinities - the “many ways of being a man” there are also commonly held – and constantly repeated - notions about being men, or dominant forms of masculinity (“hegemonic masculinities” – from Robert Connell *Masculinities* 1995).
Lets look around…what would an ideal man be in your society? What is expected of men? What do we teach boys in schools, on the street, through the media, in our communities and in families?

There are many answers to this question. But when we look for common denominators, some of the shared characteristics of dominant masculinity around the world describe men who are:

Strong, Breadwinner, Attractive, Protector, Leader, Decision Maker - ruler of his world – within the household and in public – heterosexual and sexually successful.

No man can fully live up to this ideal, especially when men are placed into the reality of societies built upon a complex of privilege and inequality. And yet men are taught to try. At the same time, as part of this process, men are indoctrinated into violence as a means of protecting themselves and others, to solve problems and conflicts, and assert their perceived positions as men.

In many parts of the world, we are constantly fed images of men being violent. Through films, books, television, magazines, video games – we see men being violence and violent men revered as role models and even heroes. For too many children everywhere – there are also the experiences of witnessing and being victims of violence.

So an equation embedded in dominant masculinity becomes - to be a man, a strong successful leader, you also must be ready to fight, and if you don’t happen to be in the right social group to be a successful leader, you still have to be ready to use violence…perhaps even more so.

Thus, dominant forms of masculinity encourage personal violence in men, and they help to legitimize other forms of violence as well. Part of gender-based violence as a “policing mechanism” is for men to establish, assert or protect their masculine identity. But men’s use of personal violence also permits and legitimizes the use of other types of organized violence – and visa versa. It is a vicious cycle of violence, a culture of violence into which men and women are socialized.

However, seeing masculinities as socially constructed does not mean that men are merely passive beings being shaped by “society” or “culture”. Men and women are
active in producing gender discourses and acting them out. Men are responsible for their violence, and are part of the problem when they allow for violence – especially violence against women and girls - to exist in their communities.

We can further identify broader notions of responsibility when gender-based violence is placed within the social structures and histories of violence that both men and women have created and reproduce. Here, we can move beyond the interpersonal violence of men to examine the violence that lies at the heart of masculinity’s stratifying of difference - the misogyny, homophobia and racism that are embedded in discourses of masculinity. It is here we begin to understand the relationship between ideals of masculinity, gender-based violence and other uses of violence as a means of establishing and maintaining power relationships and structural inequalities such as those based upon race, class or religion, etc. Violence, privilege and injustice are intimately linked (see “Men, Masculinities and Development: Broadening Our Work towards Gender Equality” by Alan Greig, Michael Kaufman, James Lang 2000)


In this sense, a development response to the connections among men, masculinity and violence should not only consider working with men (for example in violence prevention and intervention programmes) but also must address issues of human rights and discrimination.

To sum up - some uses of exploring masculinities are:

1. to help expose men’s gender
2. to think about the socialization process (of boys into men) in terms of teaching men to use violence and the sanctioning of violence in general.
3. to help men reflect on the various costs to them of playing out dominant masculine roles
4. to help highlight the benefits of changing current constructions of the masculine.
**Conclusion**

When we look at the evidence as a whole, there is no doubt that men are the main agents of violence in the world, and that widespread patterns of masculinity support this violence. Yet many men are not violent, and there are alternative patterns of masculinity that are open for men.

One way forward in the work to end violence between men and towards women and girls is to understand and transform the socialization processes that encourage the use of violence by men. By recognizing that gender-based violence is related to the construction of masculinities and that these are informed by belief systems, cultural norms and socialization processes - we can help to identify and strengthen entry points for various violence prevention initiatives around the world that aim to work with men and boys as partners.

Imagine a world in which violence against women and girls was eradicated. What would it look like? To me it would be a world without all violence, and also a world without the grave inequalities manifest in our societies. That is to say, it would be a world with gender equality and equity, with equality across races, classes, ethnicity and religions. And a world predicated on peace…

But how would we get there?

We have to work together – men and women – and different groups of women and men. And we have to be aware of our own positions and privilege. It is our job to teach through words, but also through example.

All men have clear responsibilities to end violence against women. But as a white man from the US, I am compelled to think about my own privilege and responsibility when I say “stop your violence” to other men around the world. What type of violence is used to support the privileges I enjoy – am I willing to make those connections at the same time? Am I willing make short term sacrifices for long term gains? By starting to answer these questions myself, I begin to understand how positive social change may unfold in other societies, and this vision of peace and equality becomes just a bit more tangible.