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Why we wear a white ribbon

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It paralyzes you. The first time you hear someone talk about rape as a joke, it startles you.

The first time you see a man strike a woman, it shocks you. The first time you see a person harassed because they don't conform to a traditional expression of female or male gender, it makes your heart race. Something in our nature knows what we just witnessed was life-altering, and the question is what we do next.

We first experienced gender-based violence at different points in our life. For Peter, it was the first time he walked into a courtroom as a prosecutor to arraign a perpetrator in a domestic assault case. For Thaddeus, it was the moment he stepped in front of the blows a boyfriend threw at his mother.

Our world is never the same after that first moment witnessing gender-based violence. We both undoubtedly ended up in public safety in part out of a desire to protect women from those moments. But protection is not enough. We cannot end gender-based violence until we admit the role men play in perpetuating it, even if we are not the ones throwing the punches or making the jokes. This requires a wholesale change in how we think about masculinity, aggression, power, and status.

The White Ribbon Day Campaign -- which we are proud to co-chair -- exists for that purpose. For the past nine years, Jane Doe Inc. has gathered men -- from high school age on up -- to talk about redefining manhood.

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As men we come from different paths in life, but our aim is the same: Eradicating violence against women and all gender-based violence.

We can do it. We must do it.

We can use our stations in life to change our culture. We can begin with ourselves, making sure our language and actions are respectful of women and people who are different from us

at all times, not just when they're present. We can engage our friends, creating an environment void of sexist, homophobic or transphobic commentary and violent behavior.

As fathers, brothers, teachers, and coaches, we can talk to the boys in our lives about how a man -- not the Hollywood version of one -- is allowed to show emotion, can be nurturing and share power. We can teach them that the strength of your character matters so much more than physical domination, and we can teach them that sexual and domestic violence is never acceptable.

March 3 was White Ribbon Day, and we encourage you to wear a white ribbon to signify your commitment to ending violence against women and all gender-based violence. We also encourage you to go to whiteribbonday.janedoe.org to find events in your community or to learn about hosting your own.

By coming together, we can stop the next generation of first moments before they begin.

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