

# The Spinning Wheel

*We look past discrimination because we unfortunately see ourselves as unaffected by it and treat it as an inconvenience when the subject comes up...*



Elie Wiesel, writer, professor, activist, Nobel Laureate, and Holocaust survivor, once said:

“Ultimately, the only power to which man should aspire is that which he exercises over himself.”

What a meaningful thought this is with respect to the power dynamic playing out between men and women in every segment of society, including corporate work environments. It’s time men stop exerting, intentionally or unintentionally, the emotional, physical, psychological, sexual, and financial abuse we direct toward women in order for us to remain in control and power.

This is happening in front of our eyes to our mothers, wives, daughters, sisters, partners, friends, co-workers...really, *all* women in our lives. We either don’t recognize or acknowledge that it’s happening, but it is.

Several years ago I became a Board member for [Men Stopping Violence](#), a social change organization dedicated to dismantling belief systems, social structures, and institutional practices that oppress women and children and that ultimately dehumanize men ourselves. I wanted to confront ideas and initiatives that were not only uncomfortable but counter to the ways I was raised and scripted by society to think and act, as a man, husband, father, friend, and corporate executive.

In this role, I learned about the “[Power and Control Wheel](#),” developed by the Domestic Abuse Intervention Project. What this model displayed were common behaviors and tactics used by men, regardless of racial or ethnic human dimensions of diversity, to maintain power and control over women. Even though used in domestic violence education, I saw the Wheel applicable with *any* institution and *any* dominant group behavior (whites, men, heterosexuals, Christians, etc.) over the “other.”

Many examples of these behaviors are subtle and likely unrecognized by men as abusive, because we normally associate harm as physical in nature. However, such things as 1) systemic exclusion from training, development and promotional opportunities, 2) minimizing, denying, or blaming any messenger for identifying inappropriate or perceived unfairness with management behavior, human resources or work practices, 3) public or third-party ridicule, 4) withholding information, 5) isolating, or not inviting someone to a meeting all have the impact of demoralizing, stripping away dignity, and blocking the full engagement of women. This is abusive.

At the same time, performing these acts, either intentionally or unintentionally, diminishes and damages men, psychologically, intellectually, and socially. This is also abusive.

What I have briefly described is pathological in the sense that the extreme, abnormal attitudes and behaviors by men toward women have been normalized within every institution in America. Additionally, men generally remain on the sideline or completely disconnected from obvious gender inequality. We look past discrimination because we unfortunately see ourselves as unaffected by it and treat it as an inconvenience when the subject comes up.

And the “Power and Control Wheel” spins round and round...

This is the nest of complexity that Catalyst has been relentlessly seeking to untangle for 50 years. The MARC bloggers will now have an opportunity to incrementally advance equity by offering personal insights on why men remain clueless regarding our systemic advantage (privilege), are reluctant to break rank from other men due to possible consequences for doing so, or are looking for practical ways to become effective allies, as examples of future topics.

I have a few cautionary comments as we begin this blog journey.

For men, understand that it is *not* enough to only build awareness and sensitivity. Enlightenment minus *action* quickly slips into *more* self-absorption, deception, and unearned gratification. Without the actions of changed behavior, collaborating side-by-side with women (not leading the parade) and other men, and curing the pathologies of excessive

power and control that deny a stronger and healthier society for women, the status quo remains and meaningful change does not occur.

For women, do not become complacent that the hard-fought battle for women's rights has codified them indefinitely. Just as the legislative gains of the civil rights movement are now being reversed, the same is also beginning to happen with women. Just notice the building legislative assault on women's bodies (reproductive and contraceptive rights) and the "public square" allegations that women are selfish for wanting to pursue professional careers.

It is also important that women do not become complacent or deceived because you work in a pleasant, "everyone-gets-along" work environment. If gender inequity exists throughout the organization at the same time, is it really pleasant?

Finally, women need not feed the male ego by continually reinforcing the belief that **your** success is dependent upon gracious men escorting you through the door to equality. If you are waiting on men to do this, please do not hold your breath... It's **not** going to happen. As an alternative, I suggest that women collectively pool your under-valued strength and power, to create broad alliances with **all** women, and go kick the damn door down.

Once again, considering Elie Wiesel's quote on the exercise of power, it might be interpreted differently, depending on your gender. That is, men must abandon abusive power and control while, at the same time, women exert more institutional disruption. Maybe, going forward, it's time to think about "shared power" and what that looks like between men and women?

"Shared power"...that's why I'm committed to Catalyst and the MARC blog.