Op ed on Eyewitness News Bahamas from WDI Bahamas Country Contact Rochelle Dean

NASSAU, BAHAMAS – In his landmark analysis of gender-based violence, Dr. Jackson Katz posed a fundamental truth: “If the cost of brotherhood is the degradation of women, the price is too high.” While public discourse frequently frames sexual violence as isolated, predatory acts committed by rogue individuals, this framing ignores a far more insidious reality: violence can be institutionalized.

Men do not need to personally commit physical assault to facilitate a culture of violation. Instead, many take positions within corporations, universities, and governing bodies where they manage, protect, and consolidate systems that degrade women.

Through bureaucratic gatekeeping, institutional cover-ups, and the prioritizing of executive or peer allegiance over human safety, abuse is normalized from the top down.

This dynamic is tragically evident in the recent federal civil lawsuit filed by “Jane Doe” against Cornell University. The case—which alleges that administrative machinery sanitized and suppressed records of a brutal fraternity gang rape to protect institutional standing—is not an isolated failure. It is a striking symptom of how institutional structures operate when male peer networks and organizational protection are prioritized over accountability.

Confronting this reality requires understanding how institutionalization and workplace dynamics create and consolidate systemic violence against women across three critical levels:

1. From Interpersonal Acts to Institutionalized Violence
While physical or sexual violence is often viewed strictly as an individual crime, institutions frequently structure power in ways that protect perpetrators and normalize hostility. Individuals in positions of authority may never personally commit acts of physical violence, yet they manage systems that suppress victims, silence reports, protect organizational reputation over safety, and penalize women who speak out. By gatekeeping resources, promotions, or public credibility, institutional leaders entrench environments where abuse becomes an open secret.
The institution itself becomes an instrument that enables and hides violence.

2. Workplace Gatekeeping and Degradation
When the price of professional cohesion or executive “brotherhood” requires overlooking mistreatment, degradation becomes institutionalized. In many corporate or institutional cultures,

allegiance to male peers, often packaged as “loyalty”, “fit” or maintaining team cohesion—demands turning a blind eye to sexual harassment, misogynistic banter, or unequal treatment. Positioning women in environments where their safety, compensation, or career trajectories depend on enduring systematic degradation is a form of structural violence. It weaponizes economic dependency and professional hierarchy against them.

3. The Continuum of Harm

Sociological models of violence against women emphasize that sexual assault and severe abuse do not occur without context. They exist at the top of a continuum supported by everyday institutional degradation. When institutions tolerate or encourage lower-level degradation, they lay the structural foundation that enables more severe forms of violence to persist with impunity.

Conclusion

When violence is institutionalized, the perpetrators are not merely those in the room when an assault takes place. They are also the decision-makers who design systems that trap women, silence reports, and protect powerful networks. Until we confront the men who facilitate abuse from behind executive desks, court systems, and positions of trust under the guise of organizational loyalty, the price of “brotherhood” will remain devastatingly high.

-By Rochelle R. Dean, WDI Bahamas